

## Psychological Perspectives and Spiritual Direction

George is a married man in his late forties who has been coming to you for spiritual direction for about three months. He begins to tell you in a very reserved, anxious, and indirect way about incidents of physical and sexual abuse by a relative during his childhood. He tells you that he explored those experiences in some depth in therapy several years ago, but that he feels the healing remains incomplete. Perhaps if he could bring all this somehow before God something more could happen. At the end of the session you assure him of your support and encourage him, if he feels able, to bring his experiences to prayer. In the next sessions after talking of other matters for a while, he shares another piece of the story. He also relates two disturbing dreams that seem somehow related to the incidents of abuse. When you gently inquire whether he was able to bring the experience and his feelings to prayer, George replies, "I can't seem to do that. But somehow telling it to you in spiritual direction feels like telling it to God." In the next session George again begins by talking about other areas of his life, then tells a bit more of the story. He also mentions experiencing headaches and sleeplessness that seem related to the memories. A similar pattern continues over the next eight months. More and more of the story as well as the feelings and spiritual symptoms associated with it emerge. Then one day George appears for spiritual direction smiling broadly. He tells you, "One day last week I suddenly realized that there was a part of my soul that was never touched by the abuse. I finally feel free."

*What thoughts and questions stir in you as you reflect on this story? How might you respond if you were George's director?*