



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

“The Levels of Awareness”

Excerpted from

Invitation from God

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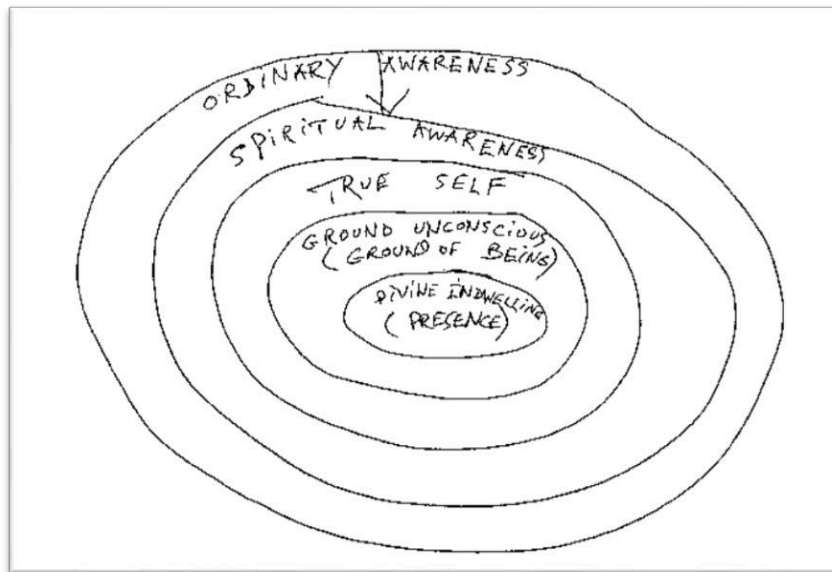
[Fr. Thomas' drawing of the levels of awareness appears on page 2 of transcript.]

Keating: Perhaps we might begin by offering you just a little bit of Christian anthropology.

Lefèvre: Yes.

Keating: That will provide a diagram that we can talk from a little bit more intelligibly. Let's begin with the ordinary psychological awareness that we all enjoy. I'll just write it out here. This is every day consciousness that everybody's familiar with. For most people, it consists of people and events entering into our consciousness or experience and leaving and our emotional reactions to people, events, and our own personal response that contain judgments, evaluations, commentaries. It's a kind of running dialog that goes on and on all day long. What especially characterizes it, is its dominating character. It's a little like being in a movie where the characters are so interesting; and the plot is well thought out that you identify with the characters and you do so, so much that you forget where you are or who you are. You're absorbed in the skill of the dramatist that captures your whole attention and emotionally too. Ordinary awareness, then, is not really free.

Suppose you move off of that level of awareness into a deeper level of our being which we might call spiritual awareness. This is the level of intuition and our spiritual will. It's the level of genuine freedom. That's the way human beings were designed to function with a certain freedom, peace, and joy and a certain capacity to decide what to do. As this spiritual awareness develops through Centering Prayer and manifests itself more and more in everyday life by this experience of freedom, our life begins to become like someone who is attending a lousy movie. That is to say, if you're attending a lousy movie, you don't identify with the characters or the plot and you can get up and leave at any time. It provides a marvelous bit of freedom and now the exercise of our spiritual will can become just as habitual as our lack of freedom used to be when we were under the domination of external events and our emotional reactions to them.



Another thing that the spiritual awareness does is open us to deeper levels of our being that we perhaps never had any suspicion existed. One of these might be called the true self which is another word for the image of God in which we were created. Which is God's idea of who we are manifested in our particular uniqueness. The true self is a more spiritual level of awareness in which even the intrusion of the residue of the habits of ordinary awareness begin to diminish significantly. We begin to be willing to accept ourselves just as we are. God is as God is and all reality as it is which is to come to terms with life. This is really what humility is which is basic disposition in the spiritual journey. The capacity to accept all reality: God, ourselves, other people, all creation as they are and as they manifest in this particular moment which is the present moment and its content.

Close to the idea of the true self and perhaps it could be looked upon as interchangeable, I won't go into the nuances of what might be described as their respective, distinctive characters, is the ground unconscious or the ground of being which is the in-most center of our being and the source of our rootedness in God and of God's creative activity in which He manifests himself in us, in our particular uniqueness. The inmost center is the divine indwelling. The present of our inmost center is really the very fullest development of the spiritual journey or of the gifts given us in baptism if you're a Christian which bring to full reality the prayer of Jesus that we might become one with God as He is one with God. He said, "The Father and I are one." This is actually the way things are. We just think it isn't this way.

The journey in large part is letting go of our ideas about God, the spiritual journey, and reality so that we can gradually awaken to these more inner experiences with God's presence and hopefully by the end of this life be able to be prepared to enter without any hindrance into the fullness of the Divine Presence and participate in what is meant by the divine in-dwelling which is the life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian life of God which is one of infinite love and infinite sharing of the Godhead along with the Trinity itself.