S

PIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Spiritual accompaniment (SA) is a ministry of the Church consisting in a help relationship between a spiritual companion and a person being accompanied, which intends to set the necessary conditions to experience the God of Jesus. In the words of William Barry SJ, it is *“a form of pastoral care aimed at helping a person to become more aware of God’s personal communication with him or her, in order to respond personally to God, and live in coherence with that relationship”[[1]](#footnote-1).* As part of this ministry, the person being accompanied tries to assess, with the help of the spiritual companion, the discoveries regarding his or her inner life, and the challenges of day-to-day experience, in order to follow Christ always more closely. It is a matter of finding and loving God in real life, in every event, and in people, looking for the Lord’s will in the concrete circumstances of life, and acting accordingly. To start with, achieving this goal requires understanding and accepting our personal history, becoming aware of our feelings and inner movements, and undergoing a true reconciliation with ourselves.

Discernment is the backbone of SA, another reason why external help to verbalize our experience is so necessary in order to perceive God’s will better and more intensely in the circumstances of our life. This is the case of Prophet Samuel: when called by the Lord, he went to Eli, someone more experienced in the ways of God, to help him clarify the calling (1 Samuel 3); or the Samaritan woman, who transformed and reoriented her life thanks to an encounter with Jesus and his teachings (John 4:1-26).

Spiritual accompaniment differs from traditional *spiritual direction* mainly in the sense that the person being accompanied freely makes his or her own decisions and implements them. The role of the spiritual companion is precisely that of walking alongside, listening, questioning, offering suggestions and helping to *“process the spiritual motions, that is, the person’s internal inclinations pertaining more to the realm of feelings than of reflective thinking”*[[2]](#footnote-2)*.* Thisattitude is diametrically opposed to that of certain traditional spiritual directors, who tended to be patriarchal, directive and hierarchical. The person being accompanied has no need to be told what to do regarding the spiritual journey, for this would limit the development of his or her Christian maturity. What the person needs is an experienced spiritual companion, someone giving witness to the spiritual journey, in which he or she walks ahead.



Therefore, it is obvious that not everyone is able to offer this service, and that the simple fact of being a religious or a priest is not a qualification to exercise SA. The spiritual companion must have formal training and experience, should be accompanied by another person, besides having a deep spiritual life – which is acknowledged by the community – and show enough prudence, humility and emotional balance to assume this role. The logical thing is to pick out a person (man, woman, lay, religious or cleric) who has the vocation and charism for this mission, and has been chosen by an institution or a community to carry it out, since there are no self-appointed spiritual companions.

In terms of structure, SA implies regular face-to-face meetings of the two persons involved in this gradual and systematic process, letting the Spirit work in both of them. The spiritual companion is chosen by the person looking for accompaniment among those available, and agrees with him or her on the duration of each session and of the process as a whole. In the present times, however, we need to open our minds to other forms of exercising this ministry, such as online or group spiritual accompaniment.

From this perspective, SA can be an effective means for the Institute and the Church, a concrete way to live Mary’s attitude as traveling companion. Therefore, SA incarnates the Marian Face of the Church. In this regard, *Water From the Rock* is quite clear: “Many of us choose to share our journey of faith with a spiritual companion. This practice is helpful in that it assists us to better discern the presence of the Lord in our day to day life. It also fills the human need of unburdening our hearts, of bringing reality into the perception of our situations, and seeking adequate solutions to problems we often face. Therefore, it is increasingly recognized as a profitable means of human and spiritual development. To be effective, it needs to occur regularly”[[3]](#footnote-3).

1. W. A. Barry and M. C. Guy: *The Practice of Supervision in Spiritual Direction,* in *Review for Religious* 37.6 (1978); Saint Louis, Missouri, USA; p. 834. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yévenes, Larry: *Hacia un acompañamiento espiritual maduro y responsable* in *Revista Mensaje* 599 (2011); Santiago, Chile; p. 215-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Water From the Rock, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)