



*Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction.* Expanded edition. By Elizabeth Liebert. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000. 225 pages.

Focusing on how the current renaissance of spiritual guidance “evolves in dialogue with contemporary insights into human persons and cultures” (1), Elizabeth Liebert seeks to extend and clarify one aspect of that dialogue, namely “the relationship between adult development and spiritual guidance” (1). At the outset, the author makes a distinction between “spiritual guidance” as encompassing pastoral actions having to do with care of souls, and “spiritual

direction," which involves attention to the individual's unique circumstances and the individual's relationship with God.

Explaining her approach, evident throughout the book, Liebert writes, "I bring a developmental perspective to bear on spiritual guidance processes, and ask what difference such a perspective makes to spiritual direction and then, somewhat more briefly, to spiritual guidance in a group setting" (2). Her background as a Roman Catholic—and as a woman who is also accustomed to teaching in Protestant settings—provides inclusivity in the book's thought and language.

Images and assumptions that inform the author's approach are presented in the first two chapters, which neophytes in spiritual direction will find helpful. Those more experienced in the field of spiritual direction will find in chapter 2 helpful descriptions of the structural paradigm for development upon which Liebert builds her subsequent work. To illustrate the dialogue between developmental theory and spiritual guidance, Liebert introduces us in chapter 3 to four fictional congregants, each of whom has unique questions and needs and has requested spiritual direction. Concluding portions of subsequent chapters document their journeys in spiritual direction, both individually and in their congregational settings.

The several facets of relationship and change occurring in both human development and spiritual development also unfold in chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes possibilities and limitations of change.

Liebert's study and experience result in her positing three stages around which she finds most adults clustered: the Conformist, the Conscientious, and the Interindividual. The Conformist stage of ego development usually begins in adolescence but can become fixed in adults. Conformist persons are aware of differences between groups but not between individuals within groups. Their values tend to be uncritically appropriated from their respective groups. The move to the Conscientious stage involves relocating authority within the self rather than the group. It is here that the quest for self-knowledge truly begins. Finally, in the Interindividual stage, the individual begins to become aware that individual selves differ and that emotional dependence and independence may coexist.

Besides explicating individual spiritual direction, the book expands to a congregational context of spiritual guidance in its last two chapters. It describes developmental dynamics supporting formational processes experienced in congregations. Dialoguing with Mary Belenky and her work in exploring the links between family, education, and life education, Liebert suggests in chapter 9: "Spiritual guidance as connected learning...seeks to unite thinking, feeling, and choosing as three complementary aspects of the human response to God's call" (169).

Finally, in "Development in Human Development," Liebert compares the work of Fowler, Kegan, Daloz, Keen, Parks, and Huneke. Liebert's concluding words offer a challenging summary: "In the end, honoring God's action wherever we are able to recognize it, in creation, in ourselves, in our directees and in our communities remains the essence of the spiritual director's task" (186).

A selected bibliography followed by elaborate footnotes and capped with an appendix of seven tables provides rich resources for readers' continued pursuits in spirituality and learning. Anyone with concerns and responsibilities in areas of spiritual leadership and guidance will find informed perceptions and possibilities in this illustrative work.

  
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