

VOCATION TO MINISTRY: ARE THE LAITY CALLED?

By JUAN-LORENZO HINOJOSA

LAITY, AT LEAST in the United States and third-world countries, have come forward in increasing numbers to be of service in the pastoral life of the Church. Where does this impulse spring from, and how can we account for it? From the perspective of the laity, what is the nature of vocation to ministry today? That we would even raise the question reveals the fact that we are in the process of re-evaluating both vocation and ministry.¹ This article will address the question of vocation to ministry in the following manner: I will begin with some background observations which will contextualize the question. Secondly, I will deal with what it is that we might mean today by vocation. Thirdly, I will address the question of ministry in today's Church. And lastly, in a more practical vein, I will describe one concrete response to what I perceive as an emerging new reality in the Church regarding ministry.

Our particular question, that of vocation to ministry, finds focus around the fact that the traditional structures of ministry appear to be in transition. The principal pastoral agents, clergy and religious, seem to be experiencing in increasing numbers a great deal of questioning regarding their role and identity. The dislocation so many priests and religious experience erupts out of a dislocation in our theology. This century has seen notable advances in biblical and historical studies which have an impact upon all facets of theology, but most importantly for the question we contemplate, upon ecclesiology. I believe the key shift, in terms of the particular question we have in hand, lies in a move from a vision of the Church which tended to dichotomize the clergy from religious and the laity, to one in which the former are but one expression of church life within a more primordial reality which principally embarks the whole people as those both called and gifted.² I offer the following quotations as reflective of the dichotomizing mentality. I take the first from Gratian's 1142 code of canon law:

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There are two classes of Christians. One class is given to divine worship and is dedicated to contemplation and prayer—cut off from temporal distractions. To this class belong clerics and those devoted to God. There is another sort of Christian, called lay folk. *Laos* means people. To these it is allowed to possess goods, to marry, to till the earth, to pay their tithes; and so they can be saved, if they do good and avoid evil.

A more contemporary expression of the same mentality flows from Pius X's pen in the encyclical *Vehementer nos* in 1906:

... the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members toward that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors.

The particular world view and theology which inform the type of mentality expressed in the above quotations, in my opinion, created a profoundly disturbing and non-evangelical reality within the Church. Among other things, the clergy and religious came to be seen as the active portion of the Church—they minister and provide salvation for the rest who are passive and receptive. To speak about the Church *was* to speak about the clergy and to a lesser extent the religious. This passivity and infantilization of the laity came to expression in a distortion of identity. Rather than identifying oneself as one called to discipleship and ministry, there was a sense of inferiority. This expressed itself in a lack of an active evangelical witness and was reflected in their non-active role in the liturgy and the inner working of the Church.

The shift from the dichotomizing previously mentioned can be traced variously, but a significant milestone occurred when the Vatican II bishops placed their reflection on the role of episcopacy within the greater context of the Church as the People of God.³ This strong communitarian and unifying symbol harks back to the Old Testament image of an entire people formed and shaped by God to be a special sign and instrument of grace. A corollary development involves a view which sees the entire Church as intrinsically sacramental.⁴ All of us actively re-present Christ.

Consequently all, by virtue of discipleship, symbolize God's presence in the world. This is in its deepest sense ministerial. Likewise, the recognition of a universal call to holiness echoes the New Testament demand for radical discipleship for all, and not just a select few. This universal call to holiness clearly relates to our being each, by virtue of discipleship, sharers in Christ's office of priest, prophet and ruler.⁵ This ecclesiological shift, which includes a new appreciation of the Spirit and the charisms, sets the stage for our newfound interest in a universal call to ministry.⁶ But to speak of call immediately thrusts one into the realm of vocation. To that topic I now turn.

As one surveys a representative sample of theological encyclopedias and dictionaries, an interesting fact emerges.⁷ They either have nothing on the topic of vocation, or principally deal with it in terms of vocation to the clergy or religious life. It is noteworthy that in Karl Rahner's and Herbert Vorgrimler's *Theological dictionary*, their short article titled 'Vocation', states that, 'A vocation means in particular, but not exclusively, a call to priesthood or the religious life' (p 483). I take this position to be absolutely untenable given the above mentioned shift in ecclesiology. What might be a different way to view vocation?

First of all, I must emphasize that the question of vocation is absolutely primordial to what Christianity is about. Vocation, in the first instance, involves being called into relationship. With the Jewish people, this manifests in knowing oneself to be part of God's chosen people—the special locus of God's presence. In Christianity this becomes further specified in direct relationship to the Father through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This call then, is primarily to relationship, and can well be symbolized by discipleship, for discipleship connotes a responsive process in which one becomes shaped in the image of the 'master' or 'teacher'. As one becomes shaped into the image of the teacher, in our case Jesus, his own response to the Father becomes ours also. Each and every authentic Christian claims that new life of God brought by Christ in the act of entering into the dynamic of discipleship. The image of discipleship, perhaps better than any other, contains within it the elements of vocation, namely, the experience of sensing oneself as someone 'called' into relationship and the consequent response to that call. What might it mean to say that one experiences oneself as someone called? How does call come to birth and how does it grow?

Not too long ago, as is demonstrated by the above quotation from Rahner and Vorgrimler, call tended to be viewed as what a religious or someone drawn to the hierarchical ministry experienced. I would contend, and I would argue from the New Testament witness, that much more fundamentally all are called to radical discipleship.⁸ I would agree with the Jewish mystic, philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel that 'To deal moderately with God is profanation'. Perhaps the word radical sounds too extreme or for the few. I do not believe so. The word radical comes from the Latin word *radix* and pertains to the root of something, to the essential and fundamental. When one impacts the root of a plant, the entire plant will be affected—likewise with our lives. God enters them in such a manner that nothing remains untouched. The moral theologians speak of a fundamental option to describe such a process in a person's life. Integral to this process, *metanoia* or conversion draws one into a turning from what does not give life toward that which *is* life—God. Out of this turning springs a new centre of consciousness that reorients one's values, perspectives, and anything else of importance. Integral to this turning are the radical moments of transformation which then give way to the more ongoing moments of consolidation and working out the implications of God's inbreaking into one's life. To be drawn into discipleship is to be drawn into conversion—to this we are called. Indeed, as one grows in wholeness and healing because of God in one's life, there emerges a growing gratitude which longs to express itself. Vocation emerges out of discipleship and this gratitude. It comes from a growing docility to the Spirit of God in our hearts. Ministry is grounded in the personal response we make to this call to relationship and to the charismatic call of the Spirit to manifest the reality of our discipleship in loving servanthood.

Who then is called to ministry? In the broad definition of ministry all are called who actively choose Jesus in a life of discipleship. The Second Vatican Council documents clearly expressed this in numerous places. For example:

From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic there arise for *each believer* the right and duty to use them in the Church and the world for the good of humankind and the upbuilding of the Church.⁹ (Emphasis added)

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church.¹⁰

These words affirm the pneumatic basis of ministry which flows directly from each individual's engagement with Christ through the Church. For some, their ministry will be expressed through celibacy for the kingdom, for others, through marriage for the kingdom. Likewise, for some, social service in labour and professions will be an expression of ministry, while for others it will be ecclesial service. We are all in a real sense called to the ministries of teaching, evangelizing, helping, etc. But, of course, we know this cannot be the whole story. Ministry in the strict sense is integrally ecclesial and often involves a specialization which flows from the development of a particular charism. Some then, will become special signs of God's continuing activity as teachers, or prophets, or healers. And although ministry will occur wherever a disciple expresses his or her discipleship in loving service, this does not constitute official ministry. Any charism or call is subject to the scrutiny of the community, especially if it purports to minister on an ongoing basis and to speak in the name of the community. It will be judged according to performance (is it effective?), and according to the community's self-understanding (is it orthodox?). The primary scrutinizers will be the co-ordinating leadership—bishop, presbyter and others in official positions of leadership. Charisms will find official expression subject to the community's needs and its current and evolving structures. Basically, ministry flows from each person's engagement with the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit and might eventuate in official ministry given the above structures. A few more distinctions, however, need to be made.

Thomas O'Meara highlights the fact that one must distinguish between the ambiguous ministerial effect of those who choose a way of life as a concretizing of their discipleship (such as someone entering the religious life or marrying) and those whose ministry can be understood in terms of their functional relationship to the community.¹¹ One can be profoundly ministered to by the symbolic import of a monk's or a family's life which witnesses to the reality of God, but one could only designate these as ministers in the very broadest sense of the term. In fact, O'Meara goes so far as not to name these as ministry *per se*. I would disagree, and would rather deal with the distinction in terms of a broad or more narrow definition of ministry. In any case, when dealing with ministry in terms of act or function rather than being, O'Meara helpfully differentiates ministry in terms of intensity. This distinction

between levels of intensity of ministry relates directly to *official* or public ministry. In other words it relates to those who will take official positions in parishes and dioceses and who will minister publicly in the name of the community. The importance in making this distinction derives from the fallacy that non-official ministry is second-rate. In fact, some of the most profound ministry occurs outside strictly official ministry. O'Meara, on the basis of intensity, distinguishes three kinds of involvement: those who have a role of co-ordinating leadership, those with a full-time involvement and those with a part-time involvement. The co-ordinating leadership resides in the ordained or in vicars. The full-time ministry involves graduate and professional preparation and lengthy, possibly a lifelong, commitment. The part-time minister engages in official ministry during a certain stage of life or as a sideline to other major involvements. A case in point would be, for example, a mother whose children are mature enough to fend for themselves, or a businessman or woman who has retired, and who therefore desires to dedicate substantial and quality time to ministry. This type of person would require brief but adequate preparation. These particular ministries as a rule will tend to be volunteer ministries. Nonetheless, the presumption is that such ministers will be prepared and skilled volunteers. On the whole, co-ordinating leadership will be in the hands of the clergy, though there are some vicariates being opened to religious women and other laity. Full-time ministry is currently exercised by priests, some religious brothers and sisters and growing numbers of other laity. Part-time ministry includes priests not directly involved pastorally, deacons, a growing number of religious and, especially, other laity. This explosion in ministry is an act of the Spirit. Let me explain. For example, in Texas, the diocese of Brownsville currently has 500,000 Catholics and approximately one hundred and twenty five priests. A careful study has shown that by the year 2000, there will be a threefold increase of population, to 1,500,000. Concomitantly there will be a decrease of clergy by fifty per cent. This will leave approximately sixty five active priests. If there is to be official ministry, our structures of ministry will increasingly be in the hands of laity, including religious brothers and sisters, and some deacons.

The new reality, in terms of theology and decreasing clergy, calls forth a different pastoral response. In the United States, there is a proliferation of programmes which prepare laity for ministry.

The United States Bishops' Committee on the Laity's *Directory of Diocesan Lay Programs* lists one hundred and thirty four either projected or developed training programmes for lay ministry out of some one hundred and sixty dioceses. Of course, the range in terms of depth and effectiveness of these programmes is bound to be great. In some dioceses, lay ministry means training lectors and eucharistic ministers. In others, the purely liturgical focus gives way to true pastoral care, where pastoral leadership in all its diversity and in terms of the real pastoral needs of the faithful is prepared. One thing is clear however: programmes have to serve as vehicles which facilitate the process of entry into the pastoral life of the Church and also serve as sifters which block the entry of those unsuited. As vehicles their principal function will be twofold. First, the programme must help the person claim his or her programme identity as one called and gifted for ministry. Furthermore, the person must be facilitated in terms of his or her insertion into the structured pastoral life of the Church. The other key function of a programme will be to determine the suitability of the person seeking to become more active in ministry and to provide the needed training for an effective ministry. What follows are some items which I consider basic in terms of a person's suitability for public official ministry:¹²

- 1 That the person have a degree of clarity regarding Jesus's role in salvation history, that is to say, an orthodox christology which falls within the conservative to liberal range.
- 2 That the person be one who has a basic human wholeness. Put negatively, that the person not currently be a candidate for psychological therapy.
- 3 That the person evince a degree of the theological and moral virtues. Of course, the person does not have to be a saint, but there should be signs of a moral and religious conversion.
- 4 That the person manifest a positive sense of the Church. This does not mean being uncritical, but rather a sense of care and concern for the Church, even with its foibles.
- 5 That the person be one who can communicate, facilitate communication, and especially receive feedback from others. This particular item also refers back to the issue of basic human wholeness since the ability to hear criticism is essential to human and spiritual growth.
- 6 That the person be equipped with a sound theological and pastoral competence *for ministry*. In other words, the person does

not need to become a theologian, but rather, one who has enough knowledge of the Church's contemporary self-understanding in key areas to provide a good base for ministry. Likewise, the person should have developed basic pastoral leadership skills such as leadership, management and listening skills.

- 7 That the person have a socio-political and cultural consciousness. This criterion refers to the ability to appreciate and value the social teaching, universality and cultural diversity of the Church.

These criteria can serve as guidelines, both for surveying the potentialities of prospective candidates, and for determining whether a particular candidate who has gone through the programme has met the above criteria and therefore should be put forward as one ready for ministry. Our own programme in San Antonio, Texas can hopefully give a sense of what can be possible in terms of meeting the pastoral need of forming ministerial lay leadership.

Starting from the premise that laity need and deserve to have quality programmes, we have geared ourselves to meet the needs of two of the above mentioned groups of ministers. A growing need is to develop well prepared leadership among those who will be part-time ministers in either a paid or a skilled volunteer basis. Furthermore, there is a need to prepare full-time, professional lay ministers. We have developed an eighteen months' part-time certification programme which meets the needs of the first group. Furthermore, our Institution grants a Master of Theological Studies degree geared to those wanting to enter full-time professional ministry. With full-time study it can be completed in two years. Each of these programmes encompass three elements: spiritual formation, theological education and pastoral skills development. The person's movement through the programme includes a thorough screening for a true call to ministry which emerges from a degree of spiritual and human maturity. The first year is an intense period of discernment which includes personal growth and the clarification of one's particular area of ministry. This occurs in the context of a rite-of-passage punctuated by liturgical moments which mark the person's passage through the programme. We have adapted the structure of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and specifically use the Rites of Enrolment and Election. The people who pass through our programme either already are involved in official ministry or become involved in public positions of ministry. We have had many who are involved in ministries of

the word such as co-ordinators of evangelism or catechesis or initiation, others who minister in the health area through either chaplaincy or co-ordinating pastoral care programmes in nursing homes or parishes, while yet others co-ordinate sacramental and liturgical activities or peace and justice ministry. Of course, not all become fully-fledged leaders. Some teach, evangelize and minister liturgically in the role open to them. To conclude, I would like to let some of the voices of the people who have passed through our programme speak. Included are men and women, well educated and not, rich and poor, religious and not.

[The programme] broadened my whole perspective of ministry; i.e. the seriousness, the many facets of ministry, the need to work constantly on personal growth, prayer and love.

I have been enriched and challenged to live the scriptures; to understand where it is that *I* fit in this community of Christians.

The lay minister is integral to the life of the Church. We are all living an important time in the Church when lay ministers are being encouraged and challenged to be leaders—all this happening through the Holy Spirit. This has become a part of me—a reality. Now it's time to act.

I have established my role in the Church and also I have met my own self, who I am and where I am going—thank God. The seeking out was somewhat painful but worth it.

The Lay Ministry Institute has been a profound growth in faith and renewal in my life as well as given me a real sense of being 'of age' as a minister for the Church today.

These, then, are some of the voices springing from real life in today's Church. I believe they voice hope, dedication, a sense of call, and competence. Might these not be some of the voices of the future of the Church?

NOTES

¹ Among works which touch on this re-evaluation would be: Cooke, Bernard: *Ministry to word and sacrament* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976).

Schillebeeckx, Edward: *Ministry: Leadership in the community of Jesus* (New York, Crossroad, 1981).

Power, David: *Gifts that differ: Lay ministries established and unestablished* (New York, Pueblo, 1980).

Bausch, William: *Traditions, tension and transitions in ministry* (Mystic, Conn, Twenty Third Publications, 1982).

² This vision of the Church finds expression in the Vatican II documents, especially *Lumen gentium* and *Apostolicam actuositatem*.

³ *Lumen gentium*, especially Ch.2.

⁴ *Lumen gentium*, no 1.

⁵ *Lumen gentium*, no 11 and especially Ch 5.

⁶ This newfound appreciation was principally mediated into the documents through Cardinal Suenens.

⁷ *Dictionary of theology*, Louis Bouyer (Desclée Co., 1965). *Encyclopedia of theology: the concise sacramentum mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, (New York, Seabury, 1975).

New catholic encyclopedia, (New York, McGraw Hill, 1967). Articles titled: 'Vocation, religious and clerical' and a shorter article on 'Vocation to supernatural life'.

⁸ Matt. 10, 37-39 is one of many passages which express the radical call of discipleship.

⁹ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no 10.

¹¹ O'Meara, Thomas Franklin: *Theology of ministry*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1983).

¹² These criteria, except for the first one, are drawn from a talk given by Rev Richard McBrien in San Antonio, Texas in 1982. They have been expanded.

SPIRITUAL GUIDES

By BARBARA BEDOLLA

SPIRITUAL GUIDES have many names: spiritual director, spiritual friends, spiritual father or mother. Whatever the title, this person is called by God to a very special ministry, which is to walk with others in spiritual journey. The function of a spiritual guide differs according to each person he or she is with. In one instance the role is that of listener/reflector, in another instructor/director; the guide moves according to the rhythm of each individual. It would seem that the primary focus of the guide is to be present with God for the directee.

Many lay people are called to the ministry of spiritual direction, and each person experiences the call differently. A pharmacist in a small town begins to notice that people spend more time in his store discussing their concerns about life, death, and God's place in it all. A pastoral counsellor begins to realise that a client's problems are not psychological but rather of a spiritual nature. A high-powered woman executive finds many of her colleagues coming to her and sharing their spiritual unrest; in some ways she enables them to speak of their search for God in a corporate business world.

In this article I would like to speak of the role of the spiritual guide from my perspective as a laywoman. I will share my call in a chronological fashion, speak of some of the personal tensions which occurred when I first began to guide people, and finally, in light of my experience and training, reflect a bit on the future of guides who are lay people.

My journey

Being a spiritual director had never been a part of my life plan. I had graduated from college when I was twenty one with a degree in social work. I was married at twenty two and worked in various social service agencies until our first child was born five years later.

I had been a member of the Sodality (now called Christian Life Community) most of my life. It was through this movement that

I was introduced to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. These retreats were made annually beginning in college. Daily prayer (meditation and contemplation), liturgy, and spiritual reading were an accepted part of my way of life along with the use of discernment in decision-making which helped to focus my life.

The small faith communities provided challenge and support which I needed to keep deepening my prayer experience. CLC also called me to integrate my prayer with my life experience. Thus in every area of my life, in my personal, familial, professional, local and global communities, I was called to mission and service. By the age of thirty one, I had two children and was a housewife. My concerns were primarily my family and the social justice issues of that day. Thus the problem of racial inequality and the needs of the migrant farmworkers were foremost in my mind.

So, when at the end of my retreat that year my director, Fr John Conrath, S. J., said to me, 'You know my dear, you are ready to give the Exercises', I was stunned and replied, 'I can't do that; only nuns and priests do that. Besides who would make a retreat with a laywoman?'. 'All right', he said, 'if that is what you think'. Later in the year, Fr Conrath sent me material on the Spiritual Exercises adapted to be made at home. This concept caught my attention, as I had always felt that spirituality was for the elite ('regular' and poor people could not afford the time or money for such a luxury).

Thus began the development of a home based retreat formulated on the Spiritual Exercises. This retreat involved both weekly individual direction and group experience over an eight-week period. All people invited to make this retreat eagerly accepted. Following that retreat, there were waiting lists of people asking to be a part of the next experience.

A year after this retreat experience began, my husband and I were transferred to La Paz, Bolivia, then to Panama, and finally to Quito, Ecuador. It was in these travels that my experience both in spiritual direction and of direction in retreats in daily life broadened. In these countries people desperately sought a sense of spiritual development in a situation where encouragement of this development was not available. I was soon directing religious and lay people, Protestants and Catholics, persons of every ethnic and cultural background imaginable.

Somewhere between our tours in Panama and Quito I was able to make the thirty-day Spiritual Exercises. This helped me greatly

in deepening my awareness of spiritual movements of my soul. I found my directing skills improving with the support of interested Jesuits, much reading, and finally with the ongoing experiences of my directees. All this time I was maturing in my experience in directing the retreat in daily life (Nineteenth Annotation). But a new dilemma presented itself: retreatants were asking to continue with me in ongoing spiritual direction. This was a whole new arena in which I had felt a need to gain more knowledge and skill. Now ten years later, programmes are being established to provide training for spiritual guides.

I chose an Ecumenical Spiritual Guide Program at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Guidance in Washington, D.C. This programme provided three specific experiences. First was reflection upon different apophatic and kataphatic prayer styles. Second came seminars and sharing on all phases of spirituality and life. Topics fully explored were discernment, psychology, social concerns, sexuality, beatitudes, and plurality, among others. Finally, students who were lay and religious of different religious traditions were divided into peer groups. Each member of a peer group would present a directee with whom they were working. The group members and supervisor would then help the presenter with any questions or concerns the presenter would have around the handling of the directee (this is to help the director freely move without his or her personal agenda affecting the direction stance). When I graduated from this programme I was certified as a spiritual guide but also clearly understood the necessity to be a member of a peer group.

My call to spiritual guidance came unexpectedly and it has grown through the years. It has been affected by CLC vocation, by the countries I have lived in, and by my own personal growth. Yet these years have not been without my own personal tensions, and from this has come a growth of my own admiration for the laity and the spiritual lives which we lead.

Reflections on tensions and gifts

During those beginning years in spiritual direction, one of the most difficult areas to deal with was my own feeling of not being ready to accept the authenticity of my own call and my lay spirituality. I was my own worst critic when it came to the question of lay spiritual directors, burdened by a history which said that a lay person cannot be as holy as a priest or as religious. I was

burdened with a sense that women cannot be attuned to other women as spiritual directors. Finally, I had a sense that laity were certainly less than adequate to deal with the quality of spirituality espoused by Ignatius Loyola.

It has taken me a period of thirteen years to gain a sense of adequacy as a spiritual guide. Not that I doubted God's ability to work in me, to help me be a director, but rather I questioned how capable I was as a religious spiritual director. I believe that my anxiety was eradicated when I sought out a lay woman to direct my annual retreat. Through this director I was gifted with a uniquely rich retreat experience. This richness was not based on a personal friendship but rather on the ease of our understanding during conference times. I found that what I had experienced in directing lay persons I also received in being directed by one. Less time was needed in getting into the heart of retreat prayer because the lifestyle, the sexuality, and the social concerns were understood. Because of this, my own capability to encounter Christ in an in-depth experience was not underestimated. I was treated with spiritual maturity and challenged to live out the gospel values.

Today's lay guide is on the threshold of a whole new exploration into the meaning of lay spirituality, a spirituality which evolves from the lives of those people who are seeking to interiorize the *word* into their own reality and to create a new response to justice and truth. The barriers which said that holiness was separate from wholeness are being knocked down. From this comes a new experience of the reality of Christ, not from a monastic vowed life but from the multi-vocational responses to Christ's particular call.

The uniqueness of this spirituality is found not in the similarity of lifestyle and patterns of life, but rather in the diversity and chaos of today's living. People are discerning and living out Christ's call from their economic status, their educational diversity and from the challenges of their state in life, be it married or single. Within their personal experiences of encountering Christ and his people, all struggle to find the meaning of prayer and the possibilities it holds for them, not in a structured existence but in a chaotic one.

The lay person who is a spiritual guide lives out and encounters this reality; there are no illusions of life, of its joys and sorrows. As lay guides walk the road of their retreatants/directees, they learn more and more about grace, relationship with Christ, and *hope*. The guide sees prayer interiorized and lived. Thus, the guide

grows in confidence that it is indeed right for him or her to be there, both to direct and to be directed, and to participate in the exploration of prayer and the retreat in daily life as lived out by Christians today. I continue to be reaffirmed by retreatants and directees. A young male teacher commented, 'I've made three retreats: the first with a priest, the second with a nun, and the third with you. By and large, I have to say that this one was the best. It was easier to relate to you my fears, my pressures, my concerns, and my prayers because I knew that you too had experienced them'.

Hopes and future

As the role of the lay guide continues to emerge in the Church today, it seems appropriate to explore ways to bring together the wealth of experience which religious and lay guides can offer to one another. The religious spiritual guide has the benefit of education and specific formation in spirituality. Religious orders provide specific spiritual traditions from which we as laity have much to learn.

On the other hand laity have lived experience of integration of prayer and various lifestyles. As laity experience deeper spiritual conversion, they explore the world they live in with a different perspective. This perspective is of an integration of the spirit, creativity and reality. This focus adds new life to a once strict interpretation of spirituality. Perhaps what the laity are capturing is the spirit which Ignatius worked toward in being contemplative in action.

This coming together may take form in formation and training programmes, in the sharing of direction, gifts and tensions with one another in peer groups, in exploring the possible needs to establish criteria and possible certification of all guides in order to provide the directee with the fullest of graced experience. In sharing my journey, its growth and development, I would hope that readers will begin to seek ways to enable this emerging ministry to come to its fullness for *all* spiritual guides. Thus in the future, the emphasis will not be on whether the spiritual guide is religious or lay, male or female, but rather the emphasis will simply be on the *person* of the spiritual guide.