

# **IVIYO AS CONTEXTUAL SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Cross-cultural spiritual direction is particularly complex and difficult when we take into consideration ethnic, religious, regional and other subcultures within a larger shared culture. This need is and can be fulfilled by the work of group spiritual direction, which holds potential value for renewal and deepening of both individual and communal spiritual life. In this article, group spiritual direction is introduced as a new paradigm for African cultures, given that it is ideally suited to communal societies, where a group of people can seek God together, trusting that God will reveal himself through common divine disclosures. By using an example of a renewal movement within the Anglican Church called Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu, group spiritual direction can be shown to be relevant, as it grows out of African spirituality and culture and can make a real difference to the communal well-being of South African society.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Spiritual director Patricia Fresen, in her article “Drinking from our own wells: cross-cultural Christian spiritual direction in the new South Africa”, suggests that cross-cultural spiritual direction is impossible (Fresen 2000:177). And rightly so, because trying to make individualistic, private Western spiritual direction fit into communal African spirituality would seem like an impossibility. Rather, what Fresen suggests is “we are being called to ... empower Africans to find another paradigm of spiritual direction, one more suited to the community-based spirituality of African people, possibly one not

unlike the spirituality of the first Christians” (Fresen 2000:178). This statement has caused me to reflect on the use of group spiritual direction within African cultures as a more suitable approach in directing the spiritual life.

This article highlights the challenge of doing individual spiritual direction cross-culturally and hence suggests group spiritual direction as a more suitable model for communal societies and helpful for community well-being. A practical example of how this could happen for rural black Anglicans is the use of a charismatic renewal movement called *Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu* (the Legion of Christ’s Witnesses) found in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa that could possibly make Western spiritual direction more accessible and relevant for rural Africans.

## 2 WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

Spiritual direction, also known as spiritual guidance, spiritual friendship and spiritual companionship, is practised in nearly all spiritual traditions (Freke 2000). Historically, the church has understood the ministry of spiritual direction in a variety of ways: in the Patristic era as a hierarchical “disclosure of thoughts” that evolved into the practice of sacramental confession (Downey 1997:8); in the Middle Ages as mystical guidance toward union with God (Barry 2004:59); in the Anglican pastoral tradition as moral guidance (Ball 1998:6); and more recently as mutual relationship between people committed to one another’s spiritual growth (Dougherty 1995). During the twentieth century, however, spiritual direction became in some contexts conflated with the practice of depth psychology (Cortright 1997:235), especially Jungian analysis (Jung 1958). As a result, the relationship between director and directee was shaped by the therapeutic norms of psychodynamic psychology, focusing on resistance, transference, countertransference, projection and to a lesser degree pathology (Bidwell 2001:278). The dominant psychology of the contemporary literature of spiritual direction not only shaped this ministry’s view of the person, but also established the norms and criteria for establishing and evaluating the spiritual direction relationship (Sperry 2002:3–5).

Most spiritual directors with any training in South Africa today are familiar with the Ignatian tradition of spiritual direction (Fresen 2000:182), which is very Western in its approach and involves the

practice of individual spiritual direction with preached and directed retreats. William A Barry and William J Connolly (1982:8), regarded as experts in the Ignatian method of spiritual direction, define spiritual direction as:

Help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, and to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God and to live out the consequences of the relationship.

Spiritual direction focuses on the maintenance and development of spiritual health and well-being, and assumes that the person is already whole but has not yet fully embraced this truth for him- or herself. Thus, it presumes a moderate degree of psychological health and well-being. The purpose of the director is to assist the directee in focusing on the particularity and uniqueness of God's presence to him or her and to become attuned to the dynamics of one's own attraction and resistance to a developing intimacy with God. Such a definition of spiritual direction presupposes that God acts in our world in such a way that we can experience God's action. To prevent a mere subject understanding of religious experience, discernment within experience is introduced to establish what is of God (Barry 2004:77). Unfortunately such a focus can lead and, indeed, has led to the development of an individualistic spirituality.

In a world where more and more people are aware of their interdependence and of the serious inequities brought on by individualism, and within the context of the church's call to the spiritual life, spiritual direction will have to show how it fits into the larger ministry of the church. This need is and can be fulfilled by the work of group spiritual direction, which holds potential value for renewal and deepening of both individual and communal spiritual life.

### **3 WHAT IS GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?**

According to Dougherty, group spiritual direction is a process in which "people gather together on a regular basis to assist one another in an ongoing awareness of God in all of life. They are seeking support for their responsiveness to God and they agree to support others

in that same responsiveness” (Dougherty 1995:10). The defining element of group spiritual direction is intercessory prayer (Ball 1998:67). Since all members hold one another in prayer through the meeting, listening to God with and for each other becomes the foundation of the group spiritual direction process.

The process best happens in a group of about six to ten people, all of whom are seeking spiritual direction and are willing to enter into the process. The ideal candidates for group spiritual direction should have sufficient interior freedom, self-knowledge and sense of the process of group spiritual direction to make a discerning decision about the rightness of the group for them. Members or directees would need to become familiar with the common faith language of the group. The focus of the group is listening to God, formational reading, the use of silence, guided images, healing rituals, contemplative prayer and respecting each directee’s contribution to how the Spirit is at work in the group. It is also important to note that the directees choose what they want to speak about, and they decide the pace at which to work out their spiritual journey so as not to become dependent on the spiritual director. Ultimately the Spirit is the real director, and both sharing and responses have their source in God rather than in personal agendas or concerns (Dougherty 1995:64). Also, the important issues of confidentiality and ethical conduct (Lebacqz & Driskill 2000:58) are emphasised so as to create a “safe space” for all directees. Spiritual direction in general provides many benefits, namely accountability, objectivity, encouragement and challenge, but group direction can be particularly useful for individuals who will benefit from being exposed to a wide variety of spiritual experiences of others in the group.

Even though the focus fell on the individual which characterised pastoral care in the twentieth century, many pastorally-orientated writers have advocated that group spiritual direction should be the norm rather than individual spiritual direction. For instance, over thirty years ago Adrian van Kaam insisted that one-to-one spiritual direction should be reserved primarily for crisis situations (Van Kaam 1976:384). Yet the prevailing image of a spiritual direction relationship continues to be the singular director with the singular directee; the implied hope is that this singular relationship multiplied many times will serve as the “leaven in the loaf” of the larger church and society. Unfortunately, in practice this is not always the case. It is now time to reclaim more fully the essential communal dimen-

sions of our heritage, and so expand the image of spiritual direction to include tending to the communal spirit.

#### 4 GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In our South African context, spiritual direction has always been practised in the Catholic Church. In the Protestant tradition, mostly in the Anglican, Methodist and Reformed traditions, individual spiritual direction is only now becoming a more accepted ministry as more lay men and women are being trained together with clergy. Ecumenical organisations like the Centre for Christian Spirituality in Cape Town and Ecumenical Spirituality Institute in Rosebank, Johannesburg offer training programmes, retreats and workshops to train spiritual directors and small group leaders in prayer. However, only a few models of group spiritual direction exist within Protestantism, and randomly so, within the Anglican Church.

This important resource of spiritual direction has not found its way to the majority of people in this country because spiritual direction, like many of the modern “talking” therapies, has developed among the relatively well-educated and seems removed from the cares and concerns of ordinary people. In fact, the tendency of much modern pastoral and psychological counselling has been to concentrate on the more privileged members of society (Bidwell 2004:60). For the reason of access, group spiritual direction can be viewed as a more suitable model for conducting spiritual direction than individualistic one-on-one direction. As Len Sperry states the future of this ministry depends on its ability to democratise itself, to become a resource for all people and to break with the elitist model which makes it a resource mainly for white, middle-class, leisured people (Sperry 2002:178).

Another key reason for the suitability of group spiritual direction in South Africa is that the majority of its people belong to communal African cultures in which the root value is group solidarity and consensus. Since spirituality is part of the very fabric of African life, a group of Africans will often talk more easily and openly about the deeper aspects of their lives in a group than in an individual setting. African liturgical practice is another aspect of spiritual formation and direction. Africans enter totally into, for instance, celebrating the Eucharist, with singing, dancing and full participation, where a

community of African worshippers receive the preaching of the Scriptures.

Moreover, in cross-cultural spiritual direction the challenges are exaggerated when the director and the directee are from different cultural backgrounds, as the problems experienced in cross-cultural spiritual direction stem from cultural differences (Fresen 2000:183). To overcome this, a paradigm of spiritual direction needs to be created that grows out of a particular cultural context where the director and directee(s) are from same cultural group. Group spiritual direction within a particular culture can meet this need.

Considering the above reason of assess, cultural suitability and cross-cultural communication challenges, this article will show how group spiritual direction can be a more suitable paradigm of spiritual direction within communal cultures than traditional individual spiritual direction by using a Christian renewal movement called *Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu*. This movement can be used to support the ministry of group spiritual direction in rural communities without diluting the purpose of the movement or the work of group spiritual direction. Considering that *Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu* groups have led to great growth in the religious life by emphasising an intimate relationship with God and a reminder to its members to live a holy life, it can be an ideal vehicle in which to carry out group spiritual direction in rural Anglican parishes. Firstly, the group focuses on spiritual growth with elements of prayer and discernment, and it emphasises the experimental dimensions of the Christian life. Secondly, a natural group forms as it finds expression in the life of the community and operates within African spirituality and culture. Thirdly, these groups remain strongly Christian and Anglican in their teaching and their membership.

#### **4.1 *Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu* (the Legion of Christ's Witnesses)**

*Iviyo*, the Legion of Christ's Witnesses, is a charismatic renewal movement within the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, most of its members residing in the Diocese of Zululand. *Iviyo* was started in the mid-1940s by two Zulu priests, Alpheus Zulu<sup>1</sup> and Phi-

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<sup>1</sup> Alpheus Zulu was a member of the Fraternity of the Resurrection, a group linked to the Community of the Resurrection (CR).

lip Mbatha, and spread rapidly in Zululand. They were both concerned about what they saw as a lack of power in the life of the church, and the failure of the church to make a significant difference in the life of its members. Zulu and Mbatha adapted the Rule of the Fraternity of the Resurrection so that it could be used within parishes, and the group that was formed became known as the *Iviyo loFakazi bakaKristu*, the Legion of Christ's Witnesses. Thus, *Iviyo* has its roots in Anglo-Catholic tradition within the Anglican Communion, but it is charismatic in that it stresses the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Individual members of *Iviyo* display the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the movement stresses faith healing and the discernment of spirits.

*Iviyo* has at its centre a Rule of Life to which members are expected to adhere. A Rule of Life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. Members of the *Iviyo* must promise to abide by the seven "rules" of the movement, namely to attend the services of the Anglican Church, to pray daily, to observe the church's season of fasting and abstinence, to give generously to the work of the church, to make confession at least twice a year, to practise sexual purity, and to lead at least one person to Christ each year (Shorten 1987:25–29). This gives *Iviyo* its missionary character as a legion of witnesses. Spiritual discipline in line with the Rule of Life is also important.

It is important to communicate some of the joys of worshipping in these groups. After attending *Iviyo* services in different rural parishes,<sup>2</sup> I have come to the conclusion that what they lack in material resources they make up for in the warmth of human interaction

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Members of the fraternity had to accept a Rule of Life, and reported their spiritual progress to a Warden who was a member of the CR (Shorten 1987:19).

<sup>2</sup> For my master's degree research, I traced a special Anglican approach to spiritual direction and investigated how this ministry was carried out within the Anglican Diocese of Zululand by priests and trained workers in the local church. The findings revealed that an important inadequacy does exist in the implementation of formal spiritual practice in the local church for various reasons, and that the need for spiritual guidance and pastoral counselling was largely administered through *Iviyo* groups (Naidoo 2002).

among ordinary people. The music has the ability to lift people out of the rut and misery of powerlessness and restores their faith in themselves, their fellow human beings and the Creator. During the services spontaneity sets in, away from the formality of the set liturgy, and people express themselves freely in prayer, song and dance. Healing of physically and spiritually wounded people takes place to the accompaniment of song and dance.

*Iviyo* has advanced because it is a grassroots spirituality, considering the fact that the cultural expression of Christianity within the Anglican Church remains largely within the English ethos (Shorten 1987:133). This is particularly evident in the liturgy, hymnody, church government, vestments, rituals and architecture, and also when theological education is considered. *Iviyo* members have experienced the life of Christ in a way that makes Christ real to them and gives them the desire to serve him. Their experience of serving Christ has also been linked in their experience with a disciplined life under a Rule, which makes the religious life seem natural and not foreign.

#### **4.2 *Iviyo* as contextual spiritual direction**

It is important to firstly show how the ministry of spiritual direction is valued in Anglicanism. Anglicanism is expressed through the traditional Prayer-Book spirituality and is basically corporate, liturgical and sacramental rather than individualistic (Ball 1998:9). Over the centuries, spiritual direction has been largely a tradition in which those who gave spiritual counsel were ordained men, but today there is a rediscovery of Ignatian spirituality, and many women and lay people are involved in the training and development of spiritual directors (Ball 1998:16). Regrettably, within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa as a whole, little attention has been given to the development of the ministry of spiritual direction (Suberg 1999). A significant part of the problem is that each diocese within the Church is autonomous and responsible for nurturing the spirituality of its own members, with few opportunities for training and networking across dioceses.

With regard to *Iviyo* groups, other dioceses within the Anglican Church have *Iviyo* members but their leaders are mainly from Zululand, as are most of their members (Hayes 1990:36). Within the Diocese of Zululand, among the existing forty-eight parishes, forty-two



parishes have *Iviyo* groups that meet on Sunday after the Eucharist service (Naidoo 2002). Outside their own circles they are relatively unknown by white church members of the Anglican Church. *Iviyo* and the Order of Ethiopia (OE) are two groups within the Anglican Church which have been initiated by Africans (Shorten 1987:19). The movement is Zulu in its language and its ethos, and the only whites who have much contact with it are clergy. The majority of black Anglicans have been influenced by the tradition of *Iviyo* particularly in the area of spirituality and worship. All black priests within the Diocese are members of *Iviyo* and use the Rule of Life to supplement their spirituality. They do, however, value individual spiritual direction and the techniques it has to offer to deepen the spiritual life, but they are aware that there are few trained spiritual directors within the diocese who can provide this ministry (Naidoo 2002).

Considering that *Iviyo* has brought great spiritual vitality to rural Anglicans, it would be expedient to use the group structure of *Iviyo*, so that group spiritual direction can take place the African way acknowledging African culture and spirituality.

Spiritual direction requires that the director engage the directee in a process that leads to a deeper relationship with God. Susan Rakoczy states that “to meet and be present to the uniqueness of each person in the spiritual direction relationship is an immense challenge, especially as one begins to understand how culture shapes each of us” (Rakoczy 1992:21). It is important to note that culture significantly affects the spiritual direction relationship as it is a human-constructed sea in which people swim; it informs all that people *do* as well as all they *are*. For example, people from certain cultures can greatly value harmony in human relationships to the point of publicly denying any felt disharmony. If cross-cultural spiritual direction is to happen, then what is called for on the part of the director is “interpathy”, which involves the letting go of one’s framework of thoughts and values and the willingness to enter into that of the other, while still retaining the ability to step back and critique values and thought patterns that are not in accordance with the Gospel (Augsburger 1986:29). One has to become deeply aware of the cultural lenses that are used in the process. Unfortunately, because few white South Africans have any grasp of African spirituality or even the degree to which spirituality is part of the very fabric of African life (Fresen 2000:184), direction becomes difficult. Africans, on the other hand,

often find Western spirituality strangely individualistic and compartmentalised. However, when in the spiritual direction relationship the culture is shared, then symbols, basic assumptions, presuppositions, attitudes and a shared behavioural system will be understood and taken for granted. The common cultural background provides a foundational understanding on which to proceed. For this reason, group direction with a group of *Iviyo* members would be uncomplicated and more natural to carry out if the facilitator were from within the culture or a director who is sensitive to African culture.

Through the process of socialisation, people learn from their earliest years the way of life which is the pattern of their culture. Luzbetak (1988:252) states: "A world view represents the deepest questions one might ask about the world and life and about the corresponding orientation that one should take toward them". In the West, the self has been understood as a distinct individual with unique value and distinct rights. Persons have a right to make something of their lives, to take responsibility for their life direction, to use their talents and gifts to the full. Such emphasis puts supreme value on the right of self-determination, self-achievement and self-satisfaction. In African cultures, the self is perceived differently in that the individual does not exist apart from the community. The uniqueness of each person is affirmed and acknowledged, but one's own individuality and freedom "are always balanced by destiny and community" (Ray 1976:14). Here in South Africa the power and quality of "ubuntu" as a foundation of culture is being damaged daily by the ongoing violence. While this must be taken into account in the experience of spiritual direction in this country, along with all the pernicious effects of apartheid, still the power of this sense of common bonding remains strong in Africa as a whole. Although Western influences of various kinds are profoundly affecting African society, this experience of self in community remains the foundation of African self-understanding. It is clear, then, what misunderstandings can occur when a Western director urges Africans to assume a degree of self-consciousness and self-assertion for which their cultural experience has not prepared them.

The African person in the spiritual direction relationship brings to it the experience of harmony with nature, a sense of the invisible world alive in the visible, and a strong conviction that various spirits can communicate with the person and the community (Setiloane 1986:9). These challenge Western perceptions of the secularity of the

universe, a sense of control over it, and at least a great scepticism about the existence of spirits that influence human behaviour. In the direction relationship, the African person brings along his or her desire that the experience of God be found in every facet of life without exception. Western directors, formed in the pattern of religion as one part of life, can be disconcerted by the holistic view presented by their African brothers and sisters, but they have much to gain from it (Rakoczy 1992:17).

Key to this Western worldview is the separation of the person and the community from the world of nature and spirits. The strong sense of continuity and lack of distinction between past, present and future in relation to ancestors is something that a Western director may admire but never fully understand. Within the *Ivijo* movement, much that traditionally belongs to Zulu thought-patterns and symbolism has been retained, which is part of the Christian tradition but has parallels in the Zulu context, such as confession, healing and exorcism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, dreams and visions (Shorten 1987:138). The Zulu person traditionally understands life to be continuous, flowing from generation to generation through the links of individuals. Everything that causes disharmony and interferes with life, which is linked with eternity and immortality, is evil.

In African cultures the belief in ancestors and diviners can be a delicate problem that the spiritual director must handle. If the director appears simply to reject this belief, the directee may turn elsewhere, to someone who would be more helpful to him or her. Part of the solution lies in taking the beliefs and experiences of the directee seriously and helping the directee test these beliefs against their faith in God in order to bring their life situation more under the protection and providence of God. Within the *Ivijo* movement, ancestor veneration is seen as incompatible with the Christian faith, as ancestors' spirits "cannot act as mediators of their living relatives" (Hayes 1990:55), and is likely to lead to demonisation. Among the leaders of *Ivijo* this is not a matter of moralising but one of exorcising (Hayes 1990:55). Sermons denouncing ancestor worship are rarely or never preached, but instead Christian commitment and sanctification are emphasised.

Because Africans tend to experience visions and the act of hearing stimulates their prayer, and because dreams are taken to be indications of God's will, it is important that the group help the members understand that these phenomena are matters for exploration and

discernment. They cannot simply be taken at face value as sure indicators of God's will. In this regard, *Ivijo* has tried to protect itself from the subjective interpretations of visions and divine messages, which have occurred in other charismatic groups (Hayes 1990:38). *Ivijo* groups soon find that they need to test experiences against the experience of the wider Christian tradition. They believe that the Spirit must be consonant with Scripture and the general teaching of the church. If there is a contradiction with scriptural truth, the revelation is not accepted. All manifestations, tongues, prophecy or counsel must be tested by the group. Discernment is very important to the process.

Spiritual direction presupposes a mature spiritual life which takes for granted regular personal meditation, journaling and the ability to express clearly to the director what is happening in one's prayer life. No small skill is required for this, even when one is speaking one's own language. According to Fresen not many directors in this country speak an African language, so African directees and retreatants are always at a disadvantage (Fresen 2000:184). And apart from the language question, the entire dynamic of a personally-directed, silent retreat, which is part of the direction process, is foreign to African culture and not congruent with African culture and spirituality (Fresen 2000:184). It therefore makes practical sense to expose Africans to group spiritual direction and for rural Anglicans to use the *Ivijo* structure where members are accustomed to spiritual discipline through the use of a Rule of Life. In recognised *Ivijo* groups, the fact that people know each other and all belong to the same faith community establishes trust in groups early on. In communal cultures, where speech is indirect and moves around the central topic, the important elements are ritual, formality, nonverbal clues and the atmosphere of the communication process. And since people have been exposed to a common language through worship services, initially there may be fewer communication problems than in other formed groups. Dialogue and discernment, both of which are essential components of spiritual direction, take time but are already operational in *Ivijo* groups. Other significant principles that make cross-cultural direction challenging but that can be accommodated in group spiritual direction involve the use of cultural and religious symbols, nonverbal communication and even male-female relations within the culture.

*Iviyo* has played a significant role in nurturing spirituality within the Diocese of Zululand and has great potential in introducing group spiritual direction to its members. For many *Iviyo* members, the charismatic experience may represent the beginnings of contemplative prayer. Therefore, careful and informed spiritual direction is essential if the Charismatic movement is to make progress in this diocese. Those members who have come to a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit's power need personal guidance in order that they can make progress and not become fixated at a particular stage of their Christian experience. Spiritual guides can help members through peak spiritual experiences and enable them to cope with the inevitable experience of darkness for which charismatic spirituality may leave members unprepared.

In a significant way, group spiritual direction via *Iviyo* can help meet the widespread hunger in rural communities for a safe, challenging, accountable group of spiritual searchers with whom to probe the mystery of God's presence. Then from this prayerful nurturing flows a sense of mission and witness to the community and the larger society.

## 5 COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Spiritual direction is a form of pastoral care that offers hurting people the opportunity to focus on religious needs and themes in the context of an experiential relationship with God. Spiritual direction is not about self-development or self-cultivation but about building Christian community, a community in which equality and sharing are symbolised by the Eucharistic celebration, which is the practice of the holy in the common life of the Christian. Michael Downey voices the concern that a psychologised spirituality appears "to have eclipsed the salvific as the governing category in spirituality" (Downey 1997:106). Such spirituality gives rise to "self-absorption, self-preoccupation, even when the focus is on the self aimed at improving relationships with others. The criticism that much contemporary spirituality is mute on issues of social justice ... is not without warrant" (Downey 1997:8). Since individualism has "crept into both public and private life" the only hope for Christian spirituality is that of nurturing communities of alternatives and of resistance. If this is so, according to Kenneth Leech in his chapter "Let the oppressed go free: spiritual direction and the pursuit of justice," spiritual direction

will assume a social importance beyond anything that its practitioners have hitherto considered (Leech 2000:133). Only as persons-in-relationships, recognising that life is both ultimately and immediately relational, can they give hope to an alienated society. To listen to the hurts of others, to place a premium on the uniqueness of each person, to see their identity in the heart of Christ and not simply in their own grasping hands – these are some of the radically contrasted ways in which believers can stand against the world.

For our wounded South African context, spiritual direction is particularly helpful in bringing about spiritual healing and social transformation. According to Gregory Lourens (1992:135), in South Africa, apartheid structures have affected everyone. Not only are we confronting the consequences of the evil structures within our social and political lives, with crime, poverty and moral degeneration, but worse, these structures have been internalised and still influence how we value and identify ourselves. For us South Africans, the process of self-discovery in terms of recognition, acknowledgement and respect for ourselves is absolutely indispensable. Group spiritual direction is an important discipline that can address these internalised sufferings caused by apartheid and can help a person find his or her true identity in God. In spite of this, Bidwell suggests that the literature on spiritual direction fails to address elements of identity and experience vested “among” participants through social discourse but rather focuses on experience located “inside” individuals (Bidwell 2004:61). As a result, the ministry of spiritual direction today remains rooted in the classical and therapeutic traditions of pastoral care, with limited attention to the developing communal-contextual paradigm (Patton 1993). What is needed is an approach to spiritual direction that is more holistic, that integrates spiritual and moral constructs with the psychological, and that emphasises all aspects of transformation, including social transformation. Bidwell suggests that spiritual direction informed by social constructionist<sup>3</sup> psychology helps to identify both the points at, and ways in which, God is at work in the directee’s life and the limits of human knowledge about God’s presence and activity (Bidwell 2004:61). The knowledge of self and world emerges as people construct, share and correlate expe-

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<sup>3</sup> Social constructionism proposes that human identity, agency, belief and values are negotiated socially through conversation and other types of communication (Gergen 1999).

riences through participation in discourse. The “locus of knowledge is not in the minds of single individuals, but in the collectivity” (Gergen 1999:61).

In group spiritual direction, people can situate themselves within their own given reality. Each directee comes from a unique background that is influenced by their family, education, and the community within which they grew up. God speaks powerfully through Scripture, but God can speak just as powerfully through the directee’s given reality (Lourens 1992:136). The group can give witness to that reality of “holy looking” as well as “holy listening.” In so doing, they teach directees to respect their own experience and try to find God and what God is saying in it all. When this is shared in a group context, directees create social and value worlds through interpretation, interdependence and attending to what God is saying within the group. Discernment of future action in response to God’s presence would remain a primary goal. For example, directees may need to look at the impact of their prayer when experiencing a social sense of desolation or helplessness, as experienced in the recent attacks of xenophobia in the country. Group direction provides an opportunity to listen in prayer together for how the group may be called to the social arena, in terms of the call to prayer and a call to action. Thus, the ways in which God has been realised becomes a relational resource that may provide foundation and impetus for future action in the spiritual direction relationship and in the relationships between self, others and God. In this way the directee begins to experience God as relevant and alive in this new society.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This article began with the idea that cross-cultural spiritual direction in practice is a challenge. It has introduced the concept of group spiritual direction as the new paradigm of spiritual direction for communal cultures by using the structure of the Iviyo movement for rural Anglicans. This new paradigm not only makes formal spiritual direction more accessible to the majority in this country, but also allows for spiritual direction to take place the African way. It allows for a space to explore the internalised sufferings of apartheid and helpful in bringing about spiritual healing and social transformation. Considering the holistic worldview of Africans and the need to incorporate

the spiritual dimensions in everyday life, spiritual direction in a group context is likely to become more common.

It is proper to ask whether we are forcing a contemporary Western model of spiritual direction onto a situation that is not ready for it. Yet Africans are dynamically spiritually aware. What is needed is deeper conceptualisation for spiritual direction for African cultures, as African cultures are quickly evolving from a traditional society into a modern one that is much more complex and offers many more options. In future spiritual directors will be called upon to listen not only to the person and group but also the culture that serves as a medium through which one perceives, experiences, lives and expresses the very reality of one's faith. The social context of spiritual direction is important in spiritual direction because knowledge of other social contexts can enrich our own. We need to learn from the apophatic tradition<sup>4</sup> in such areas as bodily discipline (as seen in the practice of yoga in the Indian tradition or vibrant energetic worship of the Africans), intuitive insights and practical wisdom. The most profound questions are answered not by logical analysis but by an aphorism, with bodily movements, physical demonstrations and acted parables which are largely lost in the rationalistic approach of the West.

Group spiritual direction rightly appropriated can serve to develop a deeper personal spiritual life and communal identities. Where such practice is widespread, it can also provide impetus for the corporate renewal of religious institutions, helping them to be more discerning instruments of service for their own members, as well as for society at large.

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<sup>4</sup> The apophatism represents a tradition stressing nonrational and intuitive insights into truth. By focusing on what God is not, one is led beyond positive and rational affirmations into the very mystery of God's being.



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