

GROWING IN THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

1. Spirituality concerns itself with how to *appropriate* and *incarnate* the realities of faith – and virtually every spiritual master and classic author in the recorded tradition of spirituality outlines a progressive movement in describing the lifelong process of appropriation and incarnation of the saving event of Christ.¹
2. In the development of Christian spirituality, *the three ways of the spiritual life* is a theme that recurs: (a) the purgative, (b) the illuminative, and (c) the unitive.²
3. Contemporary Christian spirituality faces the challenge of two temptations prevalent in society: *despair* and *presumption*. Despair involves hopelessness in finding meaning, purpose, and ultimate satisfaction in human existence. Presumption entails confidence in one's own achievement of wealth, status, and power as the way to total happiness.³
4. The New Testament presents the fundamental truth of human existence: *God is the only treasure that can bring one eternal joy*. Since God is the only treasure that is worth pursuing, one should be ready to pursue God with great radicality. As one grows more and more aware of this truth, God moves more and more to the centre of one's life, and becomes for one the interpreter of life. In God one finds the whole meaning of human existence.⁴

5. The spiritual writers consider that *detachment is the foundation* on which the rest of the spiritual edifice is to be built – the tradition definitely points to a priority for detachment in one’s growth to God. St. Teresa supports this in stating, “I cannot understand how humility exists, or can exist without love, or love without humility, and it is impossible for these two virtues to exist save where there is great detachment from all created things”. (Way of Perfection, ch.16.)⁵

6. Humility is related to the Sacrament of Penance. Two realities are acknowledged in this sacrament: one’s *sinfulness* and *divine mercy*. (The prayers of the Prodigal and the Publican not only confess their sinfulness, but show a confidence in the mercy of God.) The encounter which takes place within the Sacrament of Penance is central to the whole of human existence – it is the meeting of human sinfulness and divine forgiveness.⁶

7. One of the main fruits of humility is *patience* – so often one’s impatience with other people stems from a basic pride in oneself. Truly humble people are hard to offend because they are not concerned for themselves. Also, they are aware of the wonderful mercy which God has shown them, and they are therefore open to be merciful to others.⁷

8. A love that cannot sustain *suffering* and overcome *difficulties* is not real love. In fact, love that gives way in the face of difficulties is really just self-love disguised. On the other hand, suffering is one of the best proofs of love, and when the Lord allows one to suffer, he is giving the person the opportunity to express his or her love.⁸

9. The *vow of chastity* needs to be considered in the context of a deep, personal love of God – that is, in terms of the individual’s personal commitment to God in a way that excludes certain relationships with others. Its essential value is the totality of the self-giving.⁹
10. A Christian is called to total self-giving which is real love – mediocrity is not enough, for to limit love is to destroy its very nature. Therefore, there needs to be in every Christian life a radicalness which moves one to *total self-giving to God*.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ Richard Byrne, “Journey (Growth and Development in Spiritual Life)”, in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 569.

² *Ibid.*, 570.

³ Monika Hellwig, “Hope”, in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 513-514.

⁴ David Walker, “God Our Joy”, in *SRG400 Introduction to Spirituality: Readings – 2 of 2* (Pennant Hills, Australia: The Broken Bay Institute, 2006), 509.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁶ David Walker, “Humility”, in *SRG400 Introduction to Spirituality: Readings – 2 of 2* (Pennant Hills, Australia: The Broken Bay Institute, 2006), 520.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 519.

⁸ David Walker, “Love”, in *SRG400 Introduction to Spirituality: Readings – 2 of 2* (Pennant Hills, Australia: The Broken Bay Institute, 2006), 522.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 524.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 522.