

# MAXIMS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION (M.D.)

## INTRODUCTION

This document was published in 1694 by Servien de Montigny who was the Director of the Institute from 1688-1699.

In the life of N. Barré Spiritual Direction was as significant as founding the Institute. While still a deacon he had charge of accompanying the young religious. From the time he was ordained his particular mission was that of confessor and spiritual director. He was not given any other duties so that he could devote himself fully to this particular mission. We can see some of the methods he used in Maxims for all People, his conferences and his Letters - especially L 16 and L. 28. Maxims for Spiritual Direction sets out the principles which he followed.

R. Thuillier, a contemporary of his, left us a summary of the basic orientations used by N. Barré in his direction of others (c.f. Positio page 377 ff.).

- 1) Union with God and perseverance in prayer in order to obtain the gift of discernment of spirits.
- 2) Detachment from material things, honours; personal lived experience of the spiritual life - acquired through prayer and mortification; knowing how to gain the confidence and acceptance of one's directees through having a true motherly love for them.
- 3) Inner freedom so that the will of God can be expressed in all circumstances.
- 4) Never attract directees to oneself but lead them to God – each one following his or her own unique way.
- 5) Use simple language: use comparisons that will help familiarise them with the truths of faith.
- 6) Stimulate the desire and enthusiasm in people to take responsibility for their own progress along the way that leads to God, so that they would not be totally dependent on the director.
- 7) Show a lot of kindness and leniency at the beginning but be more firm and demanding as the directees become more attached to Jesus Christ.
- 8) Referring to books is not enough, although it may be useful sometimes. A good director will base direction on his/her own experience of God as well as on that of the directee.
- 9) The director should adhere to grace and this means destroying all in human nature that would cut one off from God.
- 10) The director must be all things to all people, in the image of Christ who becomes for us at the same time : friend, brother, servant, master, king, etc.....

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

- a) It was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that France felt the effects of the spiritual and missionary renewal arising from the Council of Trent, which had taken place the previous century. Little by little people felt the need for spiritual direction to help them live a more authentic Christian life. In some cases it was also regarded as fashionable.
- b) The need for spiritual direction was accentuated by the fact that theological debates, which were common in the more intellectual circles, gave rise to some confusion. These debates centered around grace, sin, pure love, salvation.... Jansenism and Quietism were particularly prevalent at the time.
- c) Spiritual direction was needed to help people find the truth amidst the anxiety about sin and salvation generated by Jansenism. A religion of fear made an impact on many people. N.Barré would have been among those who helped them find peace through the paths of humility and abandonment, as his Letters testify.

## MAXIMS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION (M.D.) FOR DIRECTORS AS WELL AS THOSE TO BE DIRECTED

1. Those involved in guiding others in the way of perfection (1) should act with complete disinterestedness.
2. A Director can offer some enlightenment but can never convert another or even get anyone to make progress. «It is God who gives the increase.» (2).
3. In giving guidance and direction the wise and holy Director lays aside, as far as possible, all that is purely natural and seeks to co-operate with the action of grace so that human nature which has been cut off from God may be restored. «No one is a Director who is not a destroyer.» (3)
4. The attraction for the spiritual life of itself can enable a person to speak well about the interior life even when one's knowledge is scanty and when one has little or no personal experience (4).
5. Quite often the Director can be like these muddy streams which still carry water that is pure and clear.
6. The Director's work will be stimulated by the thought, not only of going to heaven, but of seeing it filled (5).
7. Everyone must strive to become holy and, at the same time, be happy to see others become holy. As we help others along the way we will become aware of the privilege of being associated with such a holy ministry (6).
8. The Director should reach out to people with gentleness so as to win them over and should never act in an overbearing manner. As with the good Samaritan, 'oil and wine' must be applied.
9. Directors must give from their abundance. Hence they must be filled to the brim so that they can pour from their fullness : «Learn and teach; live and be life for others.» (St. Augustin) «You should be a fountainhead rather than a spout.» (St. Bernard)
10. Directors are like those who know every part of a house and can find their way about it in complete darkness. Thus they can guide others around it and warn them of pitfalls (9).
11. Directors often receive many lights and heavenly gifts to be shared with directees. They are rich, therefore, in what belongs to others. If what is given to the directors for others were separated from their personal graces and virtues, they would find themselves almost naked, poor and miserable (10). They are like a river swollen by many streams and brooks.
12. When one forgets about self to any extent for the sake of the salvation of one's neighbour - to which one has been called by God - it is then that God sees to the salvation and perfection of the person who is fully committed to this service (11).
13. It is God's desire to reign in the human heart. He does not seem to be at rest until He can take possession of it. Hence what a wonderful mission it is to facilitate whatever will enable Him to find a house in the heart of another (12).
14. The Director's role is to prevent the gifts of God from being lost and to recover what might already have been squandered (13). «He will gather together the scattered tribes of Israel.» (14).

15. It cost Jesus Christ His life to bring about the redemption and lead the human race towards their Creator (15). Why then should any less be expected of one who is called to co-operate with God's designs.

16. It might be possible to count the number of people converted by Jesus Christ during His life, but those converted after His death would be innumerable. «Unless a wheat grain... dies, it remains only a single grain..» (16). It follows that unless the Director dies to the world and to self, the fruit produced will be very mediocre.

17. In working for the salvation of one's neighbour, more attention should be given to affirming the good rather than to destroying what is evil, one will necessarily follow the other. Where good is firmly planted, evil can no longer continue to exist (17).

18. Most Directors use books to help them in their ministry. This is good but it is not the most reliable source. «†Books can be like dry cisterns containing only stagnant water.†» (18). It is much better to go directly to the source for a supply of fresh and life-giving water (19). Unless the Director is a person of prayer and ready to practice self denial where will he/she learn what to say, what advice to offer, what questions to ask (20) ?

19. The true Director should always act out of a total reliance on a higher, supreme Spirit who alone has the power to guide each one (21).

20. Directors should enter into their nothingness and act in accordance with what they perceive; they will draw light from on high so that they may be able to help in every way possible, during privileged moments of grace (22).

21. Directors must be prepared to be criticised, accused, contradicted, blamed, even when they act solely under the inspiration of the Spirit of God (23). The evil one will not leave them in peace but will stir up even good and holy people against them.

22. Directors focus more on listening than on speaking, in order to take advantage of the insights God gives through each of the directees, all the while entering more deeply into one's own nothingness (24).

23. They must look upon God as the centre of a great circle to whom an infinite number of lines converge, all starting from different points. Let them therefore take care not to divert the directees from their own particular paths, otherwise they would hinder people in their progress or lead them astray (25).

24. The Director seeks to win people over by gentleness and sincerity, empathise with them, listen with patience, show compassion when they are troubled, support them and help them to benefit from their difficulties and even to advance along this road whenever God leads them there (26).

25. The Holy Spirit attracts and takes possession of souls more often through the gentle soothing balm of grace than through the force of law (27), since people are generally more influenced by their feelings, their natural impulses, their imagination and their interest in what relates to human nature before moving on to the spiritual.. Thus the Director will emphasise the importance of God's will; while at the same time taking into account love, one's natural attraction and ability (28), rather than the austerity and authority of law.

26. Those who are troubled must be listened to even when one does not know how to relieve their suffering. While waiting for God to intervene, they can be given some consolation. By means of kindly conversation, the most bitter part of

the trouble can be gently removed from their heart. This, however, does not apply to the scrupulous, because the help they require is quite different (29).

27. An experienced Director will never be fully satisfied with the directee, no matter what efforts have been made or what degree of holiness has been reached. There is always room for progress in accordance with God's designs : «†Let the one who is just be justified more, let the one who is holy become holier still.†» (30).

28. The Director cannot satisfy and make holy at the same time. A combination of prudence (31) and firmness are necessary for the kind of direction that leads to progress in virtue (32).

29. Milk is the food of beginners. They must be treated leniently at the start so as not to be frightened off while still fragile and weak (33) : «I have given you milk to drink not solid food, because you were not yet able for it.» (34). Jesus also says in the Gospel : «I have still many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now.» (35).

30. Those called to perfection must be trained to be firm and resolute and must be urged to advance with courage and strength (36).

31. The Director must strengthen those already won over to God, treating them with a little severity and getting them to do without human support even from the Director. They must not be allowed to become over dependant like a tender vine in need of props (37). 'Be strong, and stand firm...' (38).

32. They must also be prepared for aridity, interior affliction and distress; in short, they should be made to understand that the Risen Christ can only live in those that have passed like Him, through humiliation, suffering and annihilation (39). They must indeed be led to experience these states : 'Let your heart be strengthened and wait for the Lord.' (40). Note that the same letters are found in the words : virgo, vigor, vir ego, vir ergo. (41).

33. When the Director sees that directees are becoming strong and making progress on their way towards God, she/he must become more demanding (42), 'God chastises the one He loves.' (43). The Director should also hide from the directees the grace they have received by concealing it under the veil of nature, imagination, etc.... so that they may be purified and saved from self-conceit and from vain complacency that would cause everything to be lost (5).

34. If a person is fragile and weak, there is danger of discouragement and faintheartedness, so one must be careful. By demanding too much, all can sometimes be lost.

35. Those who are strong have to be humiliated, scorned, shattered, worn down, destroyed, neglecting nothing which could delay or hinder their sanctification or the full life of Jesus within (45).

36. When physical strength permits and there is sufficient energy to match it, the Director may cautiously advise that a few hours be taken from sleep at night for prayer. The Director should be the first to practice this advice, so as to be able to devote herself or himself during the day to the salvation of the other (46).

37. Like St. Paul, the Director ought to give as much attention to the saving of a single soul as if the conquest of a whole world were at stake (47).

38. Should the person being directed have commitments which involve other people, the Director should show consideration and charity in adjusting times to suit that person as far as can be reasonably expected (48).

39. All spiritual progress is rooted in the unique way in which God draws each person. The Director should therefore pay attention to this and encourage each one to respond accordingly, whether it be to a greater or lesser degree.

40. It is important that each one grow accustomed to facilitate whatever will enhance the attraction of God. When this attraction seems to wane or disappear altogether, it must be pursued. It can be re-awakened by fervour, recalled by strong desire and strengthened by steadfast fidelity (49).

41. Different species of trees produce different kinds of fruit. We must not look for cherries on a plum tree. So it is with people. Each one has to bear fruit according to its kind which is the combined result of grace and a person's special attraction. The Director's role consists in carefully distinguishing the fruit, preserving it and bringing it to full maturity (50).

42. Directors of those who are free from serious sin should follow them as servants follow their master. On the other hand, the directors act as masters towards those who have led a life of sin. In this case they must command, disturb, harass, shatter, subdue... In this way the latter will make greater strides towards perfection than the former and will usually get there sooner (51).

43. Each one experiences various influences from the devil (52), the flesh (53), the world (54), covetousness (55), human nature (56) - the last being the most difficult to struggle with and overcome...

44. The pyramids of Egypt had three faces : one of brick, one of marble and one of porphyry. When looked at from one side only, they appeared to be entirely of marble, or of porphyry or of brick. To get a proper idea and appreciation of them, they had to be seen from all three sides.

To get to know peoples' inner life one must distinguish in them three kinds of graces : those of attraction, fidelity and experience, these must not be confused with natural impulses. The grace of attraction is bright and dazzling at first. That of fidelity leads to understanding. Experience leads one to see clearly and act resolutely (57).

45. Those who are faithful should, in all circumstances, act in a spirit of dependence; not that they should turn to a Director for everything. They will act in all honesty and simplicity as they believe the Director would advise and will report back at the first opportunity. In this way two great abuses are avoided : firstly, frequent conversations that only pamper self-love and sometimes degenerate into something worse; secondly, attachment to one's own will and judgement which is surrendered when, in a spirit of obedience, one sets out to follow the advice of another on all occasions. The faithful observance of these points rapidly leads to progress and genuine perfection (58).

46. Directees should be perfectly obedient to their Director and be ready to follow directives, even when they are contrary to one's own personal wishes, and to the inspirations and promptings of God. In this way one leaves God to find God : one remains subject to the law of Jesus, and the Spirit of God in the Director, without having anything to fear (59).

47. In order to help beginners make progress, their natural inclinations must be taken into consideration. They must be guided according to their gifts which is the way that the Spirit of God usually works. Gradually they must be led to a higher state following the direction in which grace is leading them.

48. It will be very beneficial to those who, from the beginning, can be helped to have a great respect for silence, to behave with moderation; to avoid useless, vain, frivolous talk, etc. (60).
49. The practice of interior silence helps to control and calm the passions. Both the understanding and the will then become silent before God. The presence of His Divine Majesty will be respected, and He will be free to instruct us, enkindle our love and reign within us (61).
50. The person must then be helped to have a great love for awesome truths, to abandon oneself completely into the hands of God for time and eternity and to persevere without fail in the spiritual exercises, even amidst experiences of distaste, anguish or dryness (62).
51. The Director should help beginners to open their understanding and will, almost like splitting them open, so that all that hinders and prevents the flow of divine grace can be let out. They can then offer them to God so that He will close them up again and fill them with what He wills.
52. Those that have difficulty in accepting painful experiences and in abandoning themselves entirely to the Spirit of God, should lament (63) and bewail their weakness saying inwardly : 'if I am incapable of practising these things, at least I'll keep them in mind and have the desire to get nearer the ideal, hoping one day to please God fully' (64).
53. Anyone whose mission it is to promote the salvation of one's neighbour and the sanctification of souls should be 'all things to all people'. They must be valet, servant, companion, master, tyrant. For love of others, Jesus became all of these.
- Valet and servant : 'taking the form of a servant, He emptied Himself..' (65).
- 'I am a worm and not a human person...' (66)
- 'I have not come to be served but to serve...' (67)
- Companion and friend : 'I will not call you servants but friends...' (68)
- 'Coheirs with Christ...' (69)
- 'I ascend to my Father and your Father...' (70)
- Master and King : 'You call me Master and you are right for so I am...' (71)
- Tyrant : 'I have come to cast fire on the earth...' (72)
- 'I have not come to bring peace but the sword...' (73)
- 'I have come to scatter...' (74)
- 'I will strike and I will heal... I will kill and bring back to life...' (75)

54. The skilled Director should take great care to clip the wings of the proud who would like to serve God in a conceited and purely intellectual way, following their own presumptuous ambition. People of clay (76) must serve God according to their ability, remaining in the lowly place that is theirs. When they go to God by the way of abjection and humility, He will receive them favourably. God rejects proud and arrogant persons, who presume to approach Him like angels.

#### Points to note :

Jesus, in teaching His apostles, preaching the Kingdom of God, and announcing sublime truths, never made use of high-sounding comparisons or arguments drawn from the most advanced sciences. He only used the commonest parables. His recommendations were extremely simple and there was nothing showy in their application.

He said quite openly : 'Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven (77). The fact is that God made the heavenly powers so that they would serve Him as pure spirits. But He wants people to serve Him as people. He has perfectly united our souls and our bodies and has made them dependent on the senses and the imagination, etc. He likes to see us act according to our nature, using human reasoning, which He would regard as foolishness in the angels.

He is like a wise father who transacts serious business with a grown-up son or daughter but who enjoys playing with a little child. He listens to the talk of the child and answers him/her in the same way, allowing the child to touch, caress and interrupt him. Though he finds all that amusing from the child, he could not accept any of it from his older daughter or son. The Director should, therefore, lead people by these paths to Jesus, Who said : 'Suffer little children to come to Me. The Kingdom of heaven is for such as these' (78). The more lowly a person is, the more willing Jesus is to let that person draw near and be at home with Him. The surest way to gain access to His most intimate favours is to become a child in every respect (79).

#### NOTES

1. Mt 5 : 48; MD 16; PM 12; MI 6a, 6D
2. 1 Cor. 3 : 6; MAP 199
3. Like all mystics, N. Barré advocated the destruction of anything built up which would cut one off from God. The director seeks to co-operate with God's plan to destroy whatever has upturned a person's relationship with God. This is mystical language which refers to 'dark nights', 'wilderness', 'struggles', etc., which people sometimes experiences when following the way of the Lord.
4. MAP 131
5. MAP 56
6. PM 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11
7. PM 19, 20; MAP 126
8. St. Bernard says that whatever goes into a spout flows out immediately, whereas the fountain has to be filled before it overflows.
9. The director is in touch with all the movements of the spiritual life
10. Ps 40 : 16; Ps 70 : 6; Ps 86 : 1. Ps 109 : 22; MD 22
11. PM 1, 4, 10, 11
12. MAP 84
13. Lk. 19 : 10
14. Is. 11 : 12
15. This reflects the biblical notion of conversion. e. g. Jer 2 : 13; Ezech. 18 : 27; PM 7,8
16. Jn 12 : 24. c.f. also PM 35, 36
17. PM 20; MD 3
18. Said by John Climacus who was a Greek Doctor of the Church during the 6th century and whose works were very popular during the 17th century.
19. Jn 4 : 10
20. Mk 9 : 12; R.C. 3; MAP 44, 80
21. Jn 16 : 13; R.C. 2; Ps 33 : 16-18
22. MAP 56
23. Jn 15 : 20; Mt 10 : 17
24. R.C. 3; MD 11; PM 1; S.R. 1 : 9
25. PM 21
26. PM 19, 20
27. A way of acting which touches the heart c.f. PM 19, 20, 21, 24
28. The director should take into account the natural aptitudes and abilities of the directee and see that they are used well.
29. MAP 51
30. Rev. 22 : 11; Phil. 3 : 12-16
31. Use of discernment
32. MAP 51
33. MD 34, 47, 48, 49; MAP 51
34. 1 Cor. 3 : 2
35. Jn 16 : 12
36. MAP 51, 83, 91, 204, 228
37. L. 21; MAP 50, 51, 52



38. Jos. 1 : 6-9; Dt. 31 : 23; Dn 10 : 19
39. An image from Phil. 2 of what it is to be like Christ.
40. Ps 27 : 14
- 41 . Latin expressions :
  - Virgo = virgin; Vigor = strength
  - Vir ego = I act as a strong person
  - Vir ergo = therefore I am a strong person
42. L. 28; MAP 51
43. Heb. 12 : 6
44. The director tries to prevent a person focussing too much on gifts received or progress made.
45. L. 43
46. MAP 36
47. PM 7; Phil. 2 : 17; 2 Cor. 12 : 15
48. This applies to people who are working and who are not free to come and go as they wish.
49. L. 4; S.C.; MAP 63
50. MD 23; PM 21; MAP 113
51. Mt. 21 : 31; MD 19, 22, 23, 53; MAP 16, 17
52. 2 Cor. 2 : 11
53. Rom. 7 : 25
54. Jn 15 : 17
55. MAP 38
56. A human wisdom which does not refer in any way to God
57. Reference is being made here to the three movements of the Spiritual Life which are in continuous process :
  - enlightenment, inspiration, attraction...
  - difficulties, struggle - give rise to growth in knowledge and hence perseverance / fidelity
  - experience leading to firm resolve to take action. c.f. Rom. 5 : 1-5
58. PM 25, 26; MAP 42, 72; MD 19, 20, 22
59. When we let go and let be, we learn new levels of trust in the dark and in our experiences of nothingness. 'The highest and loftiest thing that one can let go of is to let go of God for the sake of God.' Eckhart. Maybe there is a reference here to Jn. 20 : 17 : '... do not cling to Me...'; Heb. 10 : 5-10; MAP 52, 68
60. MD 49
61. Jn 14 : 23; Gal. 2 : 20; Eph. 3 : 17; L. 59, 36, 22, 14
62. L. 11; MD 32
63. Rom. 8 : 26
64. MAP 118, 125, 130, 186
65. Phil. 2 : 7
66. Ps 21 : 7
67. Mk. 10 :45; Mt. 20 : 28
- 68 Jn 15 : 15
- 69.Rom. 8 : 17
70. Jn 20 : 17
71. Jn 13 : 13
72. Lk. 12 : 49
73. Mt 10 : 34
74. Mt 10 : 35; Lk. 12 : 51
75. Dt. 32 : 39
76. Gen. 2 : 7
77. Mt 18 : 3
78. Mt 19 : 14; Mk 10 : 14; Lk 18 : 16
79. FM 9, 10, 11; L. 14, 45, 47; MAP 155, 156, 228

