

## The Spiritual Life — A Journey to God

### The Three Ways, Stages, or Phases of the Spiritual Journey - Summary

1. The Purgative Way or Spiritual Childhood
  1. In brief this way includes the initial phases of the spiritual life:
    1. coming to conversion
    2. turning away from sin
    3. bringing one's life into conformity with the moral law
    4. initiating a the habit of prayer and the practices of piety
    5. maintaining a relatively stable life in the Church
  2. The Illuminative Way or Spiritual Adolescence
    1. This way in brief is one of continuing growth and is characterized by:
      1. deeper prayer
      2. growth in the virtues
      3. deepening love of neighbor
      4. greater moral stability
      5. more complete surrender to the lordship of Christ
      6. greater detachment from all that is not God
      7. increasing desire for full union
    2. It is accompanied by various kinds of trials and purifications and sometimes by great consolations and blessings
  3. The Unitive Way or Spiritual Adulthood
    1. The unitive way is marked by:
      1. deep, habitual union with God
      2. characterized by deep joy
      3. profound humility
      4. freedom from fears of suffering or trials
      5. great desire to serve God
      6. apostolic fruitfulness
    2. One lives with an almost constant awareness of God. The suffering and trials of this stage are a participation in the suffering of Christ, rather than purification.

## **Where Am I in the Spiritual Life?**

(Jean-Baptiste Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate)

### Hardened in Sin

- Mortal Sin: Stubborn persistence in sin, either out of ignorance or because of a maliciously warped or severely underdeveloped conscience.
- Prayer: Deliberate refusal to have any recourse to God for help.
- Sacraments: Rarely attends Mass, if at all, and does not participate in confession.

### Surface Christianity

- Mortal Sin: Considered as an insignificant nuisance, and easily forgiven. The soul easily gives way and commits mortal sin at every possible occasion or temptation. Confession almost without contrition.
- Prayer: Mechanical; either inattentive, or always dictated by temporal interest. Last on the list of priorities and easily abandoned by minor distractions or difficulty. These souls enter into themselves very rarely and superficially and do not set aside or protect specific time for prayer on a daily basis.
- Sacraments: Sporadically attends Mass and confession—often only at Christmas and Easter.

## **1. The Purgative Way**

### Mediocre Piety

- Mortal Sin: Weak resistance. Rarely avoids near occasions of sin but seriously regrets having sinned, and makes adequate confessions.
- Venial Sin: Complete acceptance of this sin, which is considered as insignificant. Hence, the lukewarm state of the will. Does nothing whatever to prevent venial sin, or to eradicate it, or to undercover and uproot it.
- Prayer: From time to time, prays well but in sporadic fashion. Momentary fits of fervor, but inconsistent and fleeting. Prayer is far from habitual but is valued. Prayer is either intermittently attentive vocal prayer or petition-based prayer focused on temporal needs and desires.
- Sacraments: attends Mass regularly and pursues confession more frequently.

### Intermittent Piety

- Mortal Sin: Loyal resistance. Habitually avoids the near occasion of sin. Deep regrets when recognized. Does penance to make reparation.

- Venial Sin: Sometimes deliberate. Puts up a weak fight. Sorrow is only superficial. Makes a particular examination of conscience, but without any method or coherence.
- Prayer: Practices vocal prayer regularly. Not firmly resolved to remain faithful to mental prayer / meditation (time, place, topic, and material). Gives up as soon as dryness is felt, or as soon as there is business to attend to.
- Sacraments: Attends Mass weekly and pursues confession at least quarterly.

### Sustained Piety

- Mortal Sin: Never. At most very rare, when taken suddenly and violently by surprise. And then, often it is to be doubted if the sin is mortal. It is followed by ardent compunction/guilt and a desire for penance.
- Venial Sin: Vigilant in avoiding and fighting it. Rarely deliberate. Intense sorrow, but does little by way of reparation. Consistent particular examen, but aiming only at avoidance of venial sin.
- Imperfections: The soul either avoids uncovering them, so as not to have to fight them, or else easily excuses them. Approves the thought of renouncing them, and would like to do so, but makes little effort in that direction.
- Prayer: Always faithful to prayer, no matter what happens. Includes vocal prayer and mental prayer which is often affective. Alternating consolations and dryness, the latter endured with considerable hardship.
- Sacraments: Always attends weekly and daily Mass if able. Pursues confession on a regular schedule.

## **2. The Illuminative Way**

### Fervor

- Venial Sin: Never deliberate. By surprise, sometimes, or with imperfect advertence. Keenly regretted, and serious reparation made.
- Imperfections: Wants nothing to do with them. Watches over them, fights them with courage, in order to be more pleasing to God. Sometimes accepted, however, but regretted at once. Frequent acts of renunciation. Particular examen aims at perfection in a specific virtue.
- Prayer: Vocal and Mental prayer constantly practiced and gladly prolonged. Prayer on the affective side, or even prayer of simplicity. Alternation between powerful consolations and fierce trials.

- Sacraments: Fervently participates in weekly and daily Mass if able. Pursues confession at least on a monthly basis. Imperfections are offered in confession for the purpose of obtaining the grace necessary to overcome them (i.e. devotional confession).

#### Relative Perfection

- Imperfections: Guards against them energetically and with much love. They only happen with half-advertence.
- Prayer: Habitual life of prayer, even when occupied in external works. Thirst for self-renunciation, annihilation, detachment, and divine love. Hunger for the Eucharist and for Heaven. Graces of infused prayer, of different degrees. Often passive purification.

### **3. The Unitive Way**

#### Heroic Perfection

- Imperfections: Nothing but the first impulse.
- Prayer: Supernatural graces of contemplation, sometimes accompanied by extraordinary phenomena. Pronounced passive purifications. Contempt of self to the point of complete self-forgetfulness. Prefers sufferings to joys.

#### Complete Sanctity

- Imperfections: Hardly apparent and rare.
- Prayer: Frequently experience the transforming union. Spiritual marriage. Purifications by love. Ardent thirst for sufferings and humiliations.

Few and far between are the souls that belong to the last two, even to the last three categories. But they are what God desires for each of us. If these are difficult to understand do not worry — the only remedy is experience. Have no concern God will supply the necessary insight for you for your present moment. The reason we study these is so we know that God always has a deeper level He is calling us to until the day we see Him face to face.