



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## "The Philosophical Model, Part 2"

Excerpted from

*The Spiritual Journey Part 3, Paradigms of the Spiritual Journey*

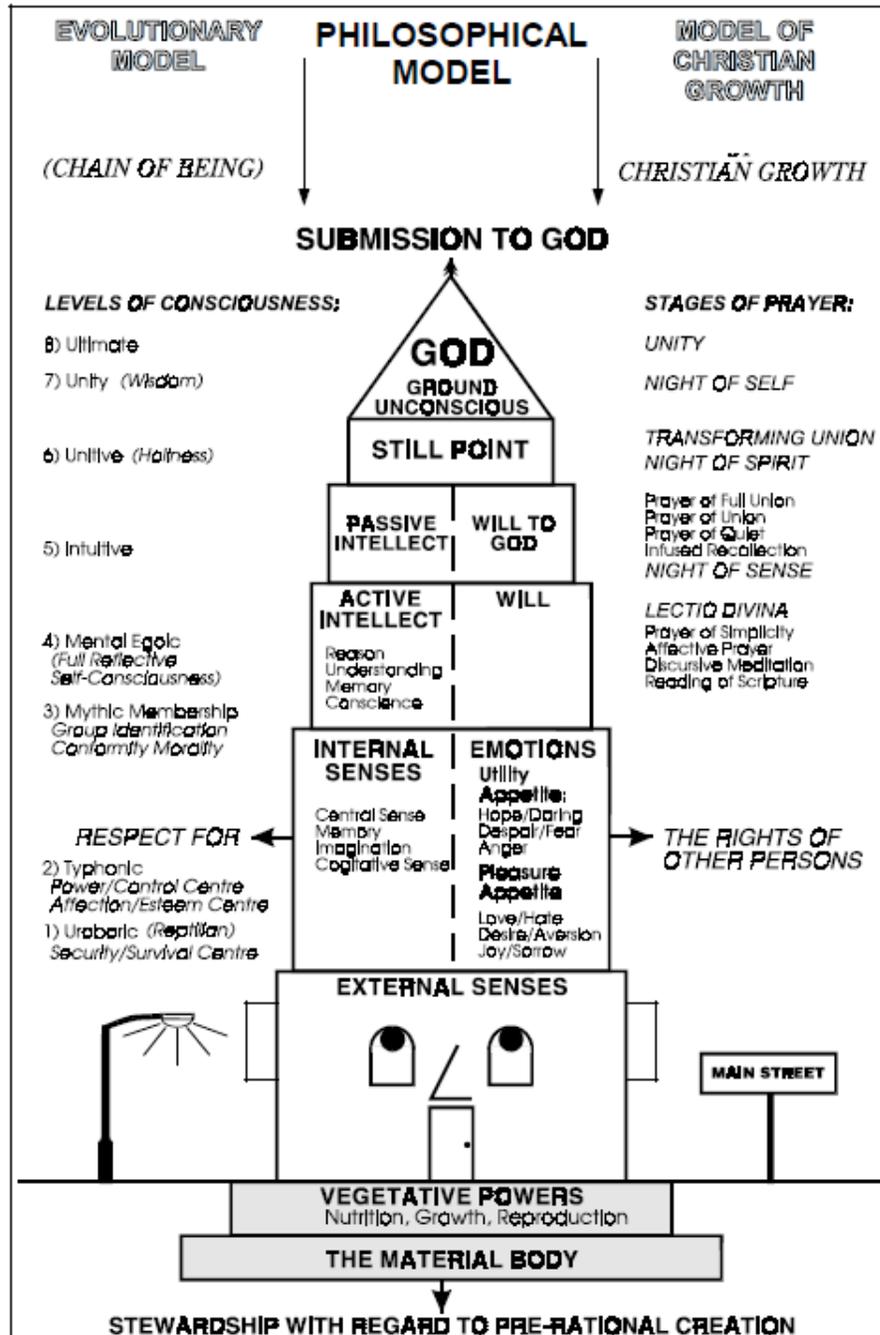
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[Evolutionary, Philosophical and Model of Christian Growth Chart appears on page 2 of transcript.]

There are three essential relationships that a human being, in view of our own personal arrival into this world, experiences. The first one is a relationship to God which is one of submission, acceptance, or consent. During Centering Prayer, we are exercising in an eminent way that relationship. We're opening, surrendering, consenting to the presence of God within us. Thus, we are cultivating the capacity to enter into this place of exchange or the place of encounter with the Ultimate Reality which is the depth of our own being. Somewhere in the [Book of] Exodus, God says of Moses in defending him against some of his detractors, "I speak with Moses face to face" – cheek to jowl, so to speak. Well, a philosophical, perhaps, translation or interpretation of that text would say that this was a "being to being" conversation. That is to say, an exchange without the mediation of the senses, the emotions, or thoughts, or concepts; in other words, it's an interpenetration of spirits. This is the kind of relationship that is cultivated in contemplative prayer, a non-mediated and openness to God so that one does not make use of concepts or particular acts during this particular time to go to God, but allows oneself to rest in the exchange of presences or the personal exchange of divine union.

The second relationship that we enter in virtue of becoming a human being concerns respect and, more than that, service of everyone else in the human race; in other words, those who are joined to us on the level of equality in the same corporate body. From the point of view of the New Creation, the transcendent humanity that is gradually being born as a result of Christ's becoming a human being and taking it into himself and establishing it firmly on the journey towards transcendence and union and unity with God. From that perspective [points to "respect for the rights of others" on chart] the natural relationships of respect is tremendously heightened by the commandment not only to love one another as ourselves, but to love one another as Jesus loved us, manifested by his dying on the cross, laying down his life for the redemption of the world; that is to say, for the liberation from these sub-human

motives and our "enthrall-dom" to the tyranny of group identity that is limiting or contrary to the values of human growth or development. And we've seen what some of those were, such as prejudice, racism, extreme nationalism and also religious prejudice, insofar as we regard ourselves as superior to other people and their convictions or ideologies.



The third relationship is stewardship with regards to the non-rational creation; that is to say, the animal kingdom, the vegetative kingdom, and the cosmos. This commandment that we find in Genesis to the first parents was to take care of the earth. Unfortunately, the patriarchal culture in which Genesis was written interpreted that as to dominate the lower creation. And, of course, this was like a bugle call to our desire to control because here was something that couldn't resist our control and the technological society really is a way of manipulating lower creation instead of relating to it, unless we bring to these wonderful new abilities a spiritual dimension so that ecological spirituality is something that is desperately needed in a technological age. Stewardship is a good word because it means symbolically that Adam was supposed to take care of this garden, and not to exploit it, and, above all, not to destroy it! And so, unfortunately, with the desire to control, nature has sometimes been trampled upon and destroyed.

Native American spirituality is such an example for us in our time because for the Native American, at least at the time of the arrival of the white people into this North American environment. They couldn't understand why these white folks were trying to buy certain pieces of property. For them, the ground belonged to everybody and it was supposed to be at the service of all. And so, they were representing, really, a spirituality that perhaps was reminiscent of the Typhonic age in which everything was equal and there wasn't a great deal of social stratification and property was held in common.

In any case, it's certainly true that the goods of the earth are meant to be enjoyed in common and that a responsible stewardship has to consider the disproportion in which the goods of the earth are now divided and to come up with an economic system, and obviously it would require massive co-operation on every level of society to create a new world in which everyone would have enough of the basic goods of life and of the opportunities for human growth. Oppression of any kind, be it economic, psychological, national, religious, political, prevents the growth of the spiritual journey because one needs to defend oneself and feeling oneself in an oppressive atmosphere, one's creativity is stifled at its root and is not able to manifest itself.

So, that the liberation of a social character is, in our time, finally been recognized as an essential part of the preaching of the Gospel. So much, then, for the relationship with which we automatically form by becoming ourselves a unique member of the human race, and especially as we enter into rational consciousness with its sense of personal responsibility for ourselves, our decisions, our actions, and for the world.

Now to take another look using this static diagram [Philosophical Model] or this ideal example of human nature in which each faculty is at a certain level of integration with the higher faculties. These faculties of reason and will are so designed as to manage this "firm." You might say it's a firm whose purpose is research in happiness and the will and the reason are the executive faculties which plan the program. The emotions are like the junior executives and they are supposed to follow the directions that the senior executives provide. But the ideal of human nature never happened; at least it hasn't happened yet, and our whole spiritual journey begins with trying to restore our executive faculties to their proper position in the firm. Because, as a result of our evolution and our emotional programs which tend to dominate reason, this floor is

really on top of this one [points to chart, indicating that emotions are above reason, intellect and will, instead of vice versa], and you should really change those if you're talking about our existential experiences. Our experience is being pushed around by the emotions rather than integrating them into our purposes. So, the chief job, you might say, of our active efforts to dismantle the false-self system is simply to restore order into this building and into the firm so that we can proceed intelligently. No firm is run by the junior executives except this one, and they don't have the slightest idea of what is best for us. They simply give an emotional judgment on life. And so as long as they are running the firm with their peevish or preposterous pretensions and their anxiety to avoid unhappy feelings and their charge towards every delight that comes down the stream of consciousness, they haven't the slightest idea of what happiness is. It's no wonder that our firm is in constant turmoil -- if they are up here and the executive faculties are submissive to them and follow them around like a dutiful little pet.

The first job is to right that disorder. And this is also the level in which the repressive material that we spoke of earlier in our conferences, as well as the superego, which is an important factor in our spiritual journey insofar as it limits our capacity to open ourselves to a re-evaluation of the values absorbed unconditionally in early childhood.

Let us now take a look at the Christian journey, the journey in which this ideal of human nature is gradually realized by restoring the hierarchy of faculties to their proper place; or, if you prefer the Evolutionary Model, the way that we evolve integrally by gradually moving from one level of consciousness to another; preserving what was good in the lower level and leaving behind its limitations. On this level of reason ["Main Street" on diagram] God approaches us, so to speak, the way everything else approaches us, through the external senses, by means of symbols, words, and rituals, and admonitions. And his strategy is to try to persuade our executive faculties to go upstairs and to assume responsibility and control of the firm which was the way they were originally intended to function.

The example of Jesus as a model of the spiritual journey appeals to our interior blueprint. Our emotions are moved by the good things we read about in the Gospel. And so, our cogitative sense, that is to say, the negative feelings we may have had about the spiritual journey, or God, or anything else that is valuable in the spiritual journey, begin to be changed by the experience of the sweetness, and the purity of the feelings that the love of God begins to infuse, even to the point of falling in love with God where one experiences the spiritual life almost as a romance, almost as a source of delight. This is what we call the springtime of the spiritual journey.

That's a period that we should not too easily avoid. People who have a low self-image tend to feel embarrassed when God shows some interest in them or when they feel lovey-dovey feelings. Now this is not the end of the journey, this sentimental relationship with God, but it may be very important in persuading our cogitative sense, which puts too great a value on pleasures of the senses that just can't compare with the spiritual beauty of the values that are infused when one experiences divine consolation in prayer. Now the emotions pour themselves out in appreciation, in gratitude, in consent to God's presence, and sometimes to the point where one almost feels as if

you could take all the pleasures of life and put them in the wastebasket compared to the wonderful experience of divine consolation.

This doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with the pleasures of life. It's just that they can't compete with the kind of reassurance or affirmation that comes through divine consolation. Now when these experiences have taken root, then comes that period of resting in God which allows these faculties of knowing intuitively and consenting to God at the deepest level to begin to function. And, from time to time, one's awareness moves to the stillpoint and if that experience becomes habitual, it tends to overflow into the rest of this household or skyscraper and one enters into union with God. Beyond the Mental Egoic, then, is this Intuitive level of relating to God habitually beyond thoughts, feelings, and particular acts in such a way as to kind of witness one's life taking place from a deeper place and that deeper place is the true Self which is beginning to be revealed or awakened by this journey of prayer and action.

What happens once this Transforming Union has been established and one moves into that stage of translating all of one's actions and relationships and into this level of consciousness which is the consciousness of being united with God, with Christ, day and night all the time, whenever one might want to refer to it or think about it? The Ground Unconscious means that one moves into an experience of unity with the Ultimate Reality. The Transforming Union is the death of the false self, but, at the same time, it is a union of our true Self. And one is aware of and in a union of self even if one doesn't have much interest in it. The "I" of the false self system has died or has relinquished its predominant position and the divine life with its inspirations is predominating and is pointing out what is to be done all the time. And since the emotions are now at rest, they offer no opposition to this movement of the Spirit. At this level, it seems that the Transforming Union can evolve into an even greater unity or experience of oneness with the Ultimate Reality which has now become the Ultimate Presence.

And in no way can a concept come anywhere near describing that experience, the experience of unity. Well, if that is attained, then the awareness that God is coming to us and is present at every level of our being and has always been there and can come to us through any experiences of the senses, the imagination, the memory, the intellect. In other words, the whole of the natural organism is suffused with this light, life and love in such a way that it begins to resonate throughout our internal senses and even our bodies with the sensitivity to the Divine Reality presenting itself in an infinite number of ways and now no longer mysterious, hidden or opaque, but open to the x-ray eyes of faith and welcoming us into the world of freedom, which is not freedom to do what we want, but freedom to do what God wants without thinking about it.

In other words, the Divine Will becomes the spontaneous movement or activity of every function, faculty, or level of our being. And thus, one also perceives in one's relationship a kind of transfiguration of relationships, so that one falls in love with everything and everyone because one perceives God at the deepest level of every other person and indeed of everything else. One sees all creation in God, including oneself, at this level of the Transforming Union.

At this further level of unity, one perceives God in all creation. And that means that at the same time that you perceive any reality, you perceive it in God and you perceive God first, you might say, so that the divine transcendence and immanence becomes a kind of transfigured life although it expresses itself without any fanfare, without any unusual experiences that people could see or perceive. There may be some that one would oneself perceive, but others look upon you maybe as just some ordinary Joe.

Let me conclude with this little tale that kind of points to that. This particular service of the poor, I believe, was located in Minneapolis or some big city, and it was designed to listen to street people. It wasn't exactly a soup kitchen because they didn't just want to give handouts. The vision was to invite street people to come in out of the cold and to enjoy the fire and to have a cup of coffee, but also to talk about their interests and needs, and to show an interest in them. Well, this one old gentleman, he tottered in, and he was talking with one of the staff who was a devotee of Fr. Merton, and he noticed that this man was interested in spiritual things. So, he said, "Well, here take this book. I think you'll like it. It's one of Fr. Merton's books, who was a great spiritual writer." And so, he said, "Well, Okay, I'll take it." He took the book and toddled off down the street.

And a few days later he reappeared at this facility and he saw the staff member and said, "Here, here's the book. Take it back. I'm not interested." And this man was kind of surprised because he thought this was a kind of spiritual person. So, he said, "Well, don't you know that Merton was a great writer? And I thought you'd get some inspiration from it." And the dear old gentleman said, "Look, I'm just not interested in it. Anybody who has any real experience of God keeps his mouth shut."