

Vinayasādhana

Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation

VOL. IX, No. 1, January 2018

Dialogue between the Clinical Practice of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Discipline of Spiritual Direction

Mark Murphy

St Mary's University College, Twickenham, London

Abstract

This paper explores Lacan's engagement with the Christian Practice of Spiritual Direction. I examine what he has said directly within his writings about the practice and move from there to explore how we should approach a dialogue between the two disciplines of Psychoanalysis and Spiritual Direction. This is a dialog which has never taken place as Lacan seems to be excluded from the majority of practical writings on the subject of Spiritual Direction and its relationship to Psychology. In exploring this absence of dialog, I discover that modern therapeutic methods and Spiritual Direction both share 'experiential foundations' and a dual repression of the Mystical element which shut it off from a Lacanian approach. Moreover, I will argue that it is only through recovering this repressed Mystical element that a dialog between Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Spiritual Direction becomes possible.

Introduction

Spiritual Direction is defined as the help one gives to another in developing ones relationship with the Sacred, while Psychology is

defined by the treatment of psychological symptoms¹. There has been much work in outlining the relationship of Psychotherapy to Spiritual Direction as both practices bleed into each other². However, Lacanian Psychoanalysis is pretty much ignored. It is taken for granted that Lacanian theory is compatible with that which is considered Mystical and Theological³ but not that which is considered “Spiritual.” We can see this with Lacanian theorists like Ian Parker who emphatically argues that Lacanian theory is profoundly anti-spiritual⁴. This is unfortunate as it fails to take Lacan seriously as a Psychoanalyst who is worthy of dialogue with this area of Pastoral Theology. This has resulted in the majority of practical writings one can find on the dialog between Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy being dominated by the schools of analytic Psychology and Psychodynamic therapy. “Experience” has become the locus from which both practices function. On the side of Spiritual Direction this has become associated with what is known as the transcendental method associated with Bernard Lonergan⁵. While on the side of the Psychological it can be seen regarding the priority given to what is otherwise known as the “affect”⁶. However, this primacy of the ‘Affective’ is a modern phenomenon for both Psychology and Theology. This has resulted in a drive toward ‘happiness’ in certain strands of Psychology⁷. While on the side of Spiritual Direction the notion of Joy, Wholeness, and completeness is sometimes presented as the only choice⁸:

“In our culture, people even have become accustomed to hearing the message of the Gospel presented in the language of emotional and Psychological healing, recovery, and human wholeness⁹.”

¹ Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*.

² Harborne, *Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction*.

³ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*; Pound, *Theology Psychoanalysis and Trauma*.

⁴ Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*, 11.

⁵ Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*.

⁶ Soler, *Lacanian Affects*.

⁷ Hillman states: “[Negative experiences] are evidence of the lower, unactualised rungs of the ladder. Our way shall be around them. Meditate, contemplate, exercise through them and away from them, but do not dwell there for insight. Analysis of them leads downward into fragmentation, into the bits and functions and complexes of partial man and away from wholeness and unity. This denial sees in psychopathological events misplaced energies by which one may be scourged by which ultimately shall be transformed to work for one and toward the One...Divinity is up at the peaks, not the swamps of our funk, and not in... anxiety...” Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, 66.

⁸ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*.

⁹ Galindo, “Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Counseling,” 395.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis is very different; it does not aim at wholeness or perfection, it aims at the necessity of fragmentation¹⁰. It concerns itself with Desire and ‘non-experience’ in the form of *jouissance*; ‘objects’ which exist on the other side of consciousness. Furthermore, its structuralist axioms preclude any recourse to anything as phenomenological as “experience” or “happiness” for its theoretical and practical foundation:

“Lacanian Psychoanalysis refuses to adapt people to society precisely because they are profoundly suspicious of the forms of happiness cultivated in this deceptive ‘reality’¹¹.”

Therefore, any dialog between Spiritual Direction and Lacanian Psychoanalysis seems to be precluded from the outset. Indeed, who would want a Spiritual Direction that aims at fragmentation and the lack of positive experience? However, this is just one understanding of what we mean by ‘Spiritual’. The term Spiritual is a relatively modern device within Christianity. In the past, it was inseparable from what we now know as Mystical Theology¹². However, over time, the term Spirituality has come to replace it. What has resulted, is the notion that the Spiritual has more to do with the *experiential* impression made upon the community of individual believers while Theology is the intellectual *expression*¹³. Rather than understanding both as different ‘manners of speaking’¹⁴, one has had its voice silenced and pushed to the fringes of feeling. This approach can be seen in the work of Jacques Maritain who argued that Aquinas was the master of discursive Theology while John of the Cross was the master of the feminine, incommunicable, affective element behind it¹⁵.

Amy Hollywood has argued that historically there have been two forms of Spirituality, one which aims at wholeness and the other at fragmentation¹⁶. It is fair to say that what has taken place is a reduction of the latter to what can now be considered ‘theoretical mysticism,’ while the former is now “spiritual” and considered the ‘object proper’ of

¹⁰ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*.

¹¹ Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*, 7.

¹² McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (Challenges in Contemporary Theology)*.

¹³ McIntosh.

¹⁴ Certeau, 2.

¹⁵ Maritain in McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 317n.

¹⁶ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*.

the discipline of Spiritual Direction. Hence, we find academic books exploring John's Mystical concept of the Dark Night of the Soul and its relationship to the will and intellect at a very precise anthropological level, but at the level of Spiritual Direction we find it merely reduced to "depression"; an obstacle which is placed before us on the way to "emotional wholeness"¹⁷.

Carrette and King have argued that in the 21st century we now see that this drive to "experience spiritual happiness" everywhere¹⁸. Everything within our neoliberal paradigm is presented as a type of reductive Psycho-Spiritual Direction. Every product comes with the promise of a positive spiritual experience which one can integrate into the very fabric of life. McGowan has argued that we are witness to a paradigm shift from a society which used to operate on "Duty" to one which now focuses on satisfaction¹⁹. So whereas, in the past, society functioned through a paternal logic of self-sacrifice, today we see a society where one is commanded to "enjoy." This injunction-to-enjoy; a demand for a positive experience, is what binds modern forms of Spiritual Direction to current therapeutic methods as adaptive technologies-of-the-self²⁰. However, this demand for happiness results in anxiety and pain:

"Happiness, once an intangible quality of individual temperament, has today emerged as an object of analytic clarity, measurable and actionable as never before[...] Today it is not unrealistic to speak of a "technology of happiness" in human resource management, education, business and executive leadership, in family and marriage therapy, in career coaching, physical fitness, and in all facets of personal and organisational life[...] Happiness is today an asset cultivated by a solitary, Psychologically truncated subject, for whom emotional self-manipulation is a simple technique. Happiness has been rendered a depthless physiological response without moral referent, a biological potential of the individual²¹."

However, there is a long tradition within Christianity Mysticism and Spiritual Direction which starts with axioms similar to Lacanian analysis,

¹⁷ Mathews, *The Impact of God*.

¹⁸ Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*.

¹⁹ McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*.

²⁰ Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*.

²¹ Binkley, *Happiness as Enterprise*, 12–13.

and, as we will see, Lacan was well aware of it²². I believe that Lacan understood the value of Spiritual Direction precisely insofar that it was inherently attached to this ‘excessive’ Mystical element and therefore challenged many of the “experiential” and “adaptive” axioms which are now universal in the many forms of Psycho- Spiritual technologies we see in our current era. Indeed, this “Mystical” excessive element as being the problematic foundation of what we now call ‘the Spiritual’ has resulted in modernity repressing and rejecting it:

“It had to eliminate mysticism-precisely to the degree that mysticism lays bare man’s inner powerlessness- as an unproductive element, often falsely labelled as quietist, irrational, and occult. In reaction mysticism- a living indictment against every form of self-interest, self-will, and technalism- developed a language and logic of its own which in turn rendered it unintelligible to cultural rationality”²³.

We can see this repression take place in modern works where scholars of Spirituality and Spiritual Direction refuse to acknowledge the mystical element of Spirituality McGrath states

“The difficulty in using the term “mysticism” to refer to what is now more widely known as “spirituality” is that the term has so many unhelpful associations and misleading overtones that its continued use is problematic...The present work adopts and endorses this convention²⁴”

Although Lacan only mentions the Discipline of Spiritual Direction once, I believe his thoughts on the practice allow us to make sense of why “mystics” played such an important role within his oeuvre. He was interested in them regarding how they enhanced people’s desire rather than repressing it. Lacan states the following about the discipline in Psychoanalysis and its practical focus:

“...the perplexities of Spiritual Direction which have been elaborated over the centuries along the path of a

²² Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*.

²³ Waajiman in McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (Challenges in Contemporary Theology)*, 8.

²⁴ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 6.

demand for truth—a demand linked to no doubt a cruel personification of this Other, but which did a fairly good job of sounding the folds in striving to clear out every other affection from people's loins and hearts. This suffices to force the Psychoanalyst to evolve in a region that academic Psychology has never considered except through a spy-glass[...] Psychoanalysis' responsibility for the sort of cancer constituted by the recurrent alibis of psychologism is probably not very great,²⁵.”

Lacan is clear here in stating that Spiritual Direction is a Demand for Truth. It is telling that he does not equate it with a demand for knowledge. Truth for Lacan is to be understood as an interruption into one's field of meaning-making, as opposed to being just another object of meaning to be located and scrutinised within it²⁶. Lacan understands older forms of Spiritual Direction not regarding a search for Theological Certainty, but precisely as a type of interruption to these symbolic and imaginary coordinates. This is why he states that “for Christians-well, it's the same with Psychoanalysts-abhor what was revealed to them and they are right”²⁷. This could be a reference to the interruptive trauma of the body which is synonymous with the incarnation. Indeed, just as certain Christians attempt to drain away the traumatic interruption of the incarnation via recourse to Philosophy²⁸, so too do certain strands of Psychologists attempt to diminish the interruptive role of pathological symptoms in the course of treatment²⁹. Consequently, Lacan locates knowledge and meaning on what he called the register of the Imaginary (the ego), while he located truth on the side of the Symbolic and the Real (the unconscious and its ‘extimate’ foundation)³⁰. Moreover, the Real is what punctures the analysand's egoistic imaginary identifications to reconfigure the coordinates of the symbolic to create new modes of desiring. Therefore, one can extrapolate that just as early forms of Spiritual Direction were concerned with Truth, Lacan draws parallels with that of his interpretation of the Freudian project.

²⁵ Lacan, *Ecrit: The First Complete Edition in English*, 381.

²⁶ Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*.

²⁷ Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, 259.

²⁸ Beattie, *Theology After Postmodernity*.

²⁹ Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*.

³⁰ Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*.

In the same paragraph, he goes on to equate Spiritual Direction with what he calls a ‘cruel personification of the Other’. Here, Lacan could be drawing a parallel between the analyst and the pre-modern Spiritual Director. Indeed, in his formulation of what he called the analysts discourse the role of the analyst was to take the place of what he called *object a*³¹. This means that the analyst plays the role of the object-cause-of-Desire within the analysand’s psychic economy. This object is that which is unconsciously desired but also unconsciously reviled. Therefore, it is the object of transference *par excellence*. In other words, in the analytic process, the analyst, in the strictest sense, becomes a cruel personification of the Other, so as to reveal the Truth of the analysand’s Desire. This cruel personification of the divine Other is also found in much of the work of the work of the earliest Spiritual Directors; the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Ward explains that during the fourth century with Christianity becoming the religion of the Roman Empire through Constantine, the eschatological dimension Christians found themselves living had ebbed away only to reveal a life which was alienating in another way³². The early believer, who was once pushed to the cusp of social reality upon which she stood to wait for the inevitable promise set down in scripture, was now being pulled back into a reality that held no conflict between the world they lived in and the world to come³³. Thus, individual Christians felt their faith was polarised between the promise of the New Jerusalem and a state accepted Christianity which annulled that promise. Indeed, this angst of being-in-the-world affected them in such a manner that they felt a call to retreat to desolate places, places which harked back to the earlier interpretation of the world as a ‘way.’ They were, in essence, ‘returning’ to what they believed was the authentic message of Christianity. They captured this pure desire in their bodies via a direct engagement with existential anxiety. The desolate landscapes of places such as Palestine, Arabia and especially Egypt became destinations in which the Christian ascetic came to consider their relationship to God through the logic of the incarnation³⁴. These desert dwelling Spiritual Directors were sought out by other Christians³⁵. To seek out a Christian Spiritual Director was to seek out someone who embodied this cruel

³¹ Žižek, *Cogito and the Unconscious*.

³² Ward, *The Desert Fathers*, 9.

³³ Louth, *The Wilderness of God*, 54–55.

³⁴ Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 3.

³⁵ Merton, *Thomas Merton - Spiritual Direction and Meditation*.

landscape, someone who had internalized it and transformed it. There was a repetition and transformation of the incarnational logic of death and suffering. It is no accident then that Lacan has also implied that the work of the analyst is much like the Spiritual Director in the desert insofar that they also embody the horror of the Real³⁶.

Lacan then goes on to state in the paragraph above that these early Spiritual Directors did a good job of clearing out ‘Affectations’. This is striking as when we think of Modern Spiritual Directors today, we usually think of the practice as being focused directly on feelings and affectations. However, Lacanis saying the absolute opposite! In contrast to modern times, these desert-dwelling Spiritual Directors were remarkably reticent in the advice they gave. Indeed, from a modern perspective this approach would be antithetical to the friendliness and emotional warmth of the contemporary Spiritual Director. They are those who are trained in counseling and other therapeutic techniques which are tailored to fit the current psychological disposition of the directee and their search for ‘meaning’. In stark contrast to this, the language of the early Spiritual Directors was marked by an austere linguistic economy. They were rooted in an oral tradition that valued the concise, the immediate, and the provocative. It was a language of austerity, one which punctured the directees attachments to “affects” and “meaning”. This might sound utterly antithetical to what we know as modern Spiritual Direction today. However, if we look back, we can see that this is precisely how these Spiritual Directors of the desert used to operate, Merton states:

“Theapothegmata or “sayings of the Fathers remain as an eloquent witness to the simplicity and depth of this spiritual guidance. Disciples often traveled for miles through the wilderness just to hear a brief word of advice, a “word of salvation” which summed up the judgment and the will of God for them in their actual concrete situation. The impact of these “words” resided not so much in their simple content as in the... action of the Holy Spirit”³⁷.

Can one not see here the opposition between the *Apothegmata* and the *Logosmoi*? The latter means “images with thoughts”³⁸. Accordingly,

³⁶ Roazen, *The Trauma of Freud*.

³⁷ Merton, *Thomas Merton - Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 13.

³⁸ Brooks, “Five Orthodox Words I Wish Everyone Knew.”

these images and thoughts distract the practitioner from their intent, while the *Apothegmatha* are words which are aphoristic and designed to break the obsessional search for meaning through the *logosmoi*. Moreover, the power of these ‘sayings’ resides not in their verbal “affective content” but in how they break into the signifying process itself. ‘Give us a word Father’ was the formula generally used to introduce the *apophthegmata* or sayings of the desert monks³⁹. Often the response was little more than a single word, a teaching rich in ambiguity and suggestiveness, serving to disturb as frequently to inspire⁴⁰. It is only by a sparse linguistic intervention which almost “punctuates” the novice’s discourse that the directee can realize the answer to his Desire lies not in some knowledge of the *Abba*. Nor does it lie within some internal emotional object. Rather it lies in the fragmented connection between their intentions, thoughts, sense of self, and its relationship to an untameable, excessive Grace⁴¹. In Seminar XVI Lacan has described explicitly that Grace is precisely this:

“The measure in which Christianity interests us, I mean at the level of theory, can be measured precisely by the role given to Grace. Who does not see that Grace has the closest relationship with the fact that I, starting from theoretical functions that certainly have nothing to do with the effusions of the heart, designate as[...]the Desire of the Other⁴².”

One can automatically detect a similarity in Lacanian Psychoanalysis with its practice of oracular statements in the course of analysis⁴³.

Lacan in the previous paragraph argues that this forces Psychoanalysis to evolve in a region which academic Psychology has hitherto explored only with a spy glass. This last reference to spy glass is telling. Apart from opposing Psychoanalysis to academic Psychology Lacan, in his native French, does not actually say Spy Glass, he says ‘lorgnette’ which means ‘opera glasses.’

“Et ceci suffit à faire évoluer le psychanalyste dans une région que la psychologie de faculté n’a jamais considérée qu’à la lorgnette”

³⁹ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*.

⁴⁰ Lane, 167.

⁴¹ Brown, *The Body and Society*.

⁴² Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan XVI*, VIII,1.

⁴³ Nobus, *Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis*.

This is extremely suggestive as it implies that Psychology approaches Spiritual Direction in much the same way as one views an Opera Singer. I believe that Lacan is making a critical comment on the masculine-feminine dichotomy that operates within Psychology and its voyeuristic approach to the Spiritual. According to Lacanian philosopher Rennata Salecl, The Opera Singer is one who is expected to deliver the sublime object of satisfaction, her voice, as detached from her body. As her voice reaches its pinnacle, her voice embodies the Holy for the masculine listener. Moreover, if this process fails, the woman is reviled for not delivering this pure object of total enjoyment⁴⁴. Similarly, during the 19th century, we see a transition whereby the Spiritual is taken up in the hands of Psychology with William James demonstrating that Spiritual experience, as a psychological phenomenon, is at the heart of all religious institutions⁴⁵. William James psychologization of ‘experience’ entails that liturgy, dogma, symbols, and rules are understood as being a secondary element. The pure object of “experience” is extracted from the body of the institutions which bore it. This psychologization of the Spiritual is probably referenced by Lacan in the same paragraph as ‘the Cancer’ which Psychoanalysis has taken little responsibility for⁴⁶. Furthermore, by opposing Psychology to Psychoanalysis Lacan is articulating that Psychoanalysis differs in its relation to this “experience.” It is not interested in delving directly into an experience as this is impossible⁴⁷, rather it focuses on those structures which form an experience. In discussing the place of the affect Lacan states the following:

“By the same token, it allows us to criticise the ambiguity that always dogs us concerning the notorious opposition between the intellectual and the affective - as if the affective were a sort of colouration, a kind of ineffable quality which must be sought out in itself[...]. The affective is not like a special density which would escape an intellectual accounting. It is not to be found in a mythical beyond of the production of the symbol which would precede the discursive formulation. Only this can allow us from

⁴⁴ Salecle, “The Silence of Feminine Jouissance.”

⁴⁵ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (Challenges in Contemporary Theology)*; Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition*.

⁴⁶ Lacan, *Ecrit: The First Complete Edition in English.*, 381.

⁴⁷ Fink, *Against Understanding, Volume 2*.

the start, I won't say to locate, but to apprehend what the full realization of speech consists in⁴⁸.”

The point here is that one cannot get directly to affect. Feelings and experience can mislead us; they lead us down strange paths and sometimes disguise the larger causal structural reality at hand. In other words, Psychoanalysis concerns itself with how the coordinates of our language (what he calls the intellect) shape our emotional dispositions. Lacan understood the unconscious not just as a dark continent of “emotion” “drives” or “archetypes” he argued that it was “structured like a language⁴⁹” and later “is a language”⁵⁰. By introducing this concept, he problematized the split between the affective and the intellect. The dividing line between them is not as robust as one would like to imagine⁵¹. What Lacan is at pains to articulate is that we should always stay aware of the participatory reality of language and not allow the operations of the imaginary register fool us into thinking otherwise.⁵² In other words, Lacanian analysis should always include the third party of the Other which mediates all communication. In bringing back together the Affect and Intellect, Lacan could be ‘returning’ to the position of the pre-modern Spiritual Director who would not have understood the divide in any meaningful sense as we do today.

We can also see that Lacan went to great lengths to defend pre-modern Spiritual Directors against accusations of experiential Gnosticism. This is directly reflected in Lacan’s comments on the “religious experience” of John of the Cross in Seminar III of the Psychoses. He states

⁴⁸ Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, 57.

⁴⁹ Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*.

⁵⁰ Fink, *Lacan on Love*.

⁵¹ Pound, “Lacan’s Return to Freud: A Case of Theological Ressourcement?”

⁵² Lacan also suggests that this logic of participation is found in medieval theological formulations:

“In the Freudian field, the words notwithstanding, consciousness [ego] is a characteristic that is as obsolete to us in grounding the unconscious [...] (that unconscious dates back to Saint Thomas Aquinas)—as affect is unsuited to play the role of the protopathic subject, since it is a function without a functionary. Starting with Freud, the unconscious becomes a chain of signifiers that repeats and insists somewhere (on another stage or in a different scene, as he wrote), interfering in the cuts offered it by actual discourse and the cogitation it informs” Lacan, *Ecrit: The First Complete Edition in English*, 676. It is possible to suggest that Lacan is alluding to the Old Theological arguments during Aquinas time. Aquinas was arguing against other formulations of Theology and Philosophy which aimed to create strict separations between the created and creature, faith and reason, intellect and affect. Similarly for Lacan the ego only has its existences by participation in the greater linguistic field of the unconscious and it can’t just be simply reduced to a mere emotion.

“There is poetry whenever writing introduces us to a world other than our own and also makes it become our own, making present a being, a certain fundamental relationship. The poetry makes us unable to doubt the authenticity of St John of the Cross experience [...] Poetry is the creation of a subject adopting a new order of symbolic relations to the world”⁵³

Lacan is demonstrating the difference between the famous Freudian Case of Judge Schreber and John of the Cross. It seems as though Lacan argues that John of the Cross ‘experience’ is Mystical precisely because it reshapes the shared field of linguistic relations which allow one to view the world and others differently. Indeed, for Lacan, judge Schreber’s religious experiences cannot be said to be Mystical because all of his writings are closed off to this typical neurotic intra subjective element. Lacan states that all the referents in the Judge’s writings seem to be an extension of himself. This ‘returning to the world and others’ via the symbolic is also found when he states in seminar XX that mysticism is not everything that isn’t politics, it is serious. What is more this serious business is taught to us by people like John of the Cross⁵⁴. This reference to serious business is suggestive:

1. It inverts Charles Peguy’s statement that everything starts in mysticism and ends in politics⁵⁵. The Mystical element is ‘serious’ precisely because it is concerned with the world as Other. It is not just an ineffable foundation for politics (relations) rather it is an antagonistic mode of speech which ‘shakes up’ our relations.
2. The term “serious business” resonates that with the Ignatian teaching that spirituality is Serious talk about Serious matters. This seriousness always includes a liturgical and ecclesial element. Lacan would have probably been familiar with his work.

One can suggest that Lacan is arguing that most forms of Psychology at his time were misinterpreting Mystical Theology and Spiritual Direction altogether. They were not taking it seriously as an intrasubjective mode of speech. Lacan states this in Seminar XX

“What was attempted at the end of the last century, in Freud’s name[...] was to reduce mysticism to questions of cum (affaires de foutre). If you look closely, that’s not it at all[...] All that is

⁵³ Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book III The Psychoses 1955-1956*, 78.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, 76.

⁵⁵ Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*.

produced thanks to the being of signifierness[...]one sees “the cross-sightedness” that results[...] we see that that doesn’t make two God’s (deux dieu), but that it doesn’t make just one either⁵⁶”

For Lacan, it was a gross reduction of the value of mystical speech and Spiritual Direction to merely equate them with affective modes of *jouissance* beyond speech.

“This Other *jouissance*...is not corporeal but discursive. It is a *jouissance* of speech, for it is a *jouissance* that includes love⁵⁷”

However, he could understand why many Psychologists at the time believed this. This is why he says it is almost like there are two Gods. This is apparently a reference to the God of philosophy and the God of religious experience⁵⁸. However, he is careful to say that this does not make two Gods but it does not make one either. For Lacan, the problem, at its heart, is the split between the intellect and the affective. When they are brought together, what results is the messy reality of the human condition. One cannot expect any experiential wholeness or perfection as a result. This is one of the implications of his formulation of the absence of a sexual rapport⁵⁹. This mode of Mystical discourse as not being reducible to the ineffable object is described succinctly by Žižek in discussing the difference between the early and late Wittgenstein:

“In the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, the world is comprehended as a self-enclosed, limited, bounded whole of “facts,” which precisely as such presupposes an exception; the ineffable mystical that functions as its limit. In late Wittgenstein, on the contrary, the problematic of the ineffable disappears, yet for that very reason the universe is no longer comprehended as a whole regulated by the universal conditions of language; all that remains are lateral connections between partial domains. The notion of language as the system defined by a set of universal features is replaced by the notion of language as a multitude of dispersed practices loosely interconnected by “family” resemblances⁶⁰”

⁵⁶ Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, 77.

⁵⁷ Stevens, “Love and Sex Beyond Identification,” 218.

⁵⁸ Beattie, *Theology After Postmodernity*.

⁵⁹ Chiesa, *The Not-Two*.

⁶⁰ Žižek, *Cogito and the Unconscious*, 83.

For Lacan, these are the very coordinates that lead to the generation of Desire. Furthermore, Desire cannot be reduced merely to a pure emotion or “a type of ineffable affective energy⁶¹.” Instead, it is part and parcel of the linguistically fragmented nature of the human being which encompasses both the *intellectus* and the *affectus*. Therefore, one can suggest that Lacan believed that Psychoanalysis and pre-modern Spiritual Direction are/were concerned with making people aware of this fragmentary Desire. This is why he implies in Seminar XX that his own writings (Ecrit) are in the same order as that of these Spiritual Directors and Mystics⁶².

To conclude, I believe that Lacan is arguing that Psychologists and Therapists need to approach Spiritual Direction as a *praxis and mode of speech* rather than something to be studied or psychologized. It is not just an endless search for different types of ineffable enjoyable experience. Lacan was interested in Mystical Theology as Spiritual Direction and its *value* for clinical practice. He was interested in how it can change the position of the subject. Lacan, therefore, understood the corrective power of these pre-modern Spiritual Directors to help throw into question the false certainties which he believed plagued modern Psychology and Theology⁶³. In essence, by Lacan aiming to ‘repeat Freud,’ he also was seeking to repeat the work of pre-modern Spiritual Direction and Mystical speech⁶⁴. Indeed, just as the Psychological establishment had forgotten the radical message of Freud, they have also completely ignored the message of pre-modern Spiritual Directors by extracting their ‘object’ from its ‘body.’ This ignorance has extended somewhat to the practice of modern Spiritual direction with its overt focus on the experiential drive toward enjoyment. This entails that Spiritual direction is merely an extension of the body of the world and offers no real space between it and itself.

In understanding Spiritual Direction from the position of fragmentation and desolation as opposed to a forced experiential “wholeness and happiness”, it can open up a discursive space whereby we can explore those parts of our lives which we usually do not associate normally with being “Spiritual.” Spiritual Direction does not always have to direct us

⁶¹ Chiesa, *The Not-Two*.

⁶² Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, 76–77.

⁶³ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*.

⁶⁴ Pound, *Theology Psychoanalysis and Trauma*.

to things which are perfect⁶⁵. Indeed, sometimes the divine(whatever we consider that to be) shatters our lives. It must include the Desert of the extra-mundane and the inherent ‘woundedness’ of language. It must include not only the experience of darkness, but the darkness of experience itself⁶⁶. Indeed, if Lacan is correct in saying that if Psychoanalysis is to be Psychoanalysis truly, it must be ‘forced to evolve in the area of Spiritual Direction’, then equally the inverse is true⁶⁷. If one wishes to access modes of Spiritual Direction which have hitherto been forgotten, Spiritual Direction should consider evolving in an area which it has only considered from theoretically afar; Lacanian Psychoanalysis. This would allow it resources to recover its repressed Mystical element in new and practical ways which are not always adaptive, experiential nor aimed at what modernity has termed “happiness”.

References

- Barry, W. A., & William J. C. (2009). *The practice of spiritual direction* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper One.
- Beattie, T. (2013). *Theology after postmodernity: Divining the void—A Lacanian reading of Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.
- Binkley, S. (2014). *Happiness as enterprise* (1st ed.). New York: State University of New York.
- Brooks, G. (2014). Five orthodox words I wish everyone knew. *Orthodox Christian Network* (blog). Retrieved from <http://myocn.net/five-orthodox-words-wish-everyone-knew/>.
- Brown, P. (1998). *The body and society*. Suffolk: Faber and Faber.
- Carrette, J., & King, R. (2004). *Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion* (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.
- de Certeau, M. (2015). *The mystic fable, Volume Two: The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*. (L. Giard, Editor). (M. B. Smith, Trans.). Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Chiesa, L. (2007). *Subjectivity and otherness*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Chiesa, L. (2016). *The not-two: Logic and God in Lacan* (1st ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Fink, B. (1997). *A clinical introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and technique*. London: Harvard University Press.

⁶⁵ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*.

⁶⁶ Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*.

⁶⁷ Lacan, *Ecrit: The First Complete Edition in English.*, 381.

- Fink, B. (2013). *Against understanding, Volume 2: Cases and commentary in a Lacanian Key*. Routledge.
- Fink, B. (2015). *Lacan on love: An exploration of Lacan's Seminar VIII, Transference*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Galindo, I. (1997). Spiritual direction and pastoral counseling: Addressing the needs of the spirit. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications*, 51(4), 395–402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234099705100403>.
- Harborne, L. (2012). *Psychotherapy and spiritual direction: Two languages, one voice?* London: Karnac Books.
- Hillman, J. (1977). *Re-Visioning psychology*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Hollywood, A. (2002). *Sensible ecstasy: Mysticism, sexual difference, and the demands of history*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Ecrit: The first complete edition in English* (2nd ed.). New York: W W Norton & Company, Inc.
- Lacan, J. (1988). *The seminars of Jacques Lacan book I: Freud's papers on technique 1953-1954* (1st ed.). New York: W.W Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1993). *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book III The Psychoses 1955-1956*. J. A. Miller (Ed.) (1st ed.). London: Routledge.
- Lacan, J. (1999). *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*. J-A. Miller (Ed.) (2nd ed.). New York: W.W Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (1969). *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan XVI*. C. Gallagher (Ed.). Dublin: Lacan in Ireland.
- Lane, B. C. (1998). *The solace of fierce landscapes: Exploring desert and mountain spirituality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Louth, A. (2003). *The Wilderness of God*. Darton: Longman & Todd.
- Mathews, I. (1995). *The Impact of God* (1st ed.). London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- McGinn, B. (2017). *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*. The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- McGowan, T. (2004). *The end of dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the emerging society of enjoyment* (1st ed.). New York: Sate University of New York Press.
- McGrath, A. E. (2013). *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Merton, T. (1960). *The Wisdom of the Desert* (1st ed.). New York: Sheldon Press.
- Merton, T. (2013). *Thomas Merton - Spiritual Direction and Meditation*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc.
- Nobus, D. (2000). *Jacques Lacan and the Freudian practice of Psychoanalysis* (1st ed.). London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Parker, I. (2011). *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*. K. Tudor (Ed.) (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Péguy, C. (2001). *Temporal and Eternal*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- Pound, M. (2011). Lacan's Return to Freud: A Case of Theological Ressourcement? In *The Oxford Handbook for Ressourcement Theology* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pound, M. (2007). *Theology psychoanalysis and trauma*. London: SCM Press.
- Roazen, P. (2001). *The trauma of Freud: Controversies in psychoanalysis*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Saleclé, R. (1998). The silence of feminine Jouissance. In *Sic 2: Cogito and the Unconscious*, (1st ed.), 175–96. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Soler, C. (2015). *Lacanian affects* (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Stevens, A. (2007). Love and sex beyond identification. In *The later Lacan: An introduction*. V. Voruz (Ed.) (1st ed.), 211–21. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Turner, D. (1995). *The darkness of God: Negativity in Christian mysticism* (1st ed.). Cambridge: University Press.
- Tyler, P. (2011). *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition* (1st ed.). London: Continuum.
- Ward, B. (2003). *The desert fathers: Sayings of the early Christian Monks*. UK: Penguin.
- Žižek, S. (1998). *Cogito and the Unconscious: Sic 2*. Durham: Duke University Press.