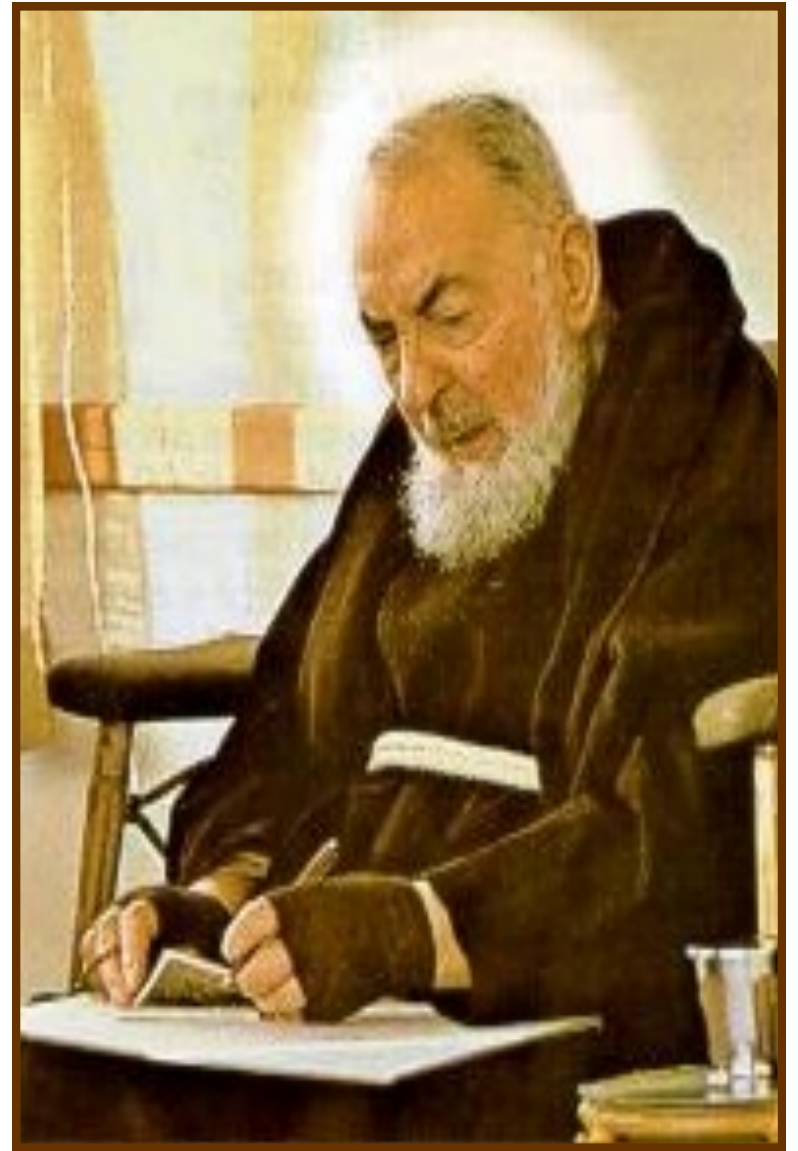


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## **Padre Pio: DIRECTION IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**



# Padre Pio: Direction in the Spiritual Life



The question regarding the spiritual direction of Padre Pio's teachings and the depth of its vastness is too large to explore in this pamphlet. Instead we will concentrate exclusively in regards to Padre Pio's correspondence with Raffaolina Cerase, Padre Pio's first spiritual child. The basis for this study is an investigation carried out by Padre Gerardo Di Flumeri and summarized in a paper on pages 267 – 305 known as *the Acts of the First Congress of Padre Pio's Spirituality* and reported on 1- 6 May 1972 at San Giovanni Rotondo. A summary of the spiritual direction taken with Raffaolina Cerase is outlined in Letters II pages 51-59.

The reason to choose this approach is because there are 56 letters written by Padre Pio to Raffaolina, and, it provides us with a good insight into the spirituality of the Saint and the means he used to transform Raffaolina with all her doubts and anxieties in her spiritual search for God and her final victory of attaining a heavenly reward.

While what is outlined in this summary relates directly only to the spiritual direction Padre Pio used with Raffaolina Cerase, nevertheless, the basic principles outlined are an important guide for us when searching for a spiritual director. We should use this outline to understand what we should and can expect from a spiritual director, but also, what the spiritual director should expect from us as we strive towards spiritual perfection. Both sides must do their part in order to attain the final goal which is eternal salvation.

## I. Necessity

In the first place we must mention that Padre Pio held spiritual direction in great esteem. He saw the need for it from two points of view: from the point of view of the person to be directed, he was convinced that the further this person advanced on the path to perfection, the greater became his need of the director's help; from the director's point of view – and here Padre Pio's doctrine is rich and original – he felt that spiritual direction was a requirement of that apostolic spirit which should animate every priest. He made it clear that to him spiritual direction was a fruit of his supernatural charity.

## II. Elements

When we analyze the 56 letters written by Padre Pio to Raffaolina, without claiming to treat the matter exhaustively, we can reduce the constituent elements of his direction to the following:

The present collection of letters between Padre Pio and his spiritual child Raffaolina Cerase is a source of primary importance for the progress of the theology of perfection considered from the ascetical and mystical viewpoint. In the light of what has been related and confirmed by experience, we see how divine grace accomplishes its transforming work through the enlightened action of spiritual directors, who represent the teaching authority of the Church, and the active and laborious cooperation of those generously committed to the acquisition of perfection, each according to his own state, in response to the universal vocation to holiness.

Spiritual teachers will discover new and practical elements which will confirm or rectify a number of principles in the science of perfection. They will find a model to be imitated in carrying out with a sense of responsibility the delicate mission of guiding souls along the not always easy paths to holiness.

For their own part, those who are receiving direction will learn how to act at the decisive moments of their spiritual ascent, so that they may not oppose the Holy Spirit but collaborate effectively with the visible representatives of this same Spirit, who is and always will be the true and principal author of all genuine spiritual direction.

Finally for those interested in the life of Padre Pio they will find in his letters a valuable addition to his spiritual heritage. In his letters to Raffaolina Cerase, there is contained many autobiographical notes, personal experiences, trials he endured and overcame, etc. Everything is described or suggested by him without either emphasis or secondary motives, spontaneously, with no other purpose than to pour out in the presence of God his state of mind. We are allowed to see the man who thirsts for God, tormented by the desire to lose himself in Him alone. The phases of his spirituality already highlighted in his correspondence with his spiritual directors during the years 1913 to 1915 are further illustrated and confirmed through his correspondence with his spiritual child Raffaolina Cerase.

It is hoped that this brief and simple outline of Padre Pio's approach of spiritual direction will be a stimulus for anyone seeking spiritual perfection.

*Elements in the efficacy of this spiritual direction.* – Dwelling briefly on these constituent elements which can be gleaned from Padre Pio's correspondence, three appear noteworthy of mentioning:

1. *Sound doctrinal preparation.* It was primarily a matter of theological preparation firmly rooted in traditional doctrine, of an uncommon familiarity with the Bible, embodied especially in the teaching of his beloved apostle Paul, and of a genuine knowledge and experience of the ascetic mystical life.

2. *A supernatural threat of holiness.* This emerges from all his letters and the soul he directed felt drawn towards the same ideal. In this brief summary it is not possible to quote even a few of the more beautiful pages which speak to us of the supernatural world and its requirements, written by the director Padre Pio and also by the soul he was directing Raffaolina Cerase. A list of a few of the more meaningful themes are: the desire to die, yearning for peace, love and suffering, the Eucharist, Our Lady, the Guardian Angel, and the mystery of the Cross. We must now consider the mystical experience of the director, which did not escape the attention of Raffaolina who found new evidence of it continually and was constantly stimulated by it.

3. *Special enlightenment.* Padre Pio was aware that he was passing on exhortations, advice, norms and doctrine which in most cases were not drawn from human effort but from divine impulses, from heavenly light, from revelations of the Lord. This is one of the more characteristic traits of his counseling and was perhaps the factor which more than any other accounted for the effectiveness of his actions. This awareness gave him authority and made him speak with the certainty of a professor.

## V. Conclusion

From what has been said so far it is hoped that the reader of this pamphlet will grasp a glimpse of the variety of orientations and suggestions, the wealth of doctrine and experience that are contained in the letters which passed between Padre Pio and the aristocratic lady, Raffaolina Cerase and constitutes the basis of Padre Pio's spiritual direction of a soul.

It is our hope that the reader of this pamphlet will undertake a systematic treatment of at least some of the subjects that may affect one's life, in the light of Padre Pio's teaching over so many years in the delicate and demanding field of spiritual direction, and that you would deal with these matters in relation to the problems which arise today in the study of the theology of perfection with one's spiritual director.

This is a fascinating and inspiring subject, of undoubted value for the science of the spiritual life and the apostolate of spiritual direction. However, as noted earlier, it is outside the range of what we are trying to accomplish with this pamphlet. This pamphlet is merely attempting to compile as a presentation the text of Padre Pio's letters to Raffaolina Cerase rather than an assessment of its content.

*A relationship of supernatural affection.* It has been said that a person finds it difficult to open up his heart completely to his director if the latter has not won his esteem, trust and affection. Padre Pio had the gift of knowing how to gain esteem and complete trust on the part of the one he directed. It is to be observed, however, that there was nothing natural in this relationship, that it had an eminently and exclusively supernatural character. Padre Pio pointed this out repeatedly to his disciple.

*Participation in the affairs of his disciple.* This supernatural character did not deprive Padre Pio's spiritual direction of that cordial affection which, on the human plane, gave greater credibility to his counseling. In point of fact, Padre Pio participated keenly and heartily in all Raffaolina's spiritual and temporal affairs, whether joyful or sad. In this connection we have some fine pages which show clearly the human character, the fatherly heart and effective charity of the director.

*The action of the Holy Spirit.* To draw attention to the action of the Holy Spirit who is invariably the only true teacher and counselor of souls, to point out the progress of grace which works gently and silently in the hearts of the faithful, is a task which calls for insight, discernment and holiness. Padre Pio did not neglect to the slightest degree this important element in the soul's progress towards perfection.

In that particular period of purgation of the senses during which the soul he was directing seemed to herself to be lost in the depths of night, in pitch darkness, the director made her understand the action of the Holy Spirit, the secret workings of grace and explained to her the ultimate purpose of that action on the part of the divine Bridegroom.

*Disclosure of Satan's snares.* Satan does not remain inactive. With his usual cunning he seeks every chance to render the action of grace ineffective, to throw the soul into a state of bewilderment and create confusion in the mind.

Discouraged by the inevitable difficulties encountered on the path towards perfection, Raffaolina felt sorry for herself, seeing nothing but pride in failures in her own life. On the other hand, flooded as she was with divine grace, she was invariably afraid of corresponding inadequately with all the grace she received. Padre Pio always intervened at the right moment and set everything in order so that the soul might proceed on its spiritual journey.

*A frank and sincere character.* We mention just one episode among many which can be found in the correspondence with Padre Pio. Obligated to leave the family home to her brother, although it had been bequeathed to her, Raffaolina had been living for seven years in a rented house. However, she was looking out for a suitable place in which to live with her sister Giovina.

She made known her intention to her director and asked him to implore Jesus to reveal His will. Padre Pio, mindful only of the supreme spiritual good of his disciple, explained his point of view clearly, sincerely and frankly, but the disciple did not succeed in keeping calm on this occasion and complained of the turn the affair had taken.

Her director's reply came immediately: "I can not spare you this time from a gentle brotherly reproof... May God forgive you, but this time you have made a big mistake. Take care in the future not to fall into similar exaggerations" (21– 6–1914).

### III. Pedagogical Method

On this subject we will confine ourselves to pointing out a few essential lines which illustrate the spiritual pedagogics developed by Padre Pio in his letters to Raffaolina.

*Psychological insight.* Padre Pio knew how to adapt himself to the personal satisfaction of the soul under his guidance. He presented Christian perfection in a positive rather than a negative light and stimulated Raffaolina's self-love in such a way as to induce her to commit herself completely on the path to perfection.

*Theological structure.* Two particular aspects are highlighted in this regard. The first refers to development of the theological virtues. In this respect Padre Pio did not insist so much on principles to show that God was the center of his spiritual direction; instead, he made every effort to develop grace in the soul under his guidance, to develop the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in order to steer her invariably towards these supernatural forces.

The second aspect refers to the fact that under Padre Pio's guidance the development of the theological virtues took place in an atmosphere of Franciscan spirituality which found expression in certain moral virtues typical of every follower of the Poverello (the Poor One) of Assisi. He strongly recommended the practice of these virtues.

*Concreteness.* His spiritual direction, well structured from the theological point of view and by his providential psychological insight, did not follow a merely abstract program and a set of principles, but consisted in a concrete plan and practical application of those principles.

This practical sense induced Padre Pio primarily to show this soul the various steps to be taken on the way to perfection, giving her to understand that she would advance on this road little by little, gradually and laboriously according to God's plan. In the second place, in order to make sure of that journey, Padre Pio fostered in his disciple an intense spiritual life by suggesting and advising the use of ascetical practices which were undoubtedly traditional, but which beneath his pen and on his lips acquire quite a distinctive quality.

*Toward the summit.* In his letters to Raffaolina Padre Pio presented Christian perfection as the noblest achievement that could be desired or fulfilled and consequently he demanded heroism from the soul under his guidance. Convinced that his disciple was called to the highest degree of perfection, he not only told Raffaolina quite clearly, but proposed to prepare her and accompany her continually until she reached the supreme goal of a loving union with God. He was fully aware that he had been entrusted by God with the task of presenting her to the divine Bridegroom as a virgin chaste in mind and body.

*His style.* When we reflect on the teachings contained in his correspondence with Raffaolina, we believe we may say that in his pedagogical method of guidance Padre Pio adopted a dignified, considerate and courteous manner, whether he advised or commanded, whether he reproved or encouraged, complained or rejoiced. This attitude induced him to respect the freedom of others even while making known his own divergent and contrary opinion. It also affected his literary style which was dignified and considerate in its mode of expression.

### IV. Effectiveness

At this point we must examine concretely the practical results of such spiritual guidance and the reasons for its undeniable effectiveness.

*Two reference points.* The effectiveness of Padre Pio's spiritual direction can undoubtedly be seen at one and the same time in its immediate effect, which was to console and restore peace and tranquility to this soul, and in its ultimate effect which was to attain the goal of her vocation to holiness.

As regards peace and tranquility of soul, it must be remembered that Raffaolina was passing through an acute spiritual crisis, that she was filled with uncertainty, doubts and anxieties. Matters were further complicated by a whole series of circumstances (their illness of her sister Giovina, disagreement with her brother, suicide of her niece's husband, etc.) which took her breath away, interfered with her peace of soul and made matters worse from day to day. Padre Pio was the great craftsman who brought peace to this troubled and afflicted soul. Almost every letter of his contains repeated invitations to be consoled, to be calm and tranquil, invitations and exhortation's which took effect, as Raffaolina herself, never disappointed in her expectations, recognized with a grateful heart.

From the point of view of its ultimate effect, which was to reach the goal of Christian perfection, this guidance was no less effective. Although we are unable to say just how high this privileged soul climbed on the mystical ladder, we can be certain that under Padre Pio's enlightened guidance she passed through the trial of sense purgation and through the still more painful trial of spiritual purgation.