

Susan S. Phillips, *Candelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2008), 253 pp.

Susan Phillips offers a much-needed and gracefully-written glimpse inside the spiritual direction room. Concerned to provide narrative description of the actual work of spiritual direction, she combines theoretical discussions with extensive case material of nine directees. We see spiritual direction taking place before our eyes, complete with dialogue between the directee and director and the inner dialogue of the director with herself. Phillips is not concerned only to show “good” spiritual direction that illustrates the ideal practice, she also reveals her anxieties, struggles, and learnings as a director. The resulting portraits of Grant, Leah, David, Melissa, Charles, Jim, Carl, John, and Ruth, and indeed Phillips herself, ring extraordinarily true to life.

Phillips teaches subtly, inserting important lessons seamlessly into the case she is narrating. Theory, then, is always in context. She does not content herself with illustrating the beginnings of the spiritual direction relationship, but each of the three sections goes deeper into the spiritual direction relationship. The entire second section, for example, is devoted to the “middle time” of direction, when little may seem to happen, crises erupt, life-changes occur, and suffering and deepening love alike etch themselves into directees’ lives.

Those who teach the art of spiritual direction seldom have nuanced case material for teaching, and Phillips has not only supplied good case material—I especially appreciate her ability to reflect back to people, for example—but also shows how the cases develop over time. It is easy to show a beginning moment in spiritual direction, but much harder to show a later or ending moment; this book shows each. That alone is a great contribution to the teaching of spiritual direction.

Phillips’ transparency about what is going on in herself as director is also rare in the literature. And, since the inner movements, thoughts, decisions of the director are what make a really artful director, one who is not just a technician, illuminating that level of process is also invaluable. If I had a “I wish you had done,” it would be that Phillips would have included a session/person where she really felt, or her directee actually told her, that she had really not helped. The “mistakes” of a clearly masterful director can help novice directors become more trusting that God can work despite their blunders if they are transparent about their errors and learn from them.

The author writes as a Christian. Always clear and nuanced about her theological foundation and faithful to her commitment that spiritual direction must be rooted in its faith context, she does not attempt to be all things to all people. Yet persons in other traditions can learn much about how to ground their practice of spiritual guidance within their own traditions.

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