

- **James M. Houston: Pioneering Spiritual Director To Evangelicals**
- ***James M Houston: pionnier de la direction spirituelle parmi les Évangéliques***
- ***James M Houston, ein Pionier als geistlicher Ratgeber und Seelsorger für Evangelikale***

Arthur D. Thomas, Washington DC.

RÉSUMÉ

James Houston, professeur de Théologie spirituelle au Regent College de Vancouver au Canada, est peut-être le premier théologien évangélique contemporain qui engage les protestants à retrouver la pratique de la direction spirituelle. Il en enseigne les principes et la propose aux étudiants intéressés. Il a rédigé une trilogie: l'Amitié qui transforme (1989), la Recherche du Bonheur (1991) et le Désir du Cœur (1992).

Il voit dans la direction spirituelle 'une aide apportée par un chrétien à un autre chrétien pour l'aider à mieux trouver son identité en Christ' et un moyen 'd'approfondir la relation avec Dieu d'une manière intimement personnelle et pratique'. Le but, c'est 'd'écarter les obstacles, les distractions, les distorsions et d'une manière générale tout ce qui entrave l'action de l'Évangile dans l'âme', de 'favoriser la vie de prière dans un climat de relation fervente' et de faire de nous 'des meilleurs adorateurs de Dieu ayant pour lui un amour passionné'.

Houston a été maître de conférence à l'École de géographie d'Oxford en 1947, et plus tard membre du Collège Hertford à Oxford de 1954 à 1970. C'est alors qu'il s'est lancé dans la direction spirituelle. Il consacrait quinze à vingt heures par semaine à des entretiens personnels avec ses étudiants et donnait une conférence publique hebdomadaire. Houston s'est alors rendu compte qu'au cours de ces entretiens, les étudiants lui confiaient leurs problèmes personnels. Lorsque cela se produisait, il leur proposait de revenir pour parler de leurs travaux. A ceux qui lui

We are grateful to the editors of *Crux*, the journal of Regent College, Vancouver, for permission to print the following article in EuroJTh.

confiaient leurs problèmes émotionnels, Houston disait qu'il ne se contentait pas de leur apporter une aide psychologique mais leur donnait un éclairage chrétien sur leurs difficultés. 'Géographe de l'âme' et de son écologie, Houston a aidé les étudiants dans le cadre des G.B.U.

De 1946 à 1954, Houston partageait le logement de Nicolas Zernov, professeur de culture Orientale orthodoxe. Les deux amis recevaient à leur domicile un groupe d'érudits et d'intellectuels chrétiens qui ont traité divers sujets d'ordre religieux, entre autres, C.S. Lewis, Hugo Dyson, Basil Mitchell et Etta Gullick. Parmi ce groupe, c'est C.S. Lewis qui a eu le plus d'impact sur la direction de la vie de Houston. Houston savait que Lewis avait bénéficié de la direction spirituelle de Penelope Lawson. Lewis et Houston savaient tous deux cultiver l'amitié. Ils ont apporté des conseils spirituels dans leur correspondance. Ils étaient tous deux disposés à s'intéresser à autre chose qu'à leur discipline académique et ont ainsi été des théologiens amateurs. En 1976, Houston a fondé l'Institut C.S. Lewis à Washington pour promouvoir les vues de Lewis dans la capitale américaine.

Houston quitta Oxford pour fonder le Regent College à Vancouver, dont il fut le directeur. Il y devint aussi professeur de théologie spirituelle en 1978. Pour faire connaître les 'saints' aux Évangéliques, il lança une collection intitulée Classiques de la foi et de la piété. Pour ce faire,

il a fait appel à un grand nombre de représentants bien connus du mouvement évangélique pour présenter des textes de Charles Simeon, John Owen, Blaise Pascal ou William Wilberforce, par exemple. Dans ces cours, il a puisé aux sources de la spiritualité orthodoxe, catholique et protestante.

Le cours intitulé 'Principes et pratique de la direction spirituelle', que Houston a entrepris d'enseigner, a été le premier du genre dans les écoles bibliques et facultés de théologie évangéliques en Amérique du nord. Dans l'Amitié qui transforme, il prend la sainte Trinité comme modèle relationnel. Houston

s'appuie sur le caractère relationnel de Dieu pour lutter contre l'absence de vie de prière dans notre monde actuel. Cette absence est le résultat, non pas d'un manque de discipline ou de techniques, mais d'un manque de relations personnelles profondes. Si l'on trouve difficile de construire des amitiés durables avec ceux qui nous entourent, on trouvera difficile de s'adresser à Dieu de façon intime. La redécouverte de la relation d'amour qu'entretiennent le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit l'un avec l'autre contenait pour Houston la promesse que les chrétiens puissent retrouver le chemin du jardin de l'amour de Dieu afin d'y demeurer.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

James Houston, Professor für geistliche Theologie (Spiritual Theology) am Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Kanada, ist vielleicht der erste Evangelikale in der jüngsten Vergangenheit, der die Protestanten dazu auffordert, die verlorengegangene Praxis der geistlichen Führung durch die Unterrichtung ihrer Prinzipien wiederzugewinnen und interessierten Studenten zur Verfügung zu stellen. Alle seine jüngeren Arbeiten unterstützen jene, die mit geistlicher Freundschaft und der Führung von Seelen befaßt sind. Dazu gehört seine Trilogie 'The Transforming Friendship' (1989), 'In Search of Happiness' (1991) und 'The Heart's Desire' (1992). 'The Transforming Friendship' ist ins Deutsche, Schwedische, Portugiesische und in Mandarin übersetzt worden.

Houston definiert geistliche Leitung auf zwei Weisen: 'Es ist die Hilfe, die von einem Christen einem anderen gegeben wird, um diesem Menschen zu helfen, in Christus individualisierter zu werden,' und es ist eine Anleitung, die eine 'Vertiefung der Beziehung zu Gott auf intimste persönliche und praktische Weise fördert'. Er sieht die Ziele geistlicher Führung darin, 'Hindernisse aus dem Weg zu räumen, Ablenkungen und Verdrehungen aller Dinge, die das Werk des Evangeliums in der Seele behindern', 'das Gebetsleben im Zusammenhang gebetsintensiver Beziehungen

zu fördern' und 'ein anbetungsvolleres Geschöpf zu werden, und das heißt: in Gott verliebt zu sein.'

Houston wurde 1947 Universitätsdozent an der 'School of Geography' der Universität Oxford, später Angehöriger des Lehrkörpers am Hertford College. Von 1964 bis 1970 versuchte sich Houston dort als Tutor erstmals an geistlicher Leitung. Er veranstaltete fünfzehn bis zwanzig Wochenstunden privater Tutorien für seine Geographiestudenten, dazu eine öffentliche Vorlesung pro Woche. Houston stellte fest, daß die Studenten begannen, während dieser privaten Sitzungen ihm ihre persönlichen Probleme anzuvertrauen. Wenn das geschah, schlug Houston vor, daß diese Studenten ihre eigentlichen Arbeiten in einer späteren Stunde mit ihm diskutieren sollten. Denen, die zu ihm mit ihren persönlichen Problemen kamen, gestand er, daß er er ihnen etwas mehr gab als Psychologie; er versorgte sie mit christlichen Einsichten in ihre Schwierigkeiten. Als ein 'Geograph der Seele' und ihrer Ökologie gab Houston Studenten Ratschläge, während er mit der Intervarsity Fellowship zusammenarbeitete.

Houston lebte von 1946 bis 1953 in einer Oxforder Wohnung mit Nicholas Zernov, einem Dozenten in osteuropäischer Kultur. Ein Kreis Oxforder Wissenschaftler und christlicher Intellektueller traf sich in jenen Jahren in dieser Wohnung, um Essays über verschiedene religiöse Themen vorzustellen. Unter den Mitgliedern waren C.S. Lewis, Hugo Dyson,

Basil Mitchell und Etta Gullick; unter ihnen hatte keiner einen so großen Einfluß auf Houstons künftigen Werdegang wie C.S. Lewis. Houston wußte davon, wie Lewis begann, geistlichen Rat für sich selbst bei Schwester Penelope Lawson zu suchen. Lewis und Houston besaßen eine bemerkenswerte Gabe für Freundschaft. Sie gaben geistlichen Rat in Briefen. Und beide waren bereit, sich als Laientheologen außerhalb ihrer akademischen Disziplinen zu bewegen. 1976 gründete Houston in Washington, DC das C.S. Lewis Institut, um die Sicht von Lewis in der amerikanischen Hauptstadt lebendig zu halten.

Houston verließ Oxford, um 1978 Gründungs-Prinzipal des Regent College und später dort Professor für Geistliche Theologie zu werden. Um die Vernachlässigung der Heiligen durch die Evangelikalen zu korrigieren, gab er eine Serie unter dem Titel "Classics of Faith and Devotion" heraus. Er gewann eine beeindruckende Zahl evangelikaler Führer, die Einleitungen schrieben, mit denen sie die Klassiker für heutige Leser empfahlen. Darunter waren z.B. Einleitungen von John Stott über Charles Simeon, von J.I. Packer über John Owen, von Os Guinness über Blaise Pascal, von Senator Mark Hatfield über William Wilferforce. Seine Vorlesungen und Seminare hoben Lektüren aus der Geschichte der orthodoxen,

katholischen und protestantischen Spiritualität hervor.

Houston begann ein Seminar mit dem Titel 'Prinzipien und Praxis geistlicher Führung'. Der Beginn des Kurses war der erste dieser Art an nordamerikanischen Colleges oder Seminaren, da nirgendwo sonst, soweit bekannt ist, in den späten siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren Anleitung in geistlicher Führung vermittelt wurde. In 'The Transforming of Friendship' gründete er seinen Zugang zur geistlichen Führung auf die Trinität als Modell für Beziehung. Indem er die soziale Analogie der Trinität betonte, demonstrierte Houston den beziehungsbezogenen Charakter Gottes. Houston hob die Trinität hervor als einen Weg aus der zeitgenössischen Gebetslosigkeit. Gebetslosigkeit war nicht zuerst die Folge eines Mangels an Disziplin oder an Technik, sondern eines Mangels an tiefgehenden Beziehungen: Wenn Menschen es schwer fanden, mit anderen in ihrer Umgebung bleibende Freundschaften zu gestalten, dann fanden sie es auch schwer, zu Gott mit irgendeiner Form der Intimität zu beten. Die Rückgewinnung der beziehungsbetonten Liebe, die der Vater, der Sohn und der Heilige Geist füreinander haben, beinhaltet jedoch für Houston das Versprechen, daß Christen im Garten der Liebe Gottes verweilen können.

More and more evangelicals living at the end of the twentieth century are becoming interested in what Roman Catholics refer to as spiritual direction, but many have forgotten that Protestants have a history of this as well. James Mackintosh Houston, Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, has urged Protestants to recover this lost practice of spiritual guidance by teaching its principles and providing it for interested students. Although Catholic spiritual directors such as Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales, and Teresa of Avila have often received greater attention, Houston has also pointed evangelicals to Protestant 'directors of the soul'—Martin Luther, John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards. During the past two

decades interest in spiritual direction has grown particularly since the publication of important works on this subject by Protestants such as Kenneth Leech, Martin Thornton, Tilden Edwards, and Gerald May.¹

One of the first evangelicals in recent years to advocate the necessity of spiritual direction has been Houston. All of his recent works assist those involved in spiritual friendship and guidance even if they are not specifically manuals on the principles and practice of this discipline in a formal sense. These include his trilogy—*The Transforming Friendship* (1989), *In Search of Happiness* (1991), and *The Heart's Desire* (1992).² Many insights in these works are derived from Houston's spiritual direction of hundreds of

Regent students from its founding in 1970 until the present. *The Transforming Friendship* has been translated into German, Swedish, Portuguese, and Mandarin Chinese. Hundreds of students from Europe, the British Commonwealth nations, and the United States have been attracted to Regent, a theological graduate school, for an opportunity to study under scholars such as James Houston, J. I. Packer, Klaus Bockmuehl, and Michael Green. Houston's approach has developed as a result of reading the new literature in the field, studying the spiritual classics, and maturing in his own spiritual journey. Two to three days a week, he provides spiritual guidance to students with appointments beginning at eight-thirty in the morning and running almost continually until to five o'clock in the evening. This study sketches his development as a spiritual director through the stages of his life and analyzes the important model he has provided for evangelicals in this forgotten discipline. It will analyze his important role as a professor of spiritual theology.

For many years evangelicals lagged behind Catholics and Anglicans in giving spiritual direction to their parishioners because they felt more secure discipling new converts than guiding mature Christians in the interior life. Parachurch groups, such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, and the Navigators have excelled in their programmes of discipleship training of new converts. Evangelicals have not usually seen spiritual guides for weekly or monthly assistance with their lives. They have stressed private prayer and Scripture reading, or they have emphasized nurture through study groups or prayer circles. They have visited pastors more for help with spiritual and emotional crises than for ongoing guidance on spiritual growth.

To provide a rediscovery of earlier models for the care of souls, Regent College led the way among Evangelicals when it appointed Houston as professor of Spiritual Theology in 1978. He began teaching classes on the Christian Spirit, Spiritual Direction, Ministry and Spirituality, Christian Character, the Cistercians and Puritans, and the History of Prayer. Later a group raised money to endow

the James M. Houston Chair of Spiritual Theology in 1991 in order to insure that this emphasis of Houston's would never be lost in the Regent curriculum once he was gone. Eugene Peterson began to occupy this endowed chair bearing Houston's name as of January 1993. As founding principal of Regent, Houston has been granted further continuance of the Board of Governors' chair in Spiritual Theology, contingent upon his health. At the occasion of Houston's seventieth birthday in November 1992, a *Festschrift* volume was presented by the editors J. I. Packer and Loren Wilkinson, which they entitled *Alive to God*. In it, John Stott expressed his gratitude on behalf of other evangelicals around the world by underscoring Houston's 'summons to us to develop an appropriate spirituality at the end of the twentieth century, in protest against its secularizing tendencies' and 'the risk he has been willing to take in inviting us to explore the spirituality of Christian traditions other than our own'.³ This present paper on spiritual direction has been prepared as part of the celebration of Houston's seventieth-birthday.

Beside his instruction on the various traditions of spirituality, Houston is probably best known at Regent for his teaching and practice of spiritual direction. He defines spiritual direction in two ways: 'It is the help given by one Christian to another to help that person become more individuated in Christ', and it is guidance that fosters a 'deepening of one's relationship with God in most intimately personal and practical ways'. For him the goals of spiritual direction are 'to remove obstacles, distractions, distortions of anything that hinders the work of the gospel in one's soul', 'to foster the life of prayer in the context of prayerful relationship', and 'to become a more worshipful creature, which is to be in love with God'.⁴

One Regent College student recently described to me how Houston had directed her: 'When I first started talking to him, I was so out of touch with who I was that when he asked how I was doing, I did not know how to respond'. She faced issues derived from her family of origin; and, as a result, found difficulty comprehending God as a loving

Father. In a therapeutic way Houston helped her to work through these concerns. 'He is one of the most intuitive people I have met. It is a gift from God', she remarked. 'If he brought up something unpleasant, I knew he cared for me'. Houston helped her to find 'obstacles' to understanding who she really was so she could relate to God more honestly. As a result, she noted, 'my relationship with God has gotten deeper as my friendships have become more honest'. Her intimacy with God and other Christian friends developed more than ever before in her life. Inner healing came to her from issues she had dealt with for years. She began a more meditative and contemplative posture to life. This is in a nutshell what happens to people who visit James Houston for spiritual counsel.

I. Child of Suffering and his Early Spiritual Mentors, 1922–1947

His parents, James and Ethel May [née Watson] Houston, married late in life. They worked independently of each other as missionaries in Spain until one day in a village near Avila James rescued Ethel from Catholic young people as they threw stones at her in order to force her to leave town. They disliked Ethel and another woman for sharing their Protestant beliefs. Soon after Ethel Watson fell in love with her rescuer and married him.⁵ They began marriage as faith missionaries in Spain without support from any agency. They did not know from whence their funds would come except through prayer and trust in God and thus emulated George Mueller who operated an orphanage in Bristol, England without making his needs known to any but God.

A. Empathy Derived from Childhood Suffering

Houston's mother always told him that he was a 'child of suffering' because of all of the painful complications she had during her pregnancy at age forty-one. She had no gynaecological help living in primitive villages in Spain in preparation for that birth, so her pregnancy was difficult. She returned to Edinburgh in order to have proper medical attention for the birth of

their first child, James Mackintosh Houston, on November 21, 1922. Later two daughters, Ethel and Louise, were born into this family. The family remained in Spain for the first eight years of Houston's life. His mother's health remained poor. Since her gynaecological problems necessitated the attention of qualified physicians, she returned to Scotland with her husband and family. James Houston noted, 'I intuitively looked to Jeremiah as my model as a child. As a teenager I had fourteen or fifteen commentaries on Jeremiah . . . so I suspect that I have always been a tender hearted feeler'. Much of his empathy in spiritual direction years hence came from his own suffering as a boy. For example, once when giving spiritual direction at Regent College, he fainted when he heard the frightening story of how an assailant had narrowly missed plunging a dagger through the heart of his directee. He had entered into the story as deeply as did Jeremiah who often felt God's pain.⁶

His childhood sufferings increased when he returned to Scotland. At age ten, he contracted diphtheria and nearly died. The serum left its effects, and physicians informed him that he had a weak heart. His parents withdrew him from all physical activities and sports. When he developed swollen glands, his father decided against having them cut. Thus, Houston had to be treated by ultra violent lights every afternoon for two years. This wasted his schooling between thirteen and fifteen. He felt very isolated and lived a lonely life with physical illness. He had no friends at school. He was fat. Fellow pupils regarded him as the class dunce because he had missed so much time due to illness. It was difficult at first making the adjustment from a Spanish to an English culture. All of these adversities made him feel very sensitive and identify strongly with Jeremiah, who wrote, 'I sat alone. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?' (Jeremiah 15:17–18).

Despite the trauma from illness, Houston had earlier received an inner strength from God that helped him with life's trials. About eight or nine years old, he underwent a religious conversion in 'a gentle nudging not

dramatic' manner. While at home, he read a story of a boy who gave his heart to serve the Lord. The boy was a cripple. Houston thought that if the boy had done this, then he could do the same. He asked Jesus into his heart 'not so much as a rebel becoming a Christian but as one who was brought up as a Christian deciding to serve the Lord in some kind of mission capacity'. Later Houston was baptized at age twelve and received his first Communion.

B. His Father as a Spiritual Mentor

Houston's father was an early spiritual mentor. He was a lay preacher who had taught himself Greek, Hebrew, German, and Spanish. Intelligent and accomplished in languages, he was able to preach fluently in German and Spanish. Earlier in life he had gone to Argentina to make a fortune until he nearly died of a bout with malaria. He promised God that if he survived he would return to England, obtain a university education, and become a missionary. Upon his return home, he learned that his younger brother was in financial trouble so he gave him his savings to go to Buenos Aires. By this action, he forfeited any hope for preparation for ministry in a college. He went instead to Spain as a faith missionary. Upon return to Edinburgh, he became an itinerant preacher to Brethren congregations in England and Scotland. He would often take along with him his son James who would watch his father stand on a box on street corners to preach the gospel. Houston was deeply awed by the piety of his father who would at times spend all night in prayer, devote several hours to intense prayer on his knees, and assist those anxious about the salvation of their souls. As they grew up, financial provisions for the Houston children were by voluntary contributions to his father's ministry. The Houston family lived frugally. Like his father, Houston respected George Mueller and his life of prayerful dependence on God. Dr. James Houston later served as a trustee of George Mueller's Orphanage Homes from 1961–1970.

Despite this esteem, Houston often felt paralyzed by his father's intensity in prayer as he himself seemed incapable of rising to such heights of religious devotion. As Houston

matured intellectually, his father did not share his son's depth of scholarly interests and often regretted that his son was reading everything except Scripture. Though he benefited greatly from his father's emphasis upon godliness, prayer, and Bible study, this mentorship was not without its pain. J. I. Packer noted: 'his experience, of being a son to a father whom he deeply admired, yet who withheld basic approval, left him with inner wounds and frailties with which he took a long time coming to terms'.⁷ Nevertheless, his father had trained him in a home where prayer was a way of life. He had seen his father give assistance to those concerned for their faith, although his approach differed from that of classical spiritual directors.

Besides his father another hero was David Ross, a schoolmaster who was especially fond of his pupils. Houston admired Ross for his leadership in the Glanton assembly in Edinburgh. Ross encouraged Houston to have faith in his academic abilities and encouraged him in a way that few had previously.

C. Early Spiritual Friendships during His University Days

During World War II, Houston's father promised that when he reached the age of sixteen he could attend a prestigious private school called Edinburgh Royal High School. When the school was evacuated into the country for safety from bombings, his father did not want him to accompany the school. Instead, the elder Houston sent his son to Skerry's Commercial College, which was designed for older, underprivileged people to advance themselves educationally. In one year he completed three years of education and entered the University of Edinburgh at age seventeen. He remained self-conscious later when at Oxford that he had never had a proper 'public school' education.

During his first two years at Edinburgh he took geography, English, history, and psychology, all of which would later influence him as a geographer, historian of spirituality, and a spiritual director. His relational life was very limited because he was working breathlessly to catch up academically. He did join the Inter Varsity Fellowship at the university. In this group he had senior student mentors such as Geoffrey Bromiley, later

professor at Fuller Theological Seminary; Thomas F. Torrance, future theologian at New College, the University of Edinburgh; while his brother James Torrance, afterwards theology professor at the University of Aberdeen, was his colleague. There was no talk of spiritual direction at this time, but Houston began to lose his shyness. He kept up with these Christian companions and then later friends at Oxford, which included J. I. Packer and Donald J. Wiseman. This marked the beginning of the importance he attached to spiritual friendships that would surface with greater intensity later during his time at Regent. He did not go out of his way to look for a spiritual guide, for he stated that practice is 'very much part of the contemporary mood' as seen in the renaissance of spiritual direction since Vatican II. Evangelicals were not thinking about spiritual direction at that time.

He received his M.A. with a First Class Honours degree from Edinburgh in 1944. The next year he was elected a gold medalist of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society out of a competition with others in all four Scottish universities. He served as geographer to the Clyde Valley Regional Planning Advisory Committee in Glasgow and later advisor to the Department of Health for Scotland on County Planning. Then a research fellowship was awarded him to study at Oxford. Commencing at Hertford College in 1945, he completed the B.Sc. in 1947, researched in Spain for his doctorate, and graduated from the University of Oxford in 1949 with the D. Phil. degree. His friend J. I. Packer remembered Houston during his student days—'quick and intuitive, with startling flashes of brilliance; warmhearted and energetic, with a gift of instant friendship and a strong instinct for pastoral care . . . and tireless as a personal evangelist, seeking to win souls'.⁸ These characteristics would later surface when he began his work of spiritual direction.

II. 'Geographer of the Soul' and Oxford Tutor, 1947–1970

He became a university lecturer in the School of Geography at Oxford University in 1947, and lecturer in various Oxford colleges, then fellow of Hertford College, Oxford from

1964 to 1970, and bursar of Hertford from 1967 to 1970. While at Oxford, he published three books: *A Social Geography of Europe* (1953), *Problems of Urbanization* (1968) [edited by Houston and R. P. Beckinsale], and his 793-page magnum opus, *The Western Mediterranean World: An Introduction to its Regional Landscapes* (1964).⁹

A. Lessons Learned from Geography

Later in life, Houston reflected upon how his training in geography had taught him principles of spiritual direction. He now sees himself as a 'geographer of the soul' when thinking about his role as a spiritual guide. Geography is the synthetic study of the earth and its features and of the distribution of life on earth, including human life and the effects of human activity. Thus, it is by nature interdisciplinary. It involves synthesizing more than analyzing. As an historical geographer, Houston, also drew insights from cultural anthropology, climatology, ecology, and cartography. Geographers seek to grasp the inter-connectedness of all the environment. Houston applied this to his counseling of students at Oxford and at Regent by seeing that the whole environment of the person must be understood, not just the immediate problem one would be facing. Before the days of the current family systems theory, Houston sensed that emotional problems of students needed to be understood in terms of their environmental background, that is their family of origin. He saw that 'their personal temptations had a temperamental ecology'. Where there were particular weaknesses, one would have proclivities to certain kinds of temptation. Perhaps students had received little love from their family. If they developed from this background with a low regard of self or if they felt abused, they would have temptations toward jealousy and envy. They would think others were better than they. If they were lonely and had spent time in self-fantasizing, they would be tempted to lust. If people were controlling and ambitious, they would tend to be manipulative. Houston said, 'Temperament and temptation go together'.

B. Tutorials, His First Experience with Spiritual Guidance

Houston had his first attempt of what he would later call spiritual direction while functioning as a tutor at Oxford. He would give fifteen to twenty hours a week of private tutorials for his geography students and one public lecture a week. Attendance at the tutorial was obligatory; the lecture was optional. The whole focus of Oxford instruction was based upon tutorial instruction. Houston found that students began to confide in him their personal problems during these private sessions. In order to render to Caesar and to God the things that were appropriate, he suggested that the students come back during another hour to read and discuss their paper if they had taken up all of the tutorial on life issues. To those who came to him with emotional problems, Houston shared that he was giving them something more than psychology; he provided them with Christian insights into their difficulties. In response to the needs of his students, Houston began to read widely in psychology during the 1950s and 1960s so he could share these perceptions with them. He had to be covert because he was by and large in a secular situation at Oxford. He would only help them if they asked for it. If they were Christians, he could discuss things more openly with them.

Evangelicals are often said to be better at giving out advice than listening. Houston maintains that this is because they are trained to be preachers, but he was prepared as a private tutor to be a listener. Over the years he learned to be attentive to the needs of his students. Houston noted, 'As I think back on it I believe that what gave me that orientation [as a counsellor to students] was the classical *paideia* model at Oxford, though I was not conscious of it at the time'. The classical approach to education reinforced this ancient approach to education. In his lectures on spiritual direction Houston contrasted the modern approach to learning from textbooks or from lectures in a class room with the tutorial method used in ancient Greece in which the teacher acted as a nurturing companion. The modern way emphasizes the acquisition of facts from

books; the ancient way stresses the imitation of a model. In Greece, the whole endeavour of education was to be fit for citizenship and the formation of moral attitudes. In the early church the saint arose from the *paideia* model. Christians learned from examples of sanctity. Education was at the hands of those who would be exemplary. The pupil went to a person of moral character or to a holy community of prayer. Similarly, there was a relational character to learning that the classical tutorial approach of Oxford offered that was not found in so much North American education with its reliance upon lecture hall instruction.¹⁰

Houston came into his counseling thus from the tutorial model 'more innocently than professionally'. He never received formal training in Clinical Pastoral Education or pastoral counselling, but he benefited from his own personal study and practice of counselling over the years. While Houston did not do as much counselling at Oxford as he later offered at Regent, he was encouraged by those who were helped by these sessions. One of these was the son of a missionary. He had become cynical about the faith and had fallen in love with the wrong kind of woman. He despaired if he had any faith at all. Houston met with him for lunch every week for a whole year. Later he was restored to faith and became chairman of a well-known evangelical organization. Houston learned from this experience 'to stick in with an individual despite what seemed to be an impossible situation'.

C. Widening of His Ecclesiastical Horizons

A number of other factors fit into his ongoing development in spiritual direction—his broadening experience of Christian community through Inter-Varsity; his participation in a study group with Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox; his growing admiration of C.S. Lewis; and his marriage and family life.

Inter-Varsity Fellowship

The narrowness of his religious upbringing among the Glanton Brethren was expanded first by his contact with Inter-Varsity Fellowship in Edinburgh, his committee

work with the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, and his service as a Council member of Inter-Varsity Fellowship in London. In these organizations he continued to develop friendships and to encourage students in whatever way he could. He took another step in this direction when he left the Glanton Brethren to assist in church planting with Oxford 'Open' Brethren, who were less exclusive than the Glanton group in which he had been raised. His association with these movements indicated not only his strong commitment to Evangelicalism but also his ability to see beyond denominational distinctions to wider biblical essentials. He saw that he need not be confined to a narrow denominational vision. From this time he became, as J. I. Packer noted 'the most ecumenical of evangelicals'.¹¹

Dialogue with Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican Thinkers

His ecumenism stretched forth to include Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican writers when Houston shared an apartment between 1946 and 1953 with Nicolas Zernov, the Spalding lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Culture at Oxford University. Zernov was born in Moscow in 1898. After completion of his theological studies at Belgrade University, he later moved to England to become secretary of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (1932–49), an organization designed to promote dialogue between the Anglican and Orthodox communions. He also taught Russian history at Keble College.

Zernov brought to the apartment all kinds of interesting people—Eastern Orthodox monks from Mount Athos, white Russians from Paris, and leaders like Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, author of the two devotional classics, *Living Prayer* and *Beginning to Pray*.¹² Bloom was a Russian Orthodox bishop and chaplain to the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. This was a foreign world to one brought up in the Glanton Brethren. Houston remembered the spirituality of Zernov, 'I have never seen any one so devout in his morning devotions. He taught me to relate more openly with non-Christians and to relate openly with Christians from as

different traditions as Eastern Orthodox'. Despite his admiration, he was threatened by Zernov's devotional life. Houston did not follow Zernov by adopting his practices of praying to icons or the repeating the prayer of Jesus in the manner of the hesychasts, but he did read with interest his works on Eastern Orthodoxy. Houston found much to ponder in his Three Russian Prophets. At this juncture Houston began reading from spiritual traditions outside the evangelical milieu. Later at Regent, Houston urged evangelicals to learn from the Orthodox devotional practices that he had first discovered from Zernov. This diversity would later characterize his approach to spiritual direction as he looked to the Desert Fathers and Mothers as well as the Russian Staretz as models for contemporary spiritual guides.¹³ While appreciating insights from the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, Houston has remained critical of certain theological convictions held by those in these branches of the church.

More important than the contact with Orthodoxy was the group to which Zernov invited Houston to belong. A circle of Oxford scholars and Christian intellectuals assembled at the Zernov home to present papers on various religious topics. Some of its members included Zernov; C. S. Lewis; Hugo Dyson, fellow at Merton College who had been instrumental in Lewis' conversion; Basil Mitchell, professor of philosophy and religion; and Etta Gullick, wife of a geography professor and a regular correspondent of Thomas Merton, the Catholic contemplative writer. Gullick persuaded Houston to read Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* and other works before Merton was known among evangelicals. Houston was learning about monasticism, meditation, contemplation, and mysticism—themes that he would later expound upon at length as professor of spiritual theology. These were concepts from which many evangelical seminaries shied away at the time. At these meetings Lewis, for example on one occasion, presented an amusing paper against mariolatry, even though Catholics were present; whereas Zernov spoke on Russian writers. Houston was still too timid as a geographer to deliver theological papers outside his academic discipline, but he

enjoyed listening and entering into dialogue with C. S. Lewis for six years before Lewis left Magdalen College, Oxford to become professor of mediaeval and renaissance literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge University, in 1954.

The Influence of C. S. Lewis

Of all of the friends Houston acquired from this circle none had quite the impact upon the future direction of his life as C. S. Lewis. Though Houston was with Lewis in the group, he found that he could not get close to him. Houston wrote, 'While he was a witty raconteur and provocative debater, Lewis was essentially shy about his inner life'.¹⁴ Houston found that Lewis did not open his heart to those in the group, but he was jolly and skilful in debate. Those in this Christian scholarly circle did not use the vocabulary of spiritual direction.

Nevertheless, Houston knew of the way in which Lewis was beginning to seek out spiritual counsel for himself. Lewis became interested in Our Sisters of Wantage outside Oxford. Sister Penelope Lawson became a close correspondent and confidante of Lewis. On 24 October 1940, he told her of his decision to make his first confession to a Catholic priest. He continued this practice of receiving spiritual care for his soul by dealing with the sin in his life.¹⁵ While Lewis did not make Houston a confidant, Houston learned from the relational life of Lewis throughout the years as he read books about him. Houston wrote: 'It is as if the relational quality of companionship assists us also to deepen friendship with God in prayer on the vertical level. This then, is another trait of Lewis. He grew in prayer as he grew into friendships'.¹⁶ These friends included Sister Penelope; Joy Davidman, the woman he married later in life; and an unnamed, charming aristocratic widow from the American South (to whom he wrote letters later published as *Letters to an American Lady*). These letters often discussed his prayer life and enlisted prayers on his behalf during crises. Lewis provided spiritual counsel in his correspondence to not only these confidants but also to the growing number from the general public who wrote him. Clyde Kilby tells us that the major

reason Lewis answered letters so regularly was that he believed 'taking time out to advise or encourage another Christian was both a humbling of one's talents before the Lord and also as much the work of the Holy Spirit as producing a book'.¹⁷ An editor James Como categorized Lewis as an 'epistolist who steadily corresponded with literally thousands of strangers seeking advice and comfort', many of whom 'attributed their religious conversions, reawakenings and even vocations to Lewis's influence'.¹⁸

Lewis became a model for Houston. Whether consciously or unconsciously, he emulated Lewis's concern for the problems of others through counselling students. Both he and Lewis were tutors. Houston shared some of Lewis's similar concern for the relational life as the context of prayer when he wrote in 1989 *The Transforming Friendship*. Warren Lewis recalled his brother's 'remarkable talent for friendship'. Not surprisingly, C. S. Lewis revealed in *Surprised by Joy* 'friendship has been by far the chief source of my happiness'.¹⁹ A recent study by Edward C. Sellner has analyzed Lewis the spiritual mentor as he provided tutorials to students with 'total interest and concern' and as he laboured as 'a lay preacher' and 'a mere Christian'.²⁰ Both Houston and Lewis were growing as relational persons during this time. Both were willing to move outside their academic disciplines to be lay theologians. This was looked down upon at Oxford, which had no room for dilettantes or amateurs. Both men suffered scorn from their peers for their attempts at Christian writing and speaking. In 1976 James Houston and Jim Hiskey founded the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C. to keep alive the vision of Lewis in the American capital.

The Implications of Marriage Upon Spiritual Direction

Another important milestone of the Oxford years was the wedding of James Houston to a Scottish school teacher, Margaret Isobel 'Rita' Davidson, on 20 March 1953 at Glasgow University Chapel. Rita took a degree from the University of Glasgow and completed her education diploma at Cambridge University. Prior to marriage she had taught in preparatory and boarding schools in Scotland and Switzerland.

English was her main subject. They had four children—Christopher (born in 1954), Lydèle (1955), Claire (1957), and Penelope (1959). Both come from Brethren backgrounds. Both have a deep love of Scripture and commitment to the Evangelical faith. Both love each other very much. However, on the issue of spiritual direction they are very different. Rita claims that her husband's qualities of 'patience and kindness' have made him effective as a spiritual director, but she sees herself not as a spiritual director but as a teacher. She prefers to invite Regent women to the Bible studies in their home.

Since his days in the Zernov home, Houston has found great comfort in the writings of the mystics, who have helped him in guiding souls. If appreciative of some mystical writings, Houston is nevertheless critical of any possible Neo-Platonic tendencies or theological errors.²¹ His wife teases about the mystical side of her husband, as she noted, 'We were put with our feet in this world not somewhere between earth and heaven in the middle'. John Stott praised the balance that she brought to her husband's spirituality by her 'no-nonsense determination to keep his feet on *terra firma*, lest his spirit should soar out of touch with the real world'.²² When Regent College bestowed upon Houston the endowed chair of spiritual theology, its fund raisers presented her with an armchair called 'the chair of spiritual reality'; because they felt her spiritual life was strongly centred in practical Christian living.

In fact, the spirituality of James Houston is intensely practical because he has helped hundreds of students with emotional problems they were facing. She, however, commented about his spirituality that 'I need Jim to lift me up from the other side of the mud because I get bogged down in the everyday things too much and lose sight of the spiritual dimension. We have needed each other'. These opposite personalities attracted each other and continue to sharpen in their lives together and in their respective ministries of Bible study and spiritual direction.

III. Founding Principal and Spiritual Counsellor at Regent College, 1970–1978

A. Openness to a New Vocation

Towards the end of his career at Oxford,

Houston was growing dissatisfied and ready to move on to conquer new fields. He had completed his *magnum opus* in 1967 but had turned down an offer to occupy the chair of the geography department at the University of Texas in 1968. In 1969, Professor E. M. Blaiklock invited a variety of Christian scholars to write on the subject, 'Why I am Still a Christian'. Every one of these described how they were Christian in their profession, but Houston's essay, entitled 'God-centered Personality', said that he was writing first as a Christian person, since his professional life was secondary.²³ This underscored a struggle going on in Houston's life at the time. He had always felt that the most important reality in his life was that he was a Christian and that it was only secondarily important that he was a geographer. If he were to understand why he had been half-hearted in geography, it was by acknowledging that he had never had a calling to be only a geographer. There was always ambiguity over the Christian books he read at home and the geography texts he studied at the college. His reading in geography only half engaged him.

B. The Founding of Regent College

In the mid 1960s Marshall Shepherd had the original vision to begin a Brethren Bible college in British Columbia and invited F. F. Bruce to assume leadership. After Bruce declined, he mentioned Houston's name as a possible leader. When Houston was approached about starting a college, he told them that he had two conditions. He was not interested in establishing a Bible college. Their first priority would be to locate themselves at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, perhaps with an affiliated status to the university. The second priority would be to have a trans-denominational school instead of a strictly Brethren institution. This ecumenical vision came from Houston's reading of C. S. Lewis and Richard Baxter and developing from them the implications of the concept of 'mere Christianity'. The founders were willing to forfeit having its Brethren connection and to make it open to those of diverse denominations. In December 1966 Houston was invited to take

up the leadership of what would become Regent College. The charter was granted in 1968 with the hopes of establishing the first graduate school of theology in North America to make the education of the laity its central focus. In 1969 the first Summer School was held for the purpose of advertising the college. By 1970 the board decided to go to a one-year programme. The beginnings were small with six faculty and only four students. In 1972, the school had grown sufficiently to begin granting the Masters degree. Four cartoons were drawn to picture the kinds of tensions that they might expect to lie ahead of Regent college. These were entitled as follows:

Academic excellence, but not professionalism
An integrated life, but not intellectualism
Cultural involvement, but not secularism
Christian commitment, but not denominationalism.²⁴

To ensure himself a salary, Houston served as lecturer in Geography at the University of British Columbia from 1970 to 1977 while functioning as principal of Regent College.

C. Spiritual Counselling of Regent Students

Houston did not envisage Regent College initially in order to have one of the first programmes in spiritual theology and spiritual direction in the evangelical world, although this is what eventually happened. Rather Regent was begun to produce lay thinkers like C. S. Lewis and to focus upon the theological needs of the laity. He taught inter-disciplinary and environmental studies. The spirituality emphases came later. Nevertheless, Houston continued with the counselling of students in the manner he had attempted during his tutorials at Oxford. The counselling load increased in this Christian setting. Because he felt assisting hurting students with emotional and spiritual problems was more important than administration, he was known to place aside all pressing business of the school whenever a needy student came in to see him. This often delayed the efficient running of the principal's office. With his genuine concern for students, he always put their interests before that of even the financial survival of the institution. During the first year when the

college had only four students, six additional, potential pupils appeared expressing interest in the school. Accepting them into the program would have helped validate the beginning work at Regent. However, Houston told them that it was not in their best interests to attend Regent at that time and sent them away. Houston's love of students was reflected in his availability to them. As he continued to grow in counselling skills, students flocked to him for spiritual advice. In the process he recognized this as a form of spiritual direction. However, some felt the smooth administration of the school suffered even though the students were being greatly helped.

In 1978 the Regent Board of Governors announced changes in the administration of the college. J. I. Packer remembered this decision: 'When the Regent board created him chancellor (a title which he later laid aside) and took day to day leadership [as principal] out of his hands, he found the transition hard'.²⁵ Asked about his response to alterations in his job description, Houston replied: 'This was a difficult time for me in relinquishing the leadership of the college administratively'. He continued, 'Yet seeing my passion was to apply theology to the daily and emotional life I could see the strategy of moving from administration into this role because it was not understood'. Houston was given more teaching assignments in the newly created professorship of spiritual theology and greater opportunities for counselling students. His wife remarked, 'Jim was God's man for starting the College, but not for leading it on'. Packer noted, 'Vision for pioneering, rather than administration for maintaining has always been Jim Houston's special strength'.²⁶

IV. Spiritual *Abba* and the Desert Experience, 1978–1990

Nevertheless, the change in job descriptions took its toll on him emotionally and spiritually. He entered a desert experience from 1978 until 1990 as he adjusted to his new role at the college and discovered areas in his inner life that needed God's attention. During this period, the Board of Governors chose to modify the vision of the founders of Regent from a focus upon educating the laity

exclusively to include the instructing of pastors through a Master of Divinity program. At first Houston found the abandonment of the original vision ill advised. In this context the words of Jesus in Luke 9:58 spoke to him again and again: 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head'. This text grew on Houston, because he said, 'I realized that I had to die to my own vision for Regent College and to be unpossessive' and to remember that 'if a corn of wheat falls into the earth and dies it bears much fruit'. 'I had to lay aside that instinct to control' the future destiny of the college. The use of the text intensified during the time of the further relinquishment of his office of chancellor. He came to pray for the 'unpossessiveness and humility of the Lord'. This unpossessiveness was the 'nature of the creator himself', for 'it was not that he created all things by power but by self-renunciation', Houston remarked. 'God allowed a lot of space in kindness for his creation, and it is that ontological quality about God that should mark our lives.'

A. *Purposes of the Desert in His Life*

Out of his own experience of the desert Houston learned much about growth in the spiritual life that he was able to pass on to those during his spiritual direction sessions with students. His book *The Heart's Desire* included many lessons he learned personally in the desert. In this he cited Charles de Foucauld's statement on the purpose of the desert experience: 'One must cross the desert and dwell in it to receive the grace of God. It is here that one drives out everything that is not God'. De Foucauld continued, 'It is in solitude, in that lonely life alone with God ... that God gives himself to the soul that gives itself whole and entire to Him'.²⁷ De Foucauld, once a wealthy playboy in fashionable Paris, had gone to live in the desert following his conversion. There in a literal desert of North Africa he discovered 'the simplicity of life that the desert can bring to the humble in heart'.

Gathering insights from de Foucauld and the Bible, Houston argued that the Hebrew term *midbar* 'refers to the geographic desert, but is also a symbol of the periods in our lives when we need to be tested and learn

the ways of the Lord. The wildness of the place is symbolic of the wildness of our emotions that need to be curbed and re-directed as the Ten Commandments directed the Israelites to walk in the way of the Lord'.²⁸ Recalling that his heart was the dwelling place of God, Houston learned from personal experience that 'it requires the "desert" however, to cleanse and purify our desires so that we can become his worshippers in Spirit and in truth'.²⁹ For him the desert was a place to encounter his false self, which he had created to face the world. In his own desert Houston discovered that God was exposing addictions: 'I think of my own addiction to an idealized self, seeking identity in my dreams of creativity. I have spent at least some ten years in my desert of loneliness and silence and find refuge only in Christ'. Houston read how those disenchanted with the world during the early centuries of the church fled to the desert to seek counsel from a spiritual *abba* (father). Stripped of worldly possessions, they hoped to fast, pray without ceasing, and face the demons in their lives that needed attention. Houston was a spiritual *abba* to many at Regent while he was dwelling in his own personal desert. He was able to have compassion on hurting students who were seeking inner healing, victory over sin, and greater intimacy with God.

In the silence of the desert, Houston began to read voraciously the classics of Christian devotion which spoke to him of the need for brokenness, crucifixion, death, and resurrection in his life. When asked which classic helped him the most in the desert, Houston replied without hesitation *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod* written in 1669 by the Puritan divine Thomas Brooks. While this work is relatively unknown among many scholars of spirituality today, it taught Houston about the transforming significance of silence in the midst of desert afflictions. Brooks based his work on an exposition of Psalm 34:9 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth: because thou didst it'. Brooks argued that 'sight of God in affliction is of an irresistible efficacy, to silence the heart, and to stop the mouth of a gracious man', for 'it is the great duty and concernment of gracious souls to be mute and silent under the greatest

afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials they meet with in this world'.³⁰ Houston recalled insights he had gained from the work. Brooks talked about how our silence is not political because it is not expedient to talk nor be stoical with the stiff upper lip, nor prideful for fear of exposing oneself. These are false silences. 'But the appropriate silence is that of trusting God', Houston remarked, 'because if God were doing and making these changes in one's life, one should not complain and grumble at God'. Really, the silence is a trust that God knows what he is doing. Houston learned from Brooks the power and transforming dimension of silence. He realized he was in the desert, but if he lived there long enough, he would discover an oasis. 'There were underground hidden streams that would be renewing one's soul and refreshing one's spirit. Therefore, the desert was a good place to live in although it was the best part of twelve years that I was there'. Brooks argued that 'all your afflictions, troubles, and trials shall work for your good', because 'afflictions are blessings'. He concluded: 'The bee sucks sweet honey out of the bitterest herbs: so God will, by afflictions, teach his children to suck sweet experience, out of all the bitter afflictions and trials he exercises them with'.³¹

B. Advising Students in Their Deserts

What good came out of Houston's desert experience? He had addictive behaviour from which he needed to be released by entering the desert appropriate for his addictions. He noted, 'the freedom that I began to have from that was fruitfulness'. As he entered more and more into that fruitfulness he found he was able to give hope to those of his students who were seeking the same kind of transformation. By 1990, his prayer had greater intimacy and joy than he had ever known. When students come to him in the midst of their desert experiences of emotional problems, disappointments, and trials, he shocks them by informing them that the desert was a good place in which to be. But communion with God will not come by running from the addictions and struggles of life. He told one depressed student, 'You have to go through

this pain. Allow God to take you through it because it is a vital part of growth. The desert experience is an essential part of your maturity'. Houston reminded him of what Bernard of Clairvaux taught about the experience of the presence and absence of God. Our relationship with God has its seasons like that of human relationships. We feel close to God at times, and at other times we feel distant. Houston concluded: 'Because God comes and goes in our relationship does not mean he is inconsistent in his love. What God has given you does not depart'. Of course, Houston sent clinically depressed people for proper psychiatric help. But in the case of this student, he helped him in the midst of his depression to know himself for the first time and understand the roots of his blockages. So, the student left Regent a stronger Christian spiritually and emotionally. By embracing the desert and not running from it, he received healing from God through the process of spiritual direction. Like Houston, he found that the desert experience was 'a necessary preparation for walking more closely with God, from being set free from false desires to love God more intimately'.³²

Unlike some present-day spiritual directors who do not take personal sin seriously, Houston saw the importance of having soul-friends who 'can show us the ecology of evil within us, how a particular childhood wound, or fixation of emotion, or emotional frame of mind, have brought the addictions that now enthrall us, coloring and distorting all we do and are.' Houston sensed that 'only the courage and wisdom of true soul friends can expose the ambitions and compulsions that lie behind our addictions to ministry, to pleasing everybody, or to being in the lime-light'.³³ Some spiritual directors today are more interested in having their directees share their religious experiences than in leading them to godliness. Following the Puritans, Houston urged the quest of holiness as a part of the spiritual direction process. He is concerned that sinful patterns be broken so one can experience the joy of the Lord more fully.

While passing through this wilderness, Houston found company in the communion of the saints. He began to read works by saints of all periods of the history of the

church. They spoke to him in his desert, and he suggested them to students who were facing similar trials. From them he found models of spiritual direction. From them he found examples of sanctity that would inspire those coming to him for spiritual counsel. He began to recognize that evangelicals had an appalling ignorance of the past after the Biblical period. The spiritual lives of contemporary Christians needed an association with the great hearts and minds of the past. 'By this process, minds and hearts speak to each other', Houston remarked. 'It is a great experience to walk through Augustine and feel he is sitting by me and we are going through this book together'. He warned. 'To hear some Protestant reactionaries denounce sainthood, you would think that it is the presence of saints that is the great sin of the Church. The fact is the Church would be in deep trouble in the *absence* of the saints'. He continued, 'For what we mean by saintliness is simply the embodiment of the life of God in the soul of man. Saints are those in whom the truths of the Gospel are fleshed out'.³⁴

To correct this absent-mindedness about the past, Houston began editing and abridging a series called *Classics of Faith and Devotion* to make the best of this spiritual heritage readily available to Evangelical readers. Besides his own interpretative comments in each volume, Houston brought together an impressive number of Evangelical leaders to write introductions commending the classics to contemporary readers. These included introductions by Chaplain Richard Halverson of the United States Senate on Richard Baxter, Charles Colson on Jonathan Edwards, J. I. Packer on John Owen, Os Guinness on Blaise Pascal, John Stott on Charles Simeon, Senator Mark Hatfield on William Wilberforce—to name only a few. He included mediaeval saints such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Walter Hilton; the philosopher Blaise Pascal; the mystic Teresa of Avila; Puritans like John Owen, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards; and the British Evangelicals Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce.³⁵

C. Houston's Class on Spiritual Direction

During this period Houston began to teach a course entitled 'Principles and Practice of

Spiritual Direction'. In this course he included insights from the classics series. Topics included temperaments and addiction, formation of character, spiritual self-direction in prayer, perspectives from the Bible, the Trinitarian model for the relational life, the role of instructor in the Early Church, the monastic approach to spiritual direction, Spanish and French Catholic directors, and Calvin, Edwards, and the Puritans on spiritual guidance. The two assigned textbooks were *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* by William A. Barry and William J. Connolly and *Writings on Spiritual Direction by Great Christian Masters* edited by Jerome M. Neufelder and Mary C. Coelho. Students were required to have a practicum of spiritual friendship with another student in the class and to receive six hours of spiritual counselling from the instructor. Beside the lectures and other activities, Houston invited church leaders and pastors to class to discuss the role of spiritual direction in their respective church polity and practice.

The commencement of this class was a pioneering venture among evangelical theological colleges and seminaries where spirituality classes are occasionally offered but not instruction in spiritual direction. His approach differed from that of some Catholic seminaries where verbatims are required of spiritual direction sessions for evaluation by peer groups. Houston is not one to teach techniques. He presents historic models and demonstrates one-on-one in spiritual direction sessions how to proceed. He resists any attempt to systematize steps of spiritual direction or to employ role plays to demonstrate right and wrong ways of counselling. While not opposed to those who use these approaches, he does not regard them as authentic to his own prior training and disposition.

Much of Houston's approach to direction is highly intuitive. He prays while listening, and insights arise that marvel him. This cannot be learned in the classroom. Perspectives based upon his knowledge of human personality by counselling hundreds of students and recognizing common blockages to similar temperaments often come easily for him. He uses materials on the basic personality types as a way of bringing healing

to one's compulsions and addictions, but he is clearly aware that a focus upon personality can be misleading at times.³⁶

To avoid making spiritual direction a profession, Houston prefers the model of spiritual friendship whereby two meet for mutual sharing about blockages in their lives, their communion with God, their prayer life, and any helpful items of discussion. Spiritual friendship can be practised by any lay person grounded in the faith. He continues to believe in the importance of Scripture and the classics of Christian spirituality as a preparation for the ministry of spiritual guidance.

VI. A Personalist in the Garden of Love: Themes of his Guidance, 1990–1993

During Houston's seventieth birthday celebration, someone noted that he had gone from being 'a specialist to a generalist'. Later he corrected this saying, 'No I have gone from a specialist to a personalist'. What Houston meant was not that he had become a follower of the American philosophy of Personalism advocated by Borden P. Bowne but that he was later in life giving more importance to the relationality of all persons and their relationship with God.³⁷

A. The Garden Themes

The personalist desires to dwell in the Garden of Love's Desire. When Houston was nearing the end of his desert experience, he wrote *The Transforming Friendship* (1989), a book on the practice of prayer based upon friendship with God. This book was written 'not of what was reflective but what was still perspective for me'. It was what he wished to experience but had not yet fully known. He was passionately concerned that he would enter that kind of intimacy with the Triune God before he died. By the time he had completed *The Heart's Desire* he had come into the garden himself. He preferred not to describe the experience that brought him into this paradise of love in 1990, but he described the wonderful existence of those in this realm. The same year that he received his spiritual encouragement, his wife successfully came through a life-threatening brain operation.

Houston is glad to share what he learned about the garden of love after his long stay

in the wilderness. One cannot choose the desert, for that is chosen for us by God. 'What we can choose', Houston remarked is 'our garden, the garden of the Lord, where we are reminded we are made "in the image and likeness of God", to desire his love alone'. For Houston, the Biblical picture of the garden is one which is fertilized by the presence of the Lord alone, 'where he is loved and desired above all else', He noted, 'If the desert represents our constant need for repentance and freedom from our addictions, the garden symbolizes our restored communion with God and the celebration of his presence in our lives'.³⁸ In the ancient Near East the garden was a place of security, refreshment, exotic desires, fulfilment, and royal retreat. Christians who long to live in the garden discover that love is more important for their well-being than knowledge. Life in the garden is one of passion, commitment, and intimacy with the Beloved. Houston concluded. 'It is a beautiful image—God having a greater desire to be intimate with his own people than they can ever have of being with him'.³⁹ In this recent stage of his pilgrimage, Houston is more concerned with the cultivation of the soul before God than weeding the garden. Both operations are important. Weeding involves pulling up the weeds of addictions or blockages to the life of the Spirit. But cultivation is a deeper work of God that calls the pilgrim into the contemplative and trinitarian life. The spiritual director is there to assist and encourage the pilgrim in whatever way possible.

B. The Trinitarian Approach to Spiritual Friendship

Houston has stressed the importance of the Holy Trinity as a model for relationality. By emphasizing the social analogy of the Trinity, Houston demonstrates the relational character of the Godhead. In this approach the loving communion of the three distinct persons of the Trinity is highlighted as opposed to the economic trinity that dealt with the Godhead in his external actions towards creatures in salvation history. The latter focuses upon God's job description; the former on the inter-relatedness of the persons. The Western Church has stressed the oneness of God or proofs of the way the three persons

can be just one God. The Eastern Church has loved the threesomeness of God defined relationally through community. Those desiring intimacy of spiritual friendship with another person and with God will do well to learn the secret of Trinitarian living. Houston wrote, 'Yet as we explore more deeply into the friendship of God, we discover to our amazement that the eternal character of God's love is that of love given, love received, and love shared'. He continued, 'For the love of the Father "begets" the Son; the love of the Son is that of the "Begotten"; and the love of the Holy Spirit is to share and make the Father and the Son known to us, and realizable within us'.⁴⁰ In short Houston holds up the Trinity as a way out of contemporary prayerlessness. Our prayerlessness results, not primarily from lack of discipline or technique, but from our lack of deep relationships. If we find it hard to form lasting friendships with those around us, then we shall find it difficult to pray to God with any intimacy. However, the recovery of the relational love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for each other holds out a promise that we may come to abide in the garden of love's desire.⁴¹

Inspired by the relationality of the Trinity, Houston has developed lasting friendships with former students, colleagues, and church leaders throughout the world. They keep contact with Houston through the years. Two especially valued friends included Malcolm Muggeridge and Klaus Bockmuehl. Houston began a meaningful relationship with Muggeridge, the journalist who converted to Christianity later in life, after Muggeridge's address in Hertford Chapel at Oxford. Later Houston used to visit him at home in Robertsbridge, Sussex and in turn entertained him when Muggeridge stayed near Vancouver working on a book. Houston also deepened his relationship with Klaus Bockmuehl, professor of systematic theology and ethics at Regent College, once Bockmuehl's cancer condition worsened. They developed a deep spiritual friendship during Bockmuehl's final illness as Houston visited Bockmuehl once every day.

C. Group Spiritual Direction

One offshoot of this call to relational living

is Houston's practice of group spiritual direction. He adopted this approach partly out of necessity, since it was impossible for him to see personally all of the Regent students who desired regular spiritual guidance from him. By forming separate groups for male and female students, he was able to have them meet once a week for a time of fellowship. The students go around the circle and share what is happening in their lives—their blockages, depression, fears, joys, closeness to God, absence from God, prayer life, times of meditation, sense of vocational calling, confusion over their future direction in life, etc. Then Houston and others offer insights or raise questions to help them. Since many in the group have similar problems, they benefit from one another. When one begins discussing how he or she is hurting, another who has been on a similar journey supplies encouragement. Houston said, 'It is a form of supervised directing of others'. There is always time for prayer at the close of the session. A sense of trust and love emerges in these groups. Houston believes that the very lonely person is more prone to the demonic than the one with Christian fellowship. Thus it is important to have spiritual friends both one-on-one but also in a group. Houston's model of group spiritual direction is very similar to that advocated by the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C. though he has not attempted to model his after theirs, and he is concerned that such direction should not be eclectic but biblically formed.

D. The Meditative Life

Seeking a biblical basis, Houston also hopes that his directees will benefit from the blessedness of the mediaeval approach of *lectio divina*. As a director, he does not teach them techniques for entering the stages of *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditating on Scripture), *oratio* (praying in response to Scripture), and *contemplatio* (being with or gazing in wonder upon God). He believes that evangelicals can gain another dimension in their meditative life as they recognize the wealth in this posture, for they often do not understand or practise contemplation. It is not something we do; rather it is a fruitage or consequence of having been meditative

with God. This is God's gift to us at God's initiative. God meets with us, and we have a sense of being in love with him and of his love for us. 'The contemplative posture is much more an awareness of God's presence and immediacy as gifts of his friendship to us'. He believes that there is another stage called the ecstatic, which temporarily carries us out of ourselves. 'Yet it is a joy that relates most to us as we are most intimately healed and where we have been most intimately freed and assured'. Reading, meditation, and prayer should engage most of our time. Contemplation is the 'fruitage' of what God gives us from such an experience of faithfulness and perseverance in devotion', Houston noted.

In conclusion, James Houston has had a varied career as a geography tutor, a professor of interdisciplinary and environmental studies, a college principal and chancellor, and a professor of spiritual theology and spiritual direction. J. I. Packer rightly concluded that Houston's awakening of the heritage of spirituality to Protestants 'to whom it has been largely a closed book will prove to be Jim's greatest contribution to the life of the church'. But one could be more specific and state that his practice and teaching of spiritual direction have been a pioneering effort in the Evangelical world. Other Evangelical seminaries and theological colleges have elective courses on devotional classics or the spiritual life, but Regent is possibly the first Evangelical graduate school to have a professor like Houston to teach spiritual direction or give so much of his time guiding students in the spiritual life.

Houston has set an example for many laity and clergy to emulate either in the marketplace or the church. One student has studied spiritual direction under him to use it in his relationships with his employees as a business manager. Another plans to pursue a retreat ministry. Still another cannot be satisfied with the shallow Christianity of the parishes she has known before: she will be a spiritual director to those interested in her congregation. Another aspires to teach church history and share models of guidance with all students. Several former students are now creating courses on spiritual

theology in seminaries as scattered as Santiago de Chile; Hong Kong; Singapore; Papua New Guinea; England; and Sweden. Yet Houston is cautious that people 'do not professionalise the Christian life' any further and deeper 'by adding one more profession of "spiritual direction".' Indeed, he sees that the 'needed reformation of the church' is to move from 'professionalisation' towards 'a richer personal life that focuses in upon the personalness of the triune God'. The 'radical objective of Christians today', he sees as 'the need of emancipation from a professionalised identity, to becoming persons-in-the-making, as indeed "in Christ".' Like the apostle, he would 'regard no one from a worldly point of view', but 'if any is in Christ that one is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Cor. 5:16, 17).⁴² James Houston's ministry of 'personalness', his classes on spiritual formation, and his tireless love for Regent students will hopefully prove such an enduring legacy that they will shape the character of the institution for decades even after he retires. He has pioneered the way for many other evangelicals in the rediscovery of the classics of Christian devotion, the meditative life, the implications of the Trinity for daily life, and the art of spiritual guidance.

- 1 The author of this article has had the opportunity of taking five of Houston's classes on spirituality and receiving spiritual direction from him personally at Regent College during the Summer of 1991 and the Fall of 1992 where he interviewed James and Rita Houston and some of Houston's directees and friends. Where biographical information is not cited by a footnote, the reader should assume that this information was supplied to the author by Dr. and Mrs. Houston during several interviews. Other information was gathered from class lectures and tapes of previous lectures at Regent College such as *Principles and Practice of Spiritual Direction* (23 lectures), cassette tape series 20185, which is available for purchase from the college. This series provides tapes on 'The Monastic Model of Spiritual Direction', 'Spanish and French Spiritual Directors of the 16-17th Centuries', 'John Calvin on the Christian Life', 'The Pastoral Directives of the Puritans', 'Nurturing Affections in the Teachings of Jonathan Edwards'. See also John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper, 1951); Jean-Daniel Benoit, *Calvin*.

- directeur d'âmes* (Strasbourg, Editions Oberlin, 1947); William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1938); for an example of an early Evangelical spiritual director much like Houston, see Arthur D. Thomas, Jr., 'Moses Hoge: Reformed Pietism and Spiritual Guidance', *American Presbyterians. Journal of Presbyterian History* 71 (Summer 1993): 95–110; Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Press, 1977); Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (London: Cowley Brothers, 1984); Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Daniel Benoit, *Direction spirituelle et protestantisme, étude sur la légitimité d'une direction protestante* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1940).
- 2 James M. Houston's recent books include: *The Transforming Friendship* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1989); *In Search of Happiness: A Guide to Personal Contentment* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1991); *The Heart's Desire: A Guide to Personal Fulfillment* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1992).
 - 3 John Stott, 'Pride, Humility, and God', in *Alive to God: Studies in Spirituality Presented to James Houston*, ed. J. I. Packer and Loren Wilkinson (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 111.
 - 4 James M. Houston, 'Principles of Spiritual Self-Direction in Prayer', cassette 2018E, in 'Principles and Practices of Spiritual Direction', Regent College Library, Vancouver, B.C.; James M. Houston, 'The Independence Myth: Only Our Soul Friends Can Show us the Ecology of Evil Within Us', *Christianity Today* 34 (January 15, 1990): 33.
 - 5 James M. Houston, 'Editor's Note About Teresa of Avila', in Teresa of Avila, *Life of Prayer* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983), xi; interview with Lydèle Houston Taylor, 9 January 1993.
 - 6 Interview with James M. Houston, December 1992.
 - 7 J. I. Packer and Loren Wilkinson, 'To James M. Houston on His 70th Birthday', in *Alive to God*, 4.
 - 8 Packer, in Packer and Williamson, 4–5. This book mistakenly indicates that Houston started at Brasenose College. Houston went rather to Hertford College.
 - 9 James M. Houston, *A Social Geography of Europe* (London: Gerald Duckworth Co. Ltd., 1953), 264 pp. with 47 maps and diagrams; *The Western Mediterranean World: An Introduction to its Regional Landscape* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. Ltd., 1964), 793 pp. with 260 maps and diagrams; James M. Houston and R. P. Beckinsale, *Problems of Urbanization* (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1968), 445 pp. with 91 maps and diagrams. While teaching at Oxford, Houston found time to serve as visiting professor at a number of institutions—University of Aberdeen (1958), University of Manitoba (1961–62), University of Texas, University of Victoria, and Columbia University in New York City (1966–67). Other honours came to him. He was elected Shaw McFie Lang Fellow of the Scottish Universities (1948); Fellow of the Royal Geography Society, London (1946–70); Fellow of the American Geographical Society, New York (1947–70); Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (London, 1949–70); member of the Latin American Society (formerly on committee), London, (1965–70); and corresponding member of 'Man and the Environment' committee on the International Geography Union, (1959–1970).
 - 10 J. M. Houston, 'Factors in the Formation of Christian Character', cassette 2018C in Principles and Practice of Spiritual Direction series, Regent College.
 - 11 Packer, 'To James M. Houston', in Packer and Wilkinson, 6.
 - 12 Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh, *Living Prayer* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1966).
 - 13 James M. Houston, Cassette Tape 201 2F, 'Asceticism, Hesychasm, and Prayer in the Eastern Church', Prayer Course series, Regent College.
 - 14 James M. Houston, 'The Prayer-life of C. S. Lewis', *Crux* 24 (March 1988): 2.
 - 15 Ibid., 6; William Griffin, *Clive Staples Lewis, a Dramatic Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 162, 181.
 - 16 Ibid., 6.
 - 17 Clyde S. Kilby, ed., *C.S. Lewis: Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans. 1967), 7.
 - 18 James T. Como, ed., *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), xxi–xxv.
 - 19 Warren Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1966), 13; C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), 33.
 - 20 Edward C. Sellner, 'C. S. Lewis as Spiritual Mentor', in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, ed. Lavina Byrne (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 142–61.
 - 21 James M. Houston, 'Reflections on Mysticism: How Valid is Evangelical Anti-Mysticism?' in *Gott Lieben und Seine Gebote Halten. Loving God and Keeping His Commandments. In memoriam Klaus Bockmuhl*, 163–81, ed. Markus Bockmuhl and Helmut Burkhardt (Giessen/Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1991), 163–81.

- 22 Stott, 'Pride, Humility, and God', in Packer and Wilkinson, 111.
- 23 James M. Houston, 'A God-centered Personality', in *Why I Am Still a Christian*, ed E. M. Blaiklock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 83-93. This part of the article has been based upon interviews with James and Rita Houston. Comments by Elisabeth Bockmuehl, Mark Grambo, Peter Robinson, Cynthia M. Thomas, Noriko Inagaki, Kelly Barbey, Ute Carkner, David Hodge, Michael McGalliard, and Jerry Giesbrecht provided me with empirical data upon which to base my appraisal of Houston as a professor and spiritual director. Where there are no footnote citations, the reader may assume that this information was supplied by interviews conducted by the author in Vancouver with them in November and December 1992.
- 24 James M. Houston, 'Living More Fully Through Creative Tensions', *Crux* 26 (September 1990): 3.
- 25 J. I. Packer, in 'James M. Houston', in *Alive to God*, 7.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 6-7.
- 27 Charles de Foucauld, *Meditations of a Hermit*, trans. Charlotte Belfour (London: Burns and Oates, 1981), 137, as quoted in Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, 173.
- 28 Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, 176.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 177.
- 30 Thomas Brooks, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod with Sovereign Antidotes for Every Case* (Boston: Seth Goldsmith, 1842), 20-21. *The Works of Thomas Brooks* are available now through Banner of Truth Trust.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 93.
- 32 Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, 187.
- 33 James M. Houston, 'The Independence Myth', *Christianity Today* 34 (January 15, 1990): 31-33.
- 34 James M. Houston, 'Prayer as the Gift and Exercise of Personal Relationships' *Crux* 3 (Sept. 1985): 7; cf. Houston, *Heart's Desire*, 21-22.
- 35 James M. Houston edited and abridged the Classics of Faith and Devotion Series published by Multnomah Press in Portland, Oregon, which is now Questar Publishers. These included: Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: A Pattern for Personal Growth and Ministry*, introduction by Richard Halverson (1982); Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Love of God and Spiritual Friendship*, introduction by James M. Houston (1983); Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, introduction by Charles Colson (1984); Walter Hilton, *Toward a Perfect Love: The Spiritual Counsel*, introduction by David L. Jeffrey (1985); Juan de Valdes and Don Benedetto, *The Benefit of Christ*, introduction by Leon Morris (1984); John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*, introduction by J. I. Packer (1983); Blaise Pascal, *Mind on Fire*, introduction by Os Guinness (1989); Charles Simeon, *Evangelical Preaching*, introduction by John Stott (1986); Teresa of Avila, *Life of Prayer*, introduction by Clayton L. Berg, Jr. (1983); William Wilberforce, *Real Christianity Contrasted with the Prevailing Religious System*, introduction by Senator Mark O. Hatfield (1982). A last volume on letters of spiritual direction is forthcoming.
- 36 Here are some examples of the use of personality types. Maria Beesing et al., *The Enneagram: A Journal of Self Discovery* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1984); Robert J. Nogosek, *Nine Portraits of Jesus: Discovering Jesus Through the Enneagram* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1987); Barbara Metz and John Burchill, *The Enneagram and Prayer: Discovering Our True Selves Before God* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1987); Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, VA: The Open Door, 1984). In his lectures Houston teaches on the enneagram and the use of the Meyers-Briggs indicator favored by Chester and Michaels. Houston points out the advantages and disadvantages of these personality approaches.
- 37 For an early treatment of this theme, see James M. Houston, 'The Loss and Recovery of the Personal', in *Quest for Reality: Christianity and the Counter Culture*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1973), 21-28.
- 38 Houston, *Heart's Desire*, 189, 196.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 206.
- 40 Houston, *The Transforming Friendship*, 199-200.
- 41 James M. Houston, 'Spiritual Theology: The Kingdom of God in Daily Life', *Crux* 27 (June 1991): 2-8; 'Spiritual Theology, Part II: The Nature and Purpose of Spiritual Theology', *Crux* 27 (September 1991): 25-33; cf. James M. Houston, 'Spirituality and the Doctrine of the Trinity', in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989), 48-69; James M. Houston, 'Spiritual Life Today: An Appropriate Spirituality for a Post-modern World', in *The Gospel in the Modern World: A Tribute to John Stott*, 179-97, ed. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 179-97.
- 42 Letter of James M. Houston to Arthur D. Thomas, Jr., 3 July 1993.