

# Moral Conversion and Resisting Temptation

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## Introduction

Spiritual conversion connects us with the heart of Christ – and this trusting and loving connection opens the way to all the other gifts of the “inner church” – peace beyond all understanding, guidance from the Holy Spirit, transformation in the heart of Christ, *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium*, and the sense of spiritual community (*Koinōnia*). Spiritual conversion occurs through regular participation in four major services of the “outer church” – reception of the Holy Eucharist in Holy Mass, listening to the Word of God, contemplative prayer, and participation in other forms of complementary inspiration. All of these gifts and perfection of the inner and outer church – given through the Holy Spirit – free us and help us toward moral conversion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes this as follows:

It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil.<sup>1</sup>

Our close connection with the heart of Christ that catalyzes the spiritual gifts of the inner church gradually transforms us -- conforming us ever more closely to the heart of Christ. St. Paul speaks of this transformation as moving from the fleshly man to the spiritual man (Rom. 8:5-11) – or moving from the old nature/man to the new nature/man (Eph. 4:17-24):

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles [ethnē – unbelievers] do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature [man -- anthrōpon] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature [man – anthrōpon], created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This quotation gives us the key to resisting temptation through Christian faith because we need only replace “thinking with our lower self” (our “fleshly self” or “the old man”) with “thinking

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1811.

through our higher self” (our “spiritual self” or “the new man”). This will be explained in detail below. For the moment, suffice it to say that Christians are not consigned to resisting temptation by using a stoic act of the will – a “no” to temptation; we can much more effectively fight temptation by simply moving our thought process from our lower to our higher self.

Though the Catholic spiritual and moral tradition offers a variety of paths to move from spiritual conversion to moral conversion – such as those of Saint Augustine,<sup>2</sup> Saint John Cassian,<sup>3</sup> Saint Benedict,<sup>4</sup> Saint John Climacus,<sup>5</sup> Saint Thomas a Kempis,<sup>6</sup> and Saint Ignatius of Loyola – I will concentrate on the path recommended by Saint Ignatius of Loyola – not only because I am familiar with it as a Jesuit, but because I believe he had a genius for integrating spiritual depth (contemplation) with the practical matters of will and action to serve God, His Kingdom, His Church, and His people.

Though St. Ignatius of Loyola was familiar with the works of St. Augustine, St. Benedict, and St. Thomas a Kempis (as well as other works of spiritual devotion) he probably had only a sketchy acquaintance with them at the time he wrote *The Spiritual Exercises* in a cave outside of Manresa (Catalonia, Spain). The *Exercises* were developed through reflection on his meditation and prayer in a period of rigorous asceticism devoted to detachment from the world and moral conversion. Hence they come more from his experience of relationship with the Lord in prayer than from reading other spiritual masters. This experiential background provided several advantages in helping others to deepen their conversion. First, he could speak not from somebody else’s experience, but from his own which enabled him to advise others confidently and practically about what might be helpful to them. Secondly, he could construct meditations that would be helpful for *both* spiritual conversion (deepening our relationship with Christ) and moral conversion (the hard discipline of detaching ourselves from the world and deepening humility). Thirdly, it would enable him to set out unique practical guidelines for spiritual discernment, interpretation of consolation and desolation in prayer, and the snares of the evil one

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (composed around 397 A.D.) presents an implicit path from spiritual to moral conversion. By recounting his own path from spiritual to moral conversion, Saint Augustine gave a kind of “prototype” to other spiritual writers who drew from its richness quite liberally. He also wrote a *Rule* for monastic life, but it is less oriented toward the development of the “inner man” than presenting rules for the ordering of a monastery.

<sup>3</sup> Saint John Cassian was a highly influential monk who brought the ideas of the Desert Fathers to the west and was an important influence on Saint Benedict – the Father of Western monasticism. He consolidated much of the thought of the Desert Fathers into a volume titled *Conferences of the Desert Fathers* (composed around 420 A.D.) which became a manual for the training of the “inner man.” It contains an early tractate on spiritual conversion and the path from spiritual conversion to moral conversion.

<sup>4</sup> Saint Benedict is the Father of western monasticism principally because his *Rule* (composed around 530 A.D.) is simple and takes a middle path between ascetical individualism and community life. Though his *Rule* is mostly concerned with the organization of monastic life and the monastery itself, the prologue in Chapter 7 (on the Twelve Stages of Humility) were highly influential in prescribing a path from spiritual to moral conversion.

<sup>5</sup> Saint John Climacus wrote the very famous work *Ladder of Divine Ascent* around 610 A.D. It contains 30 chapters detailing spiritual conversion and the ascent from spiritual conversion to moral perfection. It was highly influential in the West and contains detailed descriptions of the virtues and the Deadly Sins.

<sup>6</sup> Saint Thomas a Kempis’ classical work *The Imitation of Christ* (ca 1420) is one of the most popular and well disseminated books on Christian devotion – and is still quite popular today. It emphasizes spiritual conversion – particularly devotion to the Eucharist – and the first part of moral conversion – detachment from the world. Its path to detachment is through withdrawing from the world and its vanities, then pursuing interior conversion through asceticism, good conscience, and following the divine will.

that he believed would be part of most everyone's spiritual journey. Fourthly, he could set out meditations and guidelines for *individual* (instead of communal – monastic) approaches to spiritual and moral conversion. As the reader may have surmised, these advantages are ideally suited for our time and culture which highly values individuality, experience, and creativity.

I have taken the approach of first presenting spiritual conversion through the guidance of the Catholic Church and then moral conversion. St. Ignatius takes a more mixed approach in *The Spiritual Exercises*, blending spiritual and moral conversion. The first week (of four weeks) of the *Exercises* is devoted almost entirely to the first level of moral conversion – a firm resolve to move away from serious sin (a life controlled by desires for the eight deadly sins – particularly greed, lust, vanity, and pride). The second through fourth weeks focus on spiritual conversion (through Ignatius' contemplations on the life of Christ), and blending them with explicit meditations and rules for moral conversion such as the kingdom meditation, the Two Standards, the Three Degrees of Humility, and the three kinds of men. His instructions and rules to assist moral conversion include The General Examen, The Particular Examen, and three methods of prayer. The final contemplation (to attain divine love) and the rules for discernment of spirits (presented after the fourth week) are focused on synthesizing both spiritual and moral conversion.

These Ignatian insights into moral conversion can be fruitfully complemented by insights from philosophy and contemporary psychology. These additional insights provide an efficacious method for resisting temptation, reinforcing our "higher self," and building an identity based on virtue and the image of Christ.

We may now proceed to a discussion of the major elements involved in bringing moral conversion to deep and abiding fruition:

1. The Complementarity of Spiritual and Moral Conversion (Section I).
2. Resisting Temptation by Cultivating the Higher Self: A practical approach (Section II).
3. Spontaneous Prayers and Good Habits (Section III).
4. A shortcut for effectively resisting temptation (Section IV).
5. A caution to beware of the evil one after progress in moral conversion (Section V).

Evidently, deepening moral conversion will not be a steady upward slope. There will be times of failure, distraction, and perhaps extended periods of inattentiveness to this challenging process. This will require the Lord's unconditional merciful love through the sacrament of reconciliation and prayer. For the moment, let us proceed to the challenge of moral conversion.

## **I. The Complementarity of Spiritual and Moral Conversion**

Moral conversion – detachment from egocentricity and sensual pleasure -- presents a significant challenge. St. Paul tells us that it is likely to be a struggle even for those dedicated to holiness (like himself) until the end of our lives. As we shall see, this does not mean that moral conversion will not become simpler and habitual over the course of time – for it certainly will. It means only that we must be vigilant until our dying day – ready to ask for forgiveness from the

Lord of love when we fail and encounter setbacks. In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul proclaims in exasperation:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:15-25).

Saint Paul wrote this passage when he was a mature Christian in 58 A.D. – 23 years after his conversion in 35 A.D. and 9 years before his martyrdom in 67 A.D. Even after 23 years, he was tempted by various deadly sins – though it is difficult to identify which ones they were beyond his self-disclosed sin of pride (see 2 Cor. 12: 7).<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, as the Pauline author implies in the Letter to the Ephesians cited above (Eph. 4: 23-24) – we should continually try to replace the “old man” – our inclination toward the deadly sins -- with the “new man” – our identification with Jesus and the virtues he espoused:

Put off your old nature [man] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature [man], created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Spiritual conversion frequently precedes moral conversion because the closer we are to Jesus in relationship and prayer (spiritual conversion) the more we will want to imitate him in thought, word, virtue, and action (moral conversion). Yet the relationship between spiritual and moral conversion is not that simple. As we become more proficient at resisting temptation and living the Christian virtues (moral conversion), we open the way to an even deeper relationship with the Lord through prayer and sacraments (deeper spiritual conversion) which in its term, opens the way to the final stages of moral conversion – complete self offering to the Lord in evangelization and charitable service. St. Ignatius truly appreciated this cycle of spiritual and moral conversion, and designed the *Spiritual Exercises* to inspire and complete it. Before addressing the very important practical topic of cultivating the higher self and resisting temptation, we will take a closer look at the complementarity between spiritual and moral conversion seen through the lens of St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. We will do this in two steps:

1. **The Prioritization of Prayer and Discipleship (Section I.A).**
2. **The Cycle of Spiritual and Moral Conversion (Section I.B).**

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<sup>7</sup> We should not jump to the conclusion that Paul was tempted by sins of the flesh because he uses the word “flesh” in the above passage. This is a technical term that Paul sets in contrast to “Spirit,” and it means “an inclination toward sin of any kind.” This might be sins of the flesh, ego-centricity (vanity or pride), anger, impatience, etc.

## I.A The Prioritization of Prayer and Discipleship

As St. Ignatius implies, if we are to reach a deep level of moral conversion, we will have to get our priorities right. St. Ignatius states this incisively at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* in a meditation called “The First Principle and Foundation:”

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it. For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.<sup>8</sup>

Saint Ignatius’ priorities reflect the teachings of Jesus – “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Mt. 6:33). St. Ignatius wants the retreatant to go further – to understand what will be required in order to live for these priorities – namely, indifference to what might be called, “The things of this world.”

As we read his words, particularly his example of indifference – “So that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life...” – we might at first be overwhelmed by its seeming impossibility. We might be thinking, “How could I possibly be indifferent to sickness, poverty, dishonor, and a short life?”

If we focus solely on this phrase, we fail to grasp the whole context in which it is said – the real meaning intended by Saint Ignatius. So what is the whole context? It is his first statement that the true end of our lives is to save our souls – to be saved by our loving God. To do this, we will want to follow God’s will which means praying (praising and reverencing) and discipleship (following and serving). He recognizes that there will be two huge obstacles to prayer and discipleship in our lives:

1. Undue attachment to created things.
2. Spiritual evil (whom he refers to as “the evil one”).

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<sup>8</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ignatius/exercises>

So what is he asking of us in our pursuit of salvation? He is asking us first to prioritize our salvation (through prayer and discipleship) *above* any other created thing – even health, riches, honors, and a long life. He recognizes that if we truly prioritize prayer and discipleship toward salvation above everything else, we will direct everything else – health, riches, honors, and a long life -- to the end for which we were created – eternal life with the Lord of unconditional love.

For St. Ignatius then, the first step in moving from spiritual to moral conversion is to subordinate all worldly pursuits – the pursuit of health, wealth, honors (ego-comparative advantage), and a long life to prayer and discipleship for the Lord. This will enable us to continuously ask the question “Is my pursuit of health, wealth, etc. commensurate with my relationship with the Lord in prayer and my desire to follow Him?” Another way of asking this question is, “Is this particular pursuit interfering with my desire to pray and be a disciple of the Lord?” If so, then I have to find a way of modifying or modulating it so that it won’t interfere with my salvation or the salvation of others whose lives I touch. Notice that Ignatius does not expect us to *stop* a particular pursuit that seems to be interfering with prayer or discipleship but only to modify or modulate the pursuit so that it ceases to interfere with our higher priorities. We now have our first step in the movement from spiritual to moral conversion – to prioritize prayer and discipleship over worldly pursuits – and to continually ask the question, “Is this particular pursuit interfering with my prayer and discipleship?” If so, then modify or modulate it.

## I.B

### The Cycle of Spiritual and Moral Conversion

Though fear is sometimes thought to be the most powerful of all motivators, it is quite restricted by its negativity. It can produce a short-term jolt into action, but its antipathetic and depleting quality render it incapable of providing sustained motivation over the long term. Furthermore, fear will not bring us to the objective of spiritual and moral conversion which is *love*. The First Letter of John says this explicitly:

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us (1 John 4: 17-19).

In view of this, we might legitimately ask, “If fear is such a poor long-term motivator of Christian conduct, then why did St. Ignatius make recourse to it so pointedly in the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*?” For two reasons. First, St. Ignatius recognized that for people of the first week (who are committed to Level One materialism and Level Two ego-comparative advantage), an appeal to love would not work because they do not yet have an interest, let alone a cultivated desire, to be contributive or empathetic. He also recognized that this group was quite susceptible to motivation by fear, because the threat of losing eternal happiness – or being subject to eternal darkness and loneliness.

Nevertheless, Ignatius had no illusions about the long term efficacy of fear as a motivating power, because he intended to use this motivation for a very short time – to help people move from the first week (before spiritual and moral conversion) to the second week (the intention to deepen spiritual and moral conversion). When an individual moves to the second week, fear is no longer necessary to motivate him because he now has an interest in contribution and empathy, making him capable of being motivated by love for Christ and others.

The transition between the first and second week is generally *not* punctuated and clear cut. It is constituted by a period (that could be quite lengthy) in which the believer can vacillate between motivation by fear and by love. As the believer deepens his spiritual conversion, he is more susceptible to and capable of being motivated by love, at which point he becomes less motivated by fear – eventually ignoring it as a significant motivating influence. As this occurs, the believer begins to detach himself from egocentricity and sensual desires, removing the screens and blocks to his appreciation of the love and goodness of the Lord in creation, redemption, and the particular goods of his life. As his vision and appreciation of these goods becomes more acute, he is naturally overcome with gratitude for them and for the Lord who gave them to him quite gratuitously. At this point, he is ready to appreciate the fact that the Lord *Himself* wants to give His very self to him, which allows him to see himself as beloved. This incites one to grow in love and thanksgiving for the One whose love he is experiencing.

*Resistance to Temptation* is an integral part of this transition from fear to love – so we will need to discuss it in greater depth in Section II. For the moment, we need only get a general understanding of how the whole process from fear to love plays out.

When a believer first starts his spiritual journey, he is moved by a combination of the desire for salvation and a fear of losing it, but as he becomes more familiar with the Lord in spiritual conversion, he becomes more aware of the Lord's presence in his life – and he notices that if he slackens his commitment to participation in the Church or violates basic moral precepts, he feels an acute sense of spiritual emptiness, alienation, loneliness and guilt -- which moves him to re-commit himself to Church participation and moral propriety.

Yet the Lord is not content to leave the believer there. He sends people (frequently through church participation) into the believer's life to help him strengthen his conviction about His existence and presence, and the goodness and desirability of greater participation in the Church and deepened moral conversion. This might take several attempts by several people – all of whom might have some short term effects. Hopefully, the believer will discover that increased moral conversion has tremendous efficacy for his salvation, helping others to their salvation, and closer relationship with the Lord. If he makes this discovery, he will likely resolve to dedicate more of his life to religious participation, and to make an ever greater effort to resist temptation and sin. As he fortifies his resolve for the long term, the Lord will come to him with greater consolation, and he will experience a heightened sense of the Lord's presence, peace, home, and love – precisely as St. Ignatius states above.

The believer's deepened resolve leads to an ever-widening cycle of spiritual and moral conversion – his greater Church participation leads to increased resolve to resist temptation which leads in turn to greater love of the Lord. As the believer catches fire, he begins to resist

temptation more concertedly which in turn, opens him to the love and blessings of God around him. This leads to a greater love of the One who loves and blesses him, which in turn leads him to ever greater resolve to resist temptation – and the widening cycle continues.

The hardest and most important part of the above cycle is the believer's initial decision to increase his resolve to resist temptation. Though he can use some of the tools mentioned below (identity transformation and appropriation of virtue) to help him in a positive way, he still needs to make resistance to temptation one of the *highest priorities* of his life – resolving to bring it into every part of his day. Extremely active people may be reticent to make such a firm resolution because they may think that it will take time or sap psychic energy from the multiple commitments they have for work and family. However, this is really not the case. What is required is heightened awareness of one's vulnerabilities toward the eight deadly sins. This not only entails awareness of which sins one is most likely to commit, but being aware of the temptation toward that sin during the day. Just as soldiers are trained to be aware of the signs of enemy activity along a defensive perimeter, so also we must attend to the presence of temptations before our desire becomes significantly enkindled. If we catch our imagination and desire moving in these directions, we will want to put the threefold process for resisting temptation into practice – saying “no” for the sake of Christ, then “thinking with our higher self” (see Sections II.A & II.B), and then using spontaneous prayers to the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Michael to bolster the desires of our “higher self” (Section III.A). Though the first dimension of this process (saying “no” for the sake of Christ) is evident to most Christians, the second step may be less familiar, and so we will explain it in considerable detail here, for it is the key to unlocking Christian moral freedom.

When we are caught up in a sensual desire or egocentric emotion (e.g. anger, envy, or pride), it is not enough to use a merely negative assertion to stop it – even if it is for the noble motive of obeying and loving the Lord. Negative assertions have the same difficulty as fear in motivational efficacy – they are hard to maintain over the long term – and indeed they may be difficult to maintain for more than a couple minutes. This is where the second and third dimensions of the process – “thinking with the higher self” and spontaneous prayers – come into play. We will explain these dimensions of the process in Sections II and III respectively. If we become proficient in the second and third dimensions of the process, resistance to temptation will become easier and easier, and eventually, thinking and acting through the higher self will become habitual. At this point, we will be on the verge of actualizing St. Paul's “new man” – or “new nature.”

Not let us return to the spiritual cycle we have been discussing. If we become proficient in resisting temptation, then we will probably find ourselves drawn more to contemplative prayer and, like St. Ignatius, moved more deeply by the Lord's consolation – both affective and spiritual -- in that prayer.<sup>9</sup> Saint Ignatius tries to help this transition by suggesting contemplations to intensify *gratitude* which he knows will ignite the believer's love. Ignatius knew well (from his

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<sup>9</sup> The believer's progress in the spiritual life is generally reinforced by affective consolation through the Holy Spirit (see the quote on Ignatius about spiritual movements of the soul in this section). However, as the believer progresses more deeply in the spiritual life to greater and greater intimacy with the Lord, the Lord may choose to purify him through a “dark night.” This will decrease the believer's dependence on affective consolation and purify his love for God and neighbor.



own experience) that increased resistance to temptation will lead to decreased influence of egocentricity and sensual pleasure in the believer's life. This means that the believer will not have to suffer obstacles (from egocentricity and sensual pleasure) to recognizing the blessings he has been given by God and others. Now profoundly aware of those blessings, the believer is primed to be filled with appreciation and gratitude leading toward deepened love. Saint Ignatius hopes the believer will reach this state of increased resistance to temptation followed by increased openness to gratitude and love by the Third Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and so he spends an entire week on the Passion of our Lord, ushering him into profound gratitude for Jesus' whole gift of Himself for our redemption. In the Fourth Week, Ignatius goes further, presenting contemplations on the resurrection of Jesus, summing it all up with the contemplation to attain divine love. Here he leads the believer through the various kinds of blessings that will stimulate the believer's gratitude and love, telling him what to ask for:

Ask for what I want. It will be here to ask for interior knowledge of so great good received, in order that being entirely grateful, I may be able in all to love and serve His Divine Majesty.

The First Point is, to bring to memory the benefits received, of Creation, Redemption and particular gifts, pondering with much feeling how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He has, and then the same Lord desires to give me Himself as much as He can, according to His Divine ordination. And with this to reflect on myself, considering with much reason and justice, what I ought on my side to offer and give to His Divine Majesty, that is to say, everything that is mine, and myself with it, as one who makes an offering with much feeling.<sup>10</sup>

As the believer considers these blessings in the time and silence of the retreat, Ignatius hopes that he will be overwhelmed with gratitude and love, and will be moved to respond in kind – to love the Lord not merely in words and feelings, but also in action – the profound action of self-offering. So he proposes the following prayer, well-known to every Jesuit, *The Suscipe* (“Take Lord, Receive”):

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own.  
You have given all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it.  
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace,  
that is enough for me.

The believer's love of the Lord cannot help but intensify and deepen which will in turn lead to greater resolve to resist temptation. This increased resolve arises out of the believer's deepened desire to love the Lord and to avoid separating himself from Him. As noted above, love is the strongest and most long-lasting of all motivations – going far beyond mere fear,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid *Spiritual Exercises* “Contemplation to attain divine love.”

rational desire, and stoic acts of the will. As the Song of Songs states, love is even stronger than its opposing counterpart – egocentricity – and stronger than death itself:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned (SoS 8:6-7).

As the believer moves more deeply into this cycle of spiritual and moral conversion, he begins to transition from what the mystics call the purgative way to the illuminative way. Recall from our discussion of mysticism that this may entail a dark night of the soul. For those with a contemplative or monastic vocation, this dark night may last for a prolonged period, but for more active believers, such as Jesuits, these periods of purifying darkness from the Lord are generally shorter in duration. Indeed, Ignatius counsels those who are moving from this purgative to illuminative state to expect that consolation will soon return after this time of purification:

Let him who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, in order to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can with the Divine help, which always remains to him, though he does not clearly perceive it: because the Lord has taken from him his great fervor, great love and intense grace, leaving him, however, grace enough for eternal salvation. Let him who is in desolation labor to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him: and let him think that he will *soon be consoled*, employing against the desolation the devices stated above.<sup>11</sup>

As the mystics indicate, the cycle of spiritual and moral conversion continues into the illuminative way. Though it may be punctuated by periods of aridity and even “dark nights” (for the sake of purification) it is also filled with a remarkable capacity to resist temptation, divine consolation in peace, and a purified state of love directed not only toward the Lord, but also to His people – and this after all, is the objective of the spiritual life – the road to sainthood.

## II.

### **Resisting Temptation and Cultivating the Higher Self: A Practical Approach**

The firm resolve to resist temptation in all its forms (whether it originates in us or through a malevolent spiritual power) is central to moral conversion and the subsequent deepening of spiritual conversion. Virtually every spiritual master considered this dimension of moral conversion to be one of the most difficult and most essential dimensions of conversion – and so I would consider this section to be one of the very most important parts of this book. I will present a three-fold approach to resisting temptation that combines insights from spiritual masters (particularly St. Ignatius) and contemporary psychologists (particularly Dr. Mark Leary and Dr. Albert Bandura). This is explained below in this section.

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<sup>11</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* “Seventh and Eighth Rules for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul” in <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2017/01/the-spiritual-exercises-of-st-ignatius.html>

Before explaining this three-step process, it may prove helpful to briefly consider the Ignatian spiritual context of temptation and our resistance to it.

In his consideration of temptation in the General Examen, St. Ignatius recognized not only the need to empower resistance to temptation, but also to use this empowered resistance as quickly as possible – before a temptation captivates our thought, inflames our desire, and becomes difficult to resist at the moment of decision.<sup>12</sup> Spiritual conversion (relationship with the Lord) is not enough. We must still contend with persistent temptations toward the deadly sins. Indeed, we might say that the evil one intensifies his efforts to make us fall into one or more of the deadly sins precisely because our initial successes at spiritual and moral conversion makes us his adversary, distances us from his dark intentions, and opens us to the inspiration and will of the Holy Spirit. As long as we are haplessly playing into the evil one’s intentions (what St. Ignatius calls “people of the first week”), the evil one need only stoke the fires of our own misaligned desires, but once we decide to prioritize prayer and discipleship above worldly pursuits (what Ignatius calls “people of the second week”), we become a real problem to the enemy of our human nature – Satan. Jesus warns us that this could occur at the very moment that we try to put our spiritual and moral house in order:

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first (Lk. 11:24-26).

Obviously Jesus is not trying to discourage us from cleaning up our spiritual and moral households. So what is He saying? He is warning us that when we embark on the path to moral conversion by taking the first step of prioritizing prayer and discipleship above all other things, we can be sure that our enemy, the devil will do everything he can to undermine and discourage us. He is almost like an obstreperous evil border at our home. When we evict him, he screams back at us “How dare you! I’m going to do everything I can to undermine you for this indignation!” The evil one’s disposition is hostility and he will not hesitate to manifest this even when we are being protected by the Holy Spirit through our attempt to deepen our spiritual and moral conversion.

Make no mistake about it – the Holy Spirit will also intensify his efforts to inspire, guide, and protect us, particularly when we resolve to prioritize divine pursuits over all worldly concerns. Yet the Holy Spirit will not undermine our freedom -- and so He will allow the evil one to continue tempting us and even to intensify those temptations. Yes – the Holy Spirit will also intensify His graces and inspirations – so much so that it can become like an overwhelming “first fervor.” However we must be alert – the evil spirit will find ways to undermine our resolve to prioritize prayer and discipleship, intending not only to set us back to where we were before, but also to discourage us, undermine our trust in God, and push us back even further than where we were before we embarked on the journey to deepen moral conversion.

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<sup>12</sup> See Ignatius of Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* – First Week, “Particular and Daily Examen.”

St. Ignatius addresses these movements of the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit in people of the first and second week, showing how each spirit works within the souls of both groups:

In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin [people of the first week], the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures, making them imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason. In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord [people of the second week], it is the method contrary to that in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing.<sup>13</sup>

We can expect that the above three-step process of resisting temptation will be quite effective if we stick to it – not only because it is based on sound spiritual theology and psychology, but also because it will be supported by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, as we embark on this journey of deepened moral conversion, we must expect that the evil one will resist our efforts by intensifying temptations, distracting us from prayer, and discouraging us – provoking both resentment and depression. To think otherwise would ignore not only the advice of St. Ignatius, but Jesus Himself. In view of this, we should reflect on the determination of the evil one in frustrating our efforts:

[The evil one] behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defenses of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.<sup>14</sup>

Bearing this in mind, we will now discuss the three-step process for resisting temptation:

1. Saying “no” for the sake of Christ.
2. Appealing to the desires and thought processes of our “higher self,” and
3. Using spontaneous prayers to reinforce our “no” and “higher self.”

The first step – saying “no” to temptation for the sake of Jesus (as quickly as possible) -- may seem to be self-evident, but there is more to saying “no” than “just saying ‘no’.” As we shall see, cultivating our “higher self” (needed for the second step of the process) adds tremendously to the power and effectiveness of our “no” -- so do our spontaneous prayers. This will become

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<sup>13</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* “First and Second Rules for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul” in <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2017/01/the-spiritual-exercises-of-st-ignatius.html>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid -- “Fourteenth Rule for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul”.

evident as we explain the cultivation of our higher self (Sections II.A&B), and the practical use of spontaneous prayers (Section III.A). We will then circle back to the first step – saying “no” for the sake of Christ after you, the reader, have begun the process of cultivating the higher self. If you have started this process in earnest, you may be pleasantly surprised by how powerful and efficacious your “no” and prayers have become. Now all you need to do is stick with it – and deepen it.

As you increase your resistance to temptation, you will reengage the cycle of spiritual and moral conversion, and you will very likely find that your relationship with Christ (through the sacraments and prayer) has become quite close. You will also experience a marked increase in affective consolation (punctuated by periods of affective desolation). This will lead to an intensification of your desire to serve Christ, his kingdom, his church, and his people – particularly the temporally and spiritually poor. As you continue to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and your heart, you will move toward the illuminative way through Ignatian mysticism (contemplation in action).

## II.A Cultivating the Higher Self

In the above discussion about resisting temptation, we noted that we could bring three forces to bear against it – saying “no” for the sake of Christ, “thinking with the higher self,” and using spontaneous prayers. We said there that cultivating the higher self would empower our “no” to temptation substantially. We also noted that St. Paul (see Eph. 4:22-23 and Col. 3: 9-10) and many other spiritual writers<sup>15</sup> recognized that we have two selves dwelling within us – a lower self and a higher self, and further recognized that we can develop and reinforce this higher self in order to more easily and effectively resist temptation.

As we shall see, temptation has great power over the thoughts and desires of the *lower* self, but has very little power over the thoughts and desires of the *higher* self (the virtuous, Christ-like self). Thus, if we can develop and reinforce our higher self, and bring it to bear in times of temptation, we can disempower the temptations coming from both our imagination and from the evil spirit. In order to explain this, we must discuss three topics:

1. What is the lower self and the higher self? (below in this Section).
2. Using visualization and affirmations (techniques coming from Dr. Albert Bandura) to develop and reinforce the higher self (Section II.B).
3. Using St. Ignatius’ Daily Examen to reinforce the higher self (Section II.C).

So what is meant by “the lower self” and “the higher self”? As noted above, St. Paul’s view of “the old man” and “the flesh” may be put into modern terminology as “the lower self” and his view of “the new man” and “the spirit” as “the higher self.” At first glance, St. Paul’s idea of the old man and the new man may seem ambiguous or even confusing, but a proper

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, St. Augustine Sermon LXIV; see also St. Augustine *The Teacher*, Books I – III. The “new man” is also the underlying rationale for St. Thomas a Kempis’ approach to temptation in *The Imitation of Christ*. St. Ignatius of Loyola has this clearly in mind throughout his contemplations on the life of Christ in the *Spiritual Exercises*. He seems to have discovered this independently of St. Augustine and St. Thomas a Kempis -- through his own reading of the *Life of Christ* and his conversion experience in the Cave of Manresa.

explanation of them will reveal how efficacious they can be in resisting temptation and conforming ourselves to the image of Christ. Before discussing the role of St. Paul’s “new man” (the higher self) in resisting temptation, we must first explore the contemporary notion of “the self.” The term “self” has a rich recent history in both philosophy and psychology, but this is beyond the scope of our current exploration. For the moment, we will focus only on an aspect of the “self” which is pertinent to the topics of resisting temptation and self-transformation.

So what is meant by “self” in the expressions “lower self” and “higher self”? “Self” refers to the persona-personality-identity which our self-consciousness can appropriate to define itself. When it does so, the particular persona-personality-identity gives definition and character – conveying feelings, desires, character attributes and thinking processes—to self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> We are not indeterminate acts of self-consciousness without direction and focus – like Descartes’ “*Tabula Rasa*” (blank tablet). We are born into the world with two “generic selves” – sort of like “starter kits” that our self-consciousness can appropriate to focus our feelings, desires, character attributes, and thinking patterns.

## II.A.1 The Lower and Higher Self as Natural and Essential

In Volume I of the Quartet (*Finding True Happiness* – Chapter 1), we spoke about several natural human powers connected with Level #1, #2, #3, and #4 desires. We saw that the lower brain, limbic system, and biological instincts enabled us to feel pleasure and pain, forming the basis for Level #1 (sensual-material) desires. We also discussed the power of self-awareness or self-consciousness to form our own “inner universe,” and how this power stands at the foundation of our Level 2 (ego-comparative) desires. We also saw how the powers of empathy and conscience focus our self-consciousness on love and the good, which forms the foundation of our Level #3 (contributive) desires. Finally, we discussed the five kinds of transcendental awareness and desire for perfect truth, love, justice/goodness, beauty, and home which focus us on the sacred, the eternal, the highest forms of truth, love, and goodness, and the awareness of the supernatural and God. These form the basis of our Level 4 (transcendental) desires.

Now let us return to the two “generic selves” – the two “starter kits”-- that we are born with. We not only have the above powers and desires, we seem to have them self-organized into personas-personalities-identities that our self-consciousness can appropriate and use. A “persona” (a term used frequently in theater) designates the feelings, character attributes, desires and thinking processes of a character that an actor is attempting “to play.” This term can be applied to the “generic selves” we are born with, but the generic selves are more than this. They are optional dimensions of our psyches which are more than characters in a play. They are like optional personalities or identities that our free self-consciousness can appropriate. When it does

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<sup>16</sup> See Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith 2011 “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity” in *Handbook of Self and Identity* ed. by Mark Leary (New York: Guilford Press).

See also Richard Ryan and Edward Deci 2011 “Multiple Identities within a Single Self: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization within Contexts and Cultures” in *Handbook of Self and Identity* ed. by Mark Leary (New York: Guilford Press).

See also Mark Leary, ed 2011 *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Guilford Press). This volume is widely recognized as the definitive fieldwork on self and identity.

so, the “selves” bring an affective and cognitive organizing framework to our self-consciousness which focuses us on certain feelings, desires, character attributes and thinking processes. As the reader may have guessed, the “lower-self” (the lower persona-personality-identity) is connected with Level 1 and Level 2 desires, imagination, and thinking processes. Conversely, the “higher-self” (the higher persona-personality-identity) is connected with Level 3 and Level 4 desires, imagination, and thinking patterns.

Infants and children have a strong lower self, and a weaker, unrefined, higher self. Though children are not sophisticated in their sensual desires and ego desires, (Level 1 and Level 2), they can be quite strong in their unsophisticated desires—seeking sweets, playtime, and insisting on “having it their own way” (ego fulfillment).<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that children do not have a higher self—for they have empathy for parents, siblings, and friends,<sup>18</sup> and a sense of nobility and guilt (associated with conscience)<sup>19</sup> and a strong unrefined natural sense of the spiritual and God.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout human history, sages and philosophers have advised parents to cultivate morality and piety in their children, which is particularly evident in Jewish Wisdom literature,<sup>21</sup> Plato,<sup>22</sup> and Aristotle.<sup>23</sup> These authors recognized the need to cultivate the desires and thinking patterns of the higher self (through education and the development of virtuous habits), because they tend to be weaker than the Level 1 and 2 desires of the lower self (which gives immediate, surface apparent, and intense gratification). Children have to be pried away from these immediate and intense gratifications and taught the more pervasive, enduring, and deep benefits of the higher self (Level 3 and Level 4 desires).<sup>24</sup> If they make the transition, they are likely to have a much higher quality of life that does considerable good for individuals and culture as well as the kingdom of God.

As St. Paul implies, there is a strong likelihood that we will be caught between the lower self (the “old man”) and the higher self (the “new man”) for a long period of time. Paul experienced this double-self for at least 28 years -- and probably longer (see Romans 7:15-30 – and the explanation below in Section III.A). The image of these two selves in conflict has been humorously portrayed in dozens of cartoons. I recall from my childhood a particularly vivid

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<sup>17</sup> See Violet Kalyan-Masih 1973 “Cognitive Egocentricity of the Child Within Piagetian Developmental Theory.” *Transactions of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences* (Paper 379)

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1382&context=tnas>

See also Jean Piaget 1977 *The Essential Piaget*. Ed. by Howard E. Gruber and J. Jacques Voneche (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).p.137

See also Piaget, Jean 1930 *The Child’s Conception of Physical Causality* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company).

<sup>18</sup> Jean Decety, et al 2008 “Who Caused the Pain? An fMRI Investigation of Empathy and Intentionality in Children” *Neuropsychologia* (Vol. 46, pages 2607-2614) for a summary of the results, see “Children are naturally prone to be empathetic and moral” in *University of Chicago Bulletin* (July 11, 2008)

<https://news.uchicago.edu/article/2008/07/11/children-are-naturally-prone-be-empathic-and-moral-university-chicago-study-shows>.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Coles 1986 *The Moral Life of Children* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press)

<sup>20</sup> See Robert Coles 1990 *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin)

<sup>21</sup> Sirach 6 & 30; Wisdom Ch 1-5

<sup>22</sup> See Plato *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *The Republic* (Books VI and VII)—Which concern education in virtue, piety, and immortality.

<sup>23</sup> See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2 *Politics* Book 7

<sup>24</sup> See Spitzer 2014 *Finding True Happiness* (Ignatius) Chapter 3.

image of Fred Flintstone who had a small figure of himself with a halo and wings standing above his right shoulder, and another small figure of himself with devil's horns and a tail above his left shoulder. As he considered a mischievous deed, the two selves gave counsel – each according to his appropriate desires and thinking processes. Strange as it may seem, this portrayal is not far from the reality many of us experience when we are in that long developmental period where both selves seem to coexist on an equal level. Even though the higher and lower selves tug at our self-consciousness with seeming equality, one will win – and when it does, it will incite us to action.

A serious and profound portrayal of this process is given by J.R.R. Tolkien through the creature Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*. His higher self (portrayed as the young man, Sméagol) feels pity for the hobbits and sympathy for their noble mission, but his lower self (portrayed by the old and withered Gollum) is mesmerized by his desire for and addiction to the power of the ring as well as his anger toward the hobbits. As he debates with himself, his facial and vocal expressions change from Sméagol to Gollum and back again. Ultimately his lower self wins, and he resolves to betray the hobbits (who had in many ways become his friends) and take the ring for himself. It is said that Tolkien actually wept as he created this scene – because every man (like Sméagol) has the capacity to reach his higher self and complete a noble mission, but so many (like Gollum) do not – preferring instead to lapse into their addictions to the deadly sins (the power of the ring).<sup>25</sup>

Plato illustrates how every human being (starting with the young) must manage the opposition between these two selves in his dialogue *Phaedrus*. He uses the image of a charioteer to indicate self-consciousness, an unruly winged-horse to symbolize the lower self, and a noble winged-horse to symbolize the higher self:<sup>26</sup>

Of the other souls that which best follows a god and becomes most like thereunto raises her charioteer's head into the outer region, and is carried round with the gods in the revolution, but being confounded by her steeds she has much ado to discern the things that are; another now rises, and now sinks, and by reason of her unruly steeds sees in part, but in part sees not. As for the rest, though all are eager to reach the heights and seek to follow, they are not able; this one striving to outstrip that. Thus confusion ensues, and conflict and grievous sweat. Whereupon, with their charioteers powerless, many are lamed, and many have their wings all broken, and for all their toiling they are balked, every one, of the full vision of being, and departing therefrom, they feed upon the food of semblance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Winter's 2015 in *Wisdom from The Lord of the Rings*, <https://stephencwinter.com/2015/12/15/a-scene-which-caused-tolkien-to-weep-as-he-wrote-it/#comments>.

<sup>26</sup> *Phaedrus* 246a-254e.

<sup>27</sup> Plato 1961 *Phaedrus* trans. by R. Hackforth in *Plato: Collected Dialogues* ed by Edith Hamilton (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 248a.



The charioteer who is able to give preeminence to the noble steed (the higher self) and can control the unruly steed (the lower self) will reach the realm of the gods, becoming like them. However those who do not succeed in giving preeminence to the noble steed (the higher self) will allow the unruly steed to create confusion and turmoil in the soul. Ultimately the turmoil and conflict hurts both steeds (laming and de-winging them), which renders the charioteer powerless. These individuals never reach the highest levels of enlightenment, purpose, fulfillment, and destiny—they are consigned to the world of the appearances (sensuality and egocentricity).

Though Plato did not have the benefit of St. Paul's spiritual insights (e.g. the old man versus the new man) or the insights of contemporary psychology,<sup>28</sup> he had a remarkable intuition into self and personal identity as well as the higher and lower selves within each individual. As we shall see, this insight—complemented by Christian spirituality and the psychological insights into self, identity, and the subconscious mind—can lead us to a remarkably efficacious way of resisting temptation and transforming ourselves into the image of Christ.

## **II.A.2 Reinforcing the Natural Higher Self with Sacraments, Prayer, and Christian Practice**

St. Paul recognized that when we are baptized into the mystical body of Christ—through which we receive the Holy Spirit—our higher self is elevated by these two gifts, however he also recognized that the lower self (the pull toward sensual desire and egocentricity) does not go away (see Rom 7:15-30). He calls the lower self “the flesh” and the higher self—enhanced by its participation in the mystical body and the Holy Spirit through Baptism—“the spirit.” Though the enhancement of our higher selves (through the urgings and guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as communion with the saints through Christ's mystical body) is quite powerful, it does not take away what St. Paul called “the flesh”:

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (Rom 7:18-19)

Later Church fathers called St. Paul's “flesh”, “concupiscence” (the tendency to act unreflectively in accordance with the lower self toward sensual pleasure and egocentricity).<sup>29</sup> Church tradition establishes that concupiscence does not go away after Baptism—however the fruits of Baptism (the gifts of the Holy Spirit and participation in the mystical Body) can help us

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<sup>28</sup> See for example Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith 2011 “Self, Self-Concept, and Identity” in *Handbook of Self and Identity* ed by Mark Leary (New York: Guilford Press)  
See also Mark Leary, ed 2011 *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Guilford Press).

<sup>29</sup> See St. Augustine, “The Free Choice of the Will”, in “The Fathers of the Church”, vol. 59: “Saint Augustine: The Teacher, The Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will”, trans. Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968) 63-241.

See also St. Augustine *Confessions* trans and ed by Henry Chadwick 1991 (New York: Oxford University Press) Book VII.

significantly to resist the urgings of the lower self (“concupiscence”) by making the higher self more preeminent—if we cooperate with those fruits in our thoughts and actions.<sup>30</sup>

The gift of Baptism makes resistance to temptation and self-transformation toward the higher self more manageable. We are not constrained to join what Plato called the fate of most people who fail to give preeminence to the noble steed over the unruly one (losing control and relegated to life in the lower realms). Baptism gives, as it were, the noble steed (the higher self) a significant spiritual advantage—if we cooperate with and cultivate the fruits of that gift. This is why young children, after Baptism, can have significant spiritual experiences and insights. I will use my own experience to explain these gifts of Baptism and their effects in enhancing the higher self.

I recall from my youth the Catechism classes before my First Holy Communion, and then the special day when I received the Lord for the first time. Though I was happy with all the attention given to me by family and friends, I also had a deep interior conviction that this was spiritually significant and important to my salvation—and it brought me a joy—a spiritual joy—beyond the temporal joys of being the center of family and friends and receiving gifts. I suppose I recall it as my first conscious spiritual awakening. My religion was always important to me, but after receiving my First Holy Communion, I became reflectively aware of the priority that God and religion should be in my life. I knew I was a different person—though I did not know how or why. Looking back on it, I would have to say that this event galvanized the *sensus fidei*—one of the gifts of my Baptism—within me.

On that occasion, I received my first Catholic picture Bible which offered other galvanizing religious experiences. I would gaze upon the pictures of that Bible as if I were entering into the scene, and after staring at it for a while, would have the same sense of how important God and my religion were to me—almost as if they were becoming best friends and even a part of my inner world. I loved reading other stories—and listening to Mrs. Paxton tell us stories in school and in the library. Though I entered into the scenes of these stories too in my imagination, they did not have the same effect on me as the Bible picture and stories, for I did not want to make the characters or the surrounding cultures a part of my interior life—they were simply not that important. I knew that religion was more important to me than for many of my friends at school, but I did not think much more about it.

After receiving First Holy Communion, Catechism classes became much more important. I really loved learning the faith even more than I loved Arithmetic and other favorite subjects, and look forward to Saturday mornings when my father would take us to church for those classes. After class (before our mothers picked us up) many of us would have discussions about the topics of the class, thinking through the implications of the little sayings we had memorized from our *Baltimore Catechism*. Several of us were able to advance the core teachings from the Catechism beyond anything discussed in class. We not only were concerned about whether these views were correct, but also had a sense—both individually and collectively—about whether they were or not. I did not have these remarkable discussions with all my friends, because I did not go to a Catholic school. Many of my friends, though Christians, were not baptized, and many others, were not Christians (I grew up in Honolulu where there was a considerable diversity of

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<sup>30</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1264.

religions and first generation Asian cultures). Though I loved the school I attended (because of wonderful friends and education), I looked forward to my Saturday morning Catechism classes to re-engage in the theological discussions that animated me and my “church friends.”

In about the fifth grade, I became an altar boy and noticed a significant heightening of theological discussion and conviction with my friends who were in the knights of the altar. My service as an altar boy seemed to galvanize the *sensus fidei* that characterized my earlier life and discussions at Catechism class, giving them a sort of preeminent importance in my life. I really cared about my salvation, about Christ, the Church, Christmas, Easter, the New Testament readings I heard, and even the Masses I attended. I knew interiorly that these were not only important to my mother, but also to Jesus—and to me.

In about the sixth grade, my mother took us to a Good Friday service, and I was quite moved by the Passion account of Jesus, kissing the Cross, and receiving Holy Communion. I felt after the service that I was somehow saved, and that Jesus really cared about me—that His Passion and Death were *for me*. I was in a state of consolation for the rest of the day—indeed for the rest of the Easter Triduum. When I told one of my fellow “Mass Servers” about this, he said he had had a similar experience—so I decided to see if this was fairly commonplace at my school. It was not, and in fact, some of my buddies thought that I was getting “a little too religious.” I thought to myself, “I can bring this matter up with other Mass servers, but I better refrain from talking about it with other people—they just don’t seem to “get it.” In hindsight, I see the graces of my Baptism—particularly the *sensus fidei*—progressively working on my interior life *and* my higher self. The more I progressed in my religion and spiritual practice, the more convinced I became about the importance of God, Jesus, and religion—from First Holy Communion, to the picture Bible, to the Catechism classes, to serving at Mass, and in the Good Friday Service.

My progress continued through the seventh and eighth grades. I wore my religious medals proudly and was quite willing to explain their significance to my friends at school, using them as an opportunity for evangelization—to convince my friends to take greater interest in God and religion. I never entered into a debate with someone of another religion, respecting their love for God and the spiritual life. However, I truly felt the need to tell those who were non-religious about God and my understanding of the faith. I was amazed by the questions people asked, and I always seemed to have an answer that helped them. Half the time, I would think to myself—“I didn’t know I knew that!” Again the fruits of Baptism were galvanizing my higher self, and I was becoming progressively more interested in God, the Church, theology, prayer, spreading the faith and defending the faith. Like the Parable of the Talents, the more I used what I had, the more I seemed to get—not only the *sensus fidei*, but also my sense of God’s presence and love.

When I went to the Academy (ninth through twelfth grades), I already had a reputation for being the “religion guy.” I remember my friend saying to his friends, “If you have any questions about religion or ethics, just ask Spitzer.” I was only too happy to provide answers that came half from my education—and half from my interior life. In retrospect, I still think they were fairly good answers—definitely the Holy Spirit galvanizing the *sensus fidei* within me. I also became a lightning rod for a few individuals who were antagonistic to religion (though

some, I'm convinced, were really seeking to know God, but too afraid to admit it in public). They would always come up to me with a really sneaky question; "Well, God created Hell, didn't He?" to which I would say "Of course," this would be quickly followed by, "Well, God knows everything in the future?" I knew where this was going, but I responded truthfully—"Yes." And then, they would try to tighten the noose—"Well, isn't it much worse to be in Hell for all eternity than to never have been born?" I would of course say yes and expect their conclusion—"What kind of a God do you believe in—that would knowingly create a person who is destined to go to Hell for all eternity?" This led to a long excursus on human freedom—and why the person who goes to Hell has chosen it (because he believed it would make him happy—a place of pure sin and self-worship). I read some of these responses from my mother's theology books (including some by Fulton J. Sheen). The nuanced philosophical mind of Archbishop Sheed inspired my creativity and theological defense—far beyond my natural abilities.

My last two years of high school were challenging because I was exposed to several works of atheistic existentialist literature for which I had not yet developed a proper philosophical response. Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and *The Plague* really disturbed me. This disturbance was greatly enhanced by reading Elie Wiesel's *Knight*. I began to question my faith, looking for some proof for God—a particularly a loving God as preached by Jesus—but was unable to find any from teachers or priests beyond a cryptic mentions of some proofs of Aquinas. Unfortunately no one could direct me to the original texts of these proofs, so I was caught between a very strong interior conviction about God's existence, presence, and love on the one hand and some challenging intellectual questions and doubts on the other. Though I could not find the proof I needed in high school, I did not abandon my faith. Why? In retrospect I would attribute this "little miracle" to the interior gifts (particularly the *Sensus Fidei* that I was given through my baptism, reception of Holy Communion, and participation in the Church and evangelization). Later in college I did discover several proofs of God from metaphysics and contemporary physics as well as an explanation for suffering given by C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*. As I entered more deeply into intellectual conversion during those years, the gifts of the Holy Spirit became even more powerful. After some retreats and teaching a catechism class, I took off like a shot out of a canon into spiritual conversion. This led to my interest in the Jesuits and the priesthood—and along with it, my desire to pursue deeper moral conversion.

As I look back on those early years, I am left with one singular conviction -- if I had not been Baptized, had not regularly attended Church (receiving Holy Communion), and not entered into the life of evangelization, prayer, and defense of the faith, my "higher self" would be in a state of quasi-infancy, and as a result, I think my spiritual and moral conversion would have likewise been quite limited. Thinking back on Plato's analogy, I am sure that without my Baptism and practice of faith, I would be one of the charioteers that fell to the ground because I would not have been able to give preeminence to the noble steed and control the unruly steed. I would have been lamed, de-winged, and living in the lower regions. This is what motivates me to continue my apostolate of evangelization and defense of the faith today—particularly the doctrine of infant Baptism and early reception of Holy Communion. I can't imagine where I would have been without them—no fire in my heart, no conviction in my soul, no confidence in a loving eternity, and a severely underdeveloped higher self.

Let us review for a moment where we have come. Like St. Paul, Plato, Tolkien, and many contemporary psychologists and philosophers, I would contend that we have two selves – two personae–personalities-identities – that organize feelings, desires, character attributes, and thinking processes through which our self-consciousness intentionally acts – the lower self and the higher self. The lower self is organized around Level 1 desires for pleasure (coming from the limbic system and lower brain) and Level 2 desires (coming from self-consciousness in combination with the limbic system). The higher self is organized around Level 3 desires (arising out of our capacity for empathy and conscience) and Level 4 desires (arising out of our five transcendental desires for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home). Initially the two selves are generic, but the lower self is more powerful than the higher self. When children are encouraged to develop their Level 3 and Level 4 desires (through empathy, moral education, and religious practice), their higher self begins to emerge – and if they mature in these practices through education, inspiration, and appropriation of virtue, the higher self will eventually equal and better the lower self. However, if little attempt is made to encourage Level 3 and Level 4 desires, the lower self will gain in power, causing it to overshadow the higher self. This can frequently lead to superficiality, addiction, the habitual practice of deadly sins, and even criminal behavior.

We noted above that both the lower self and higher self are natural dimensions of the human psyche, and that the higher self can be enhanced through Christian baptism, Holy Communion, and the practice of Christian faith. We also noted two corollary truths. First, if the higher self is not cultivated, the lower self (which is quite susceptible to temptation) will grow in influence and power. Secondly, even when we do cultivate the higher self, the lower self will persist for a significant period of time (co-existing as it were, with the higher self). However, the longer we continue to cultivate the higher self, the stronger and more habitual it will become – while the lower self correspondingly diminishes in influence and strength. This puts us in a position similar to that of St. Paul who experienced an increase in the “new man” for 28 years, but nevertheless continued to feel himself subject to the “old man” – “the flesh.”

Thanks to some advances of contemporary psychology, particularly in the area of subconscious identity and self-efficacy, we have the opportunity to accelerate the process of strengthening the higher self. St. Ignatius of Loyola discovered a process for doing this in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (from his own spiritual journey) called the “daily Examen.” Before discussing it below (in Section II.C), we will discuss two contemporary techniques for enhancing the higher self from Dr. Albert Bandura – visualizations and affirmations (Section II.B) These techniques can be folded into the daily Examen for optimal effectiveness. If we practice all three of these techniques, they will galvanize and enhance the fruits of our spiritual conversion (baptism, reception of the sacraments, and practice of prayer) as well as the initial fruits of our moral conversion (our study of the deadly sins and the virtues, and our resolve to resist temptation).

## **II.B Using Visualization and Affirmation to Develop and Reinforce our Higher Self**

Two insights from contemporary psychology can help us accelerate and enhance the development of our higher self:

1. The discovery of the subconscious mind.
2. The use of visualization and affirmation to condition the subconscious mind toward self-efficacy.

These techniques for self-efficacy can be used beyond the domain of developing and strengthening the higher self. They can, for example, help us overcome unnecessary inhibitions produced by fears, low self-image, self-loathing, and habitual patterns of low-efficacy (by changing our subconscious self-image). Though these topics are beyond the scope of this analysis, they can be fruitfully studied in the works of Dr. Albert Bandura and Lou Tice cited below. In this article, we will restrict ourselves to the topic of how to conform our subconscious self-image to the desires, character attributes, and thinking patterns of our higher self.

Some of the best work on enhancing self-efficacy through the conditioning of the subconscious mind has been thoughtfully and arduously set out by Stanford psychologist, Dr. Albert Bandura. He has not only developed a generic process of enhancing self-efficacy,<sup>31</sup> but also applied it to the topic of moral agency.<sup>32</sup> Though he does not apply this work specifically to the area of resisting temptation, it can be easily adapted to this purpose by using it to explain the insights of Christian spiritual masters like St. Paul,<sup>33</sup> St. Augustine,<sup>34</sup> St. Thomas a Kempis,<sup>35</sup> and St. Ignatius Loyola.<sup>36</sup> In brief, Bandura's work explains in great depth the power of strong self-image, cultivating it in both the conscious and subconscious psyche, and using it to direct efficacious behavior. Lou Tice has popularized some of these insights, providing some techniques to help appropriate strong self-image subconsciously through visualization and affirmations.<sup>37</sup> I will give a brief summary of these findings and apply them to the specific challenge of resisting temptation. Three topics are germane to this discussion:

1. How does strong subconscious self-image work to direct behavior toward efficacious ends?
2. Using visualization to begin the process of cultivating a strong Christ-like subconscious self-image.
3. Using affirmations to cultivate a strong Christ-like subconscious self-image.

## **II.B.1**

### **How Does Subconscious Self-Image Work?**

With respect to the first point, how does strong subconscious self-image work to direct our behavior naturally toward efficacious ends? We might begin by defining the subconscious mind. As most psychologists recognize, the conscious mind can only attend to or focus on a

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<sup>31</sup> See Albert Bandura, 1997. *Self-Efficacy: The exercise of control*. (New York: Freeman).

<sup>32</sup> Albert Bandura 2002. "Selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency". *Journal of Moral Education*. 31 (2): 101-119

<sup>33</sup> Eph 4:22-23 and Col. 3: 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> St. Augustine. *The Teacher* Books I-III.

<sup>35</sup> St. Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Books III and IV in which Jesus is in dialogue with His disciple instructing him on how to imitate Him in mind and heart.

<sup>36</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* -- the Second through Fourth Week. St. Ignatius asks us to place ourselves in contemplations on the life of Christ that we might become like him through relationship with him.

<sup>37</sup> See Lou Tice 1990 *Smart Talk* 2003 (Provo, UT: Executive Excellence Publishing).

limited amount of perceptual and intelligible data at any given time, so much of the data of experience and memory is screened out of the purview of consciousness. However, not all of it is screened out of the active psyche. As hypnosis and various therapeutic techniques have revealed, the psyche can apprehend a considerable amount of experiential data on which consciousness is not focused and can retain this data in what might be called “subconscious memory.” Hence a person might have been involved in a serious accident, and when asked to describe what happened, give only a vague account of what transpired without significant details. However, under hypnosis, it is revealed that he apprehended and remembered far more about the accident than the data focused on by consciousness.

Furthermore, the subconscious mind can introduce data and emotions into the motivational framework of an acting subject – mostly unbeknownst to him. For example, a person might see a car resembling the one that hit the family car when he was a little boy. Though he may be consciously unaware of the pain and fear he felt at the time, his subconscious mind may have appropriated and remembered it, associating it with that model of car. Later when the boy has become an adult, he might see a similar model of car and find himself trying to avoid it because of an almost unrecognized fear and anxiety.

Thus, we might say that the subconscious mind is an active part of the human psyche lying underneath the conscious psyche that attends to perceptual data, emotions, and other cognitional impressions that it remembers and associates with elements from a particular experience. When stimulated by those elements (e.g., subconsciously remembered data, emotions, and other impressions), the subconscious can introduce strong feelings (e.g. fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, aversion, etc.) into the active psyche, affecting motivation and behavior not consciously chosen by an acting agent. These subconscious emotions can have deleterious effects on self-efficacy by blocking or interfering with our conscious rational choices. However, subconscious data and emotions can also be positive because it allows for creative associations giving rise to creative discoveries (called “the creative subconscious”). A positive subconscious self-image can also help direct our behaviors in positive ways, because as we shall explain, we move naturally (without effort) toward that subconscious self-image.

Some examples may prove helpful here with respect to a negative or non-efficacious self-image, we might think of the example of a golfer who is on the front nine holes of a challenging golf course, and is effortlessly achieving par on every hole. He suddenly thinks to himself, “this is totally unlike me—I’m not anywhere near a par golfer.” As Lou Tice would say, “Don’t worry, your subconscious mind will take care of the incongruity between your performance and your negative self-image. At the 18<sup>th</sup> hole you will be ten strokes above par (poor performance). You will have moved naturally and effortlessly toward your negative subconscious self-image—who you believe yourself to be.

We could give the opposite example as well. A golfer could be out on the front nine holes, and be golfing at a very sub-standard level. If he does not panic in the midst of competition, he might think to himself, “I’m better than this.” Frequently enough, his positive subconscious self-image will remove the negative impressions he feels about his past

performance, and he will move naturally and effortlessly toward the higher range of his capability.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, a positive self-image will not allow a person to perform better than his intrinsic capacities, but it frequently helps us to reach the high end of our capacities. Why is this? Because a self-image that underestimates our true capacity can prevent us from reaching that capacity. It introduces feelings of doubts and anxiety into our motivational and behavioral framework, causing nervousness—what some call “choking”—while we are moving our plans into action. If we can remove those feelings of doubt and anxiety, by adjusting our self-image, before putting our plans into action, there is a strong likelihood that we will perform more efficaciously—on a higher level of quality, creativity, and productivity—quite naturally.<sup>39</sup>

I have known several people throughout my life who had excellent capacities for articulation and organization, but would tell me that they were “bad public speakers” or “suffered from writer’s block.” I recognized right away that this was not a problem of intrinsic capability, but rather with their self-image. Some teacher had told them in the first or second grade that they were not good speakers or writers, and they believed those teachers—so much so that they dutifully etched this self-image into their subconscious mind. Sure enough, every time they were called upon to do public speaking, they began to feel quite nervous—even feeling constriction in their throats and vocal chords—almost paralyzing them to the point of fainting. The same held true for people with supposed “writer’s block.” Like the “poor” public speakers these people had experiences of having a great difficulty writing in the fourth or fifth grade. They remembered these experiences, thinking to themselves, “I just can’t write—nothing comes out.” In the meantime, they became avid readers of both fiction and non-fiction, and prove themselves quite organized in their thought. Nevertheless, every time they sat down to write, their subconscious mind took care of it—nothing came out.

I have recommended Lou Tice’s book, *Smart Talk*, to these individuals, particularly the sections on visualization and affirmations<sup>40</sup> (described below) to help them adjust their needlessly negative self-image. After working on this, I helped them break speech writing and prose writing into small achievable steps—and the result was amazing. Some of them became very creative and productive speakers and writers—not from an increase in intelligence or talent, but from simply removing the negative elements in their self-image. I have helped people to overcome “mathematics blocks” and “social blocks” through the same method.

The reader may be thinking, “Well that’s all great, but I don’t have a problem with self-efficacy in golf, speaking, writing, mathematics, or social events. What does this have to do with the subject at hand—namely resistance to temptation and becoming more virtuous?” As it turns out, subconscious self-image is just as important to character development (acquisition of virtue and resistance to temptation) as it is to efficacious use of skills and actualization of goals – because reinforcing our higher self by conscious choice alone is not enough. We have to

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<sup>38</sup> See Albert Bandura 1997 *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman) pp.36-61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> See Lou Tice 2005 *Smart Talk for Achieving Your Potential* (Seattle, WA: The Pacific Institute Publishing) Chapters 1-3.

See also Albert Bandura 1997 *Self-Efficacy* pp. 79-159.



complement our conscious choice to enhance our higher self with deliberate conditioning of our *subconscious* self-image. As the reader may by now have discovered, forming our *subconscious* self-image is not as simple as *consciously* choosing a particular self-image. The former entails changes to our previous subconscious self-image which in turn requires conditioning the subconscious mind to a new self-image as well as repeated choice and action (explained below).

If we make a *conscious* choice to give preeminence to the higher self without reconditioning our *subconscious* self-image to conform to that choice, Our subconscious mind will resist our subconscious choice, and in the end, it will probably win. Why? Unfortunately our subconscious self-image has a “default drive” toward the *lower self* coming from our childhood desires, pleasures, and experiences.<sup>41</sup> Even though we learn how to regulate the lower self in adulthood to become socially acceptable, the “lower self” still exerts considerable influence over our behavior because our subconscious self-image still continues to come from our childlike desires, pleasures, and experiences. As we shall see, if we do not recondition our subconscious self-image to conform to the higher self, it will keep its old propensities and resist the higher self in our beliefs and behaviors. Thus, if we are not to be continually hampered by the intrusion of the lower self when resisting temptation and appropriating virtue, we will have to make a concerted effort to change our subconscious self-image to match our conscious choice to emphasize the higher self. The work of Dr. Albert Bandura (and Lou Tice) on self-efficacy can be quite useful.

As noted above, if we do not re-orient our subconscious self-image toward the higher self – allowing the lower self to have continued significance in our behavior – we can expect our bifurcated psyche to fail in most of its resolutions and to be unsuccessful in resisting temptation – particularly when we are lacking in psychic energy (e.g. we are tired or stressed). Thus the sooner we endeavor to reorient our subconscious self-image toward the higher self, the sooner we will have greater success in resisting temptations and completing our resolutions.<sup>42</sup>

As might be expected, a subconscious self-image oriented toward the higher self, will have the opposite effect of our default drive (i.e., a subconscious self-image oriented toward the lower self), because it will reinforce our conscious choices to resist the deadly sins and act virtuously (in the image of Christ and the saints). When our subconscious self-image has been strongly reconditioned toward the higher self, resistance to temptation can be quite simple. All we really need to do is say to ourselves, “I am going to act according to my noble, virtuous, saintly, Christ-like self” – or some other rephrasing similar expression – “I am going to act according to my loving, respectful, generous, saintly, Christ-like self.” As we shall see, our choice of wording for this expression should conform not only to the virtues to which we most naturally relate, but also to the virtues that resist the deadly sins to which we are most vulnerable.

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<sup>41</sup> Freudian psychologists call this dimension of the psyche, the “id” which was later called “the child” by transactional psychologists. For Freud, the id works to satisfy *basic* urges, needs, and desires, operating on the pleasure principle which seeks Level 1 satisfaction – what is immediately gratifying, surface apparent, and intense in pleasure.

<sup>42</sup> Some individuals may successfully complete resolutions and resist temptations without changing their subconscious self-image toward the higher self, because they feel pressure from employers, social networks, family, etc. But this kind of success – due to fear and pressure – will probably be unsuccessful in the *long term* because their subconscious self-image will continue to resist the higher self. Furthermore, fear and social pressure are exhausting which motivates most individuals to free themselves from it in the long term.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves here. For the moment, suffice it to say that the more strongly we associate our subconscious self-image with these virtues, the more quickly our simple declaration (that we are going to act according to our higher self) will become effective in resisting temptation.

Louis Pasteur said “chance favors the prepared mind.” We might adapt this statement to our purposes by noting that “resistance to temptation and virtuous conduct favor the reconditioned subconscious self-image (toward the higher self).” Given its importance in moral conversion, we must now discuss how, according to Bandura and Tice, we can recondition our subconscious mind. They recommend two techniques:

1. Visualization (Section II.B.2).
2. Affirmations (Section II.B.3).

St. Ignatius’ daily Examen can also be helpful in this process (Section II.C) as well as spontaneous prayers (Section III.A). Let us begin with visualization.

## **II.B.2 Visualization**

Lou Tice summarizes the process of visualization in transforming our subconscious self-image as follows:

You will never accomplish all that you dream, but you will seldom accomplish anything that you don’t envision first. So, think in terms of ideals; compare your ideals with your current reality; establish what you want; find models of what you want to become; and visualize yourself achieving your desired end result.<sup>43</sup>

We might deduce three steps in this process:

1. Find an ideal (virtue).
2. Find a model of this ideal.
3. Visualize yourself as having reached the ideal.

The first step may be accomplished by studying the table of deadly sins and counteracting virtues presented below. Given the fact we cannot appropriate all virtues in a single attempt at visualization (because we have a limited amount of psychic energy and concentration), we will have to be strategic about selecting the virtues (what Tice calls “ideals”) we want to start with. How might we best do this? Recall what St. Ignatius says about how the evil spirit tempts us:

the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds

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<sup>43</sup> Lou Tice *Smart Talk* p.20

us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.<sup>44</sup>

If we are to avoid being spiritually attacked where we are weakest and most vulnerable, we will have to counter the evil one’s strategy by cultivating the virtues that best help us to resist the deadly sins to which we are most vulnerable. For example, if we are most vulnerable to the sin of anger, we will want to start the process of visualization with the virtues of patience and forgiveness – and the subordinate virtues supporting it – gentle-heartedness, respect, and compassion. If we are most vulnerable to lust, then we would want to start the process of visualization with the virtue of chastity and the subordinate virtues supporting it – covenant romantic love, respect for others, and temperance. If we are most vulnerable to the sin of pride, we will want to start with the virtue of humility and the subordinate virtues supporting it -- contributive/transcendental identity, respect, and compassion.

Now study the table given below, identify the deadly sin to which you are most vulnerable, and then focus on the virtues that counteract it.

<b>Eight Deadly Sins</b>	<b>Counteracting Virtues</b>
Gluttony/drunkenness	<b>Temperance</b> (natural virtue)
Greed	<b>Generosity</b> —sub-virtues--contributive and transcendental identity as well as gratitude
Lust	<b>Chastity</b> – sub-virtues--covenant romantic love, respect for others, plus temperance
Sloth	<b>Zeal</b> – sub-virtues--contributive and transcendental identity plus fortitude (natural virtue)
Vanity	<b>Modesty</b> –sub-virtues-- contributive and transcendental identity and respect/humility
Anger	<b>Forgiveness and/or Patience</b> – sub-virtues--gentle-heartedness, respect, and compassion.
Envy	<b>Gratitude</b> —sub-virtues-- contributive and transcendental identity respect for others and humble-heartedness
Pride	<b>Humility</b> – sub-virtues--contributive and transcendental identity, respect for others and compassion

After you have studied the descriptions of the virtue and sub-virtues on which you are focused, you are ready to proceed to Tice’s second step—finding a role model who exemplifies this virtue and the subordinating virtues. Evidently, Jesus is the prime role model of every virtue, so we can use St. Ignatius’ technique of contemplating on scenes in the life of Christ in which Jesus exemplifies these virtues. There are multiple examples of Jesus’ gentleheartedness, respect and compassion for sinners; His compassion in sharing Himself with the sick, poor, possessed, sinners, His total humility in offering Himself up as a sin offering and pascal sacrifice (taking the place of sacrificial animals); His prayerfulness and complete confidence in the Father manifested throughout His ministry, and His chastity in promoting the sanctity of marriage and living and

<sup>44</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola *Spiritual Exercises*-- “Fourteenth Rule for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul”.

promoting celibacy. It might be useful to read one or more of the narrative versions of the life of Christ to get a better “feel” for how Jesus lived these virtues. There are several excellent ones, such as, Fulton J. Sheen’s *Life of Christ* (Image/Doubleday), Archbishop Goodier’s *The Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Mediatrix), his *Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Scepter), Romano Guardini’s *The Lord* (Regnery), and Pope Benedict XVI’s three-volume series on Jesus of Nazareth (Ignatius Press).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The three-volumes: *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*; *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism to the Transfiguration*; *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*

Some people may also benefit from finding a role model from among the many saints of the Catholic Church. Rather than trying to identify a saint who seems to exemplify a particular virtue or virtues, I would suggest finding a saint or saints to whom you feel attracted or drawn – with whom you naturally identify. In my case, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Peter Canisius, and St. Thomas More (among the earlier saints) and Blessed John Henry Newman and Venerable Fulton J. Sheen (among the more contemporary saints) have not only inspired me, but also attracted me—to the point of imitation. If you, the reader, identify with certain saints, you may want to read a good hagiography about them, then look at how they lived the virtues, and then proceed to Lou Tice’s third step—visualization.

So what does visualization entail? As you might expect, it is rather difficult to imitate the saints you most admire. Evidently, these saints lived in different times and so the point is not to visualize yourself imitating them in that time, but trying to visualize yourself having the same virtues that led to their holiness of life and effectiveness in the apostolate. We know in faith that these saints are interceding on our behalf *right now* within the mystical body of Christ, and so we should pray for their inspiration to become like them in prayer, discipleship, and above all, virtue. The more we read about these saints and pray for their intercession, the more lucidly we will be able to identify with them, and envision ourselves having—not necessarily their talents, but their virtues. By doing this, we place ourselves in the same position as St. Ignatius Loyola in the early part of his spiritual and moral conversion when he read a *Life of Christ and Lives of the Saints* during his recovery. He began to visualize himself being like these saints and desired to imitate them in virtue and discipleship. He describes this process in his own words:

While perusing the life of Our Lord and the saints, he began to reflect, saying to himself: "What if I should do what St. Francis did?" "What if I should act like St. Dominic?" He pondered over these things in his mind, and kept continually proposing to himself serious and difficult things. He seemed to feel a certain readiness for doing them, with no other reason except this thought: "St. Dominic did this; I, too, will do it." "St. Francis did this; therefore I will do it."<sup>46</sup>

Of course we need not have the resolve of St. Ignatius in order to obtain the benefits of visualization, but the more resolve we have, the more we will identify with our favorite saint, and the more we do this, the more our subconscious mind will appropriate the mentality of that saint. The more closely we subconsciously identify with this saint, the more we will naturally (and effortlessly) move toward their mentality—particularly their deep love of the Lord, their desire to serve Him, and the virtues springing from them--zeal, fortitude, respect and compassion for others, humbleheartedness, temperance, chastity, generosity and modesty. We might imitate St. Ignatius in ruminating on what it would be like to have the faith and heart of our favorite saints. As we do this, we might find ourselves subconsciously appropriating their saintly mind-set, precisely as St. Ignatius did. The more we visualize ourselves emulating these saints, the stronger our subconscious identification will become, creating, as it were, “the new man” within ourselves.

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<sup>46</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola *Autobiography of St. Ignatius* ed. by JFX O’Connor  
[http://s3.amazonaws.com/manybooks\\_pdf/rg\\_new/loyolas2453424534-8pdfLRG.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/manybooks_pdf/rg_new/loyolas2453424534-8pdfLRG.pdf)

We might think it presumptuous to view ourselves as saints – as already having a “saintly higher self.” We might even believe it to be appropriately humble to say, “I am no saint” or “I am no saint yet.” However, I believe those humble statements to be at least partially incorrect, because, as noted above, we are all born into the world with a *soul* inclined toward Level 3 and Level 4 desires<sup>47</sup> – and these Level 3 and Level 4 desires – these higher desires – are the underpinning of our higher self (as explained above in Section II.B.1). Furthermore, when we are baptized, receive the sacraments, and act within the Church (Christ’s mystical body), we strengthen our higher self (as explained above in Section II.A.2). This means that every human being has a “saintly self” in potencia, and every baptized and practicing Christian has a partially actualized “saintly” self. The more we practice our faith and deepen our spiritual conversion, the more we strengthen our “saintly self,” but we need not stop there. We can also work on conforming our *subconscious* self-identity to our saintly higher self by visualizations, affirmations, and spontaneous prayers.

Visualization is particularly effective in doing this, because it is almost natural to imitate someone we respect, admire, and have even grown to love. Imitation after all is the sincerest form of flattery. The more we study, admire, and love a particular saint, the more we begin to imitate them *in our subconscious mind*. Here’s the problem—when we are reading a hagiography about someone we admire (and with whom we identify), we begin the process of subconsciously imitating them, but if we don’t reinforce this admiration and love after we finish the hagiography, our subconscious imitation begins to fade. So how do we reinforce it?

One effective way is to visualize ourselves imitating this saint in their love for God, love for God’s people, their desire to serve God, desire to be virtuous, and desire to be self-sacrificial. You the reader may be thinking, “Why is he repeating the word “desire” three times and the word “love” twice? Is he being more than ordinarily verbose?” The answer lies in the fact that we cannot really imitate the thoughts and actions of a particular saint who very likely came from a different culture and an earlier time. The world has changed, and we have changed with it. However we *can* imitate quite well the *desire* of saints to serve and the love they had for the Lord, which has a remarkable effect on forming and reinforcing the higher self in our subconscious mind.

The more we can visualize *ourselves* being like a particular saint in his/her love for God and desire to serve, the more we will naturally imitate them subconsciously. Imitating extraordinary love for God and desire to serve others (Level 3 and Level 4 desires) will naturally reinforce the “higher self” within our subconscious mind. The more we visualize ourselves loving and serving heroically, the more our subconscious mind will naturally imitate the desires of the higher self. It will also weaken the dominant grip of the lower self which, as

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<sup>47</sup> Recall the evidence for the soul from Volume II of the Quartet (*The Soul’s Upward Yearning*). In addition to the evidence from near death experiences, Gödel’s Proof, self-consciousness, and conceptual ideas, we showed that the awareness needed for our five transcendental desires (for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home) requires some form of *transphysical* agency (beyond physical processes). Thus, our five transcendental (Level 4) desires require a soul through which to appropriate their objectives – and the powers of this transphysical soul belong properly to the higher self. So also do the powers of empathy and conscience that give rise to Level 3 desires.

noted above, tends to be stronger than the higher self in children, adolescents and adults who have not chosen to do otherwise.

It seems that Divine Providence led St. Ignatius of Loyola to do this quite naturally—without benefit of any insights from contemporary psychology—while he visualized himself imitating Jesus, the Apostles, St. Dominic, and St. Francis in his hospital bed. Almost five hundred years later, his form of contemplation is being vindicated by insights from those relatively new disciplines. Ignatius’s voice echoes throughout the centuries with one more insight to complement contemporary psychology. When we visualize ourselves imitating the mindset (the love and desire to serve) of the saints, we not only form our subconscious mind *naturally*, the Holy Spirit also takes the occasion to reinforce our love and desire through consolation (grace). This probably explains why St. Ignatius was able to move from a dominant lower self to a dominant higher self so rapidly during his stay in the hospital. Recall that his transition was so profound that it led him to abandon his worldly goods, go to the cave outside of Manresa, and undergo a remarkably profound interior purification through his evolving method of spiritual exercises. In view of this, I would recommend visualizing ourselves imitating the love and desire of the Apostles (in Scripture) and our favorite saints. The Lord—and our subconscious mind—will not disappoint us.

This opens the way to Lou Tice’s second recommendation for creating our new identity—*affirmations*.

### **II.B.3 Affirmations**

Recall for a moment the reason we want to conform our subconscious self-identity to the character attributes of the higher self -- to resist temptation. By now the reader will be quite familiar with our threefold process to resist temptation:

1. Asserting “no” for the sake of Christ.
2. Thinking, feeling, and acting with our higher self (“putting on the new man”).
3. Using spontaneous prayers to reinforce our higher self and our resistance to temptation.

Recall from above that temptations appeal to the lower self, and derive their power from it. The more influential the lower self is within our psyche, the more power temptation has over us. The more we cultivate our higher self (by conforming our subconscious identity to it and repeatedly acting through it), the more we will naturally use its higher thought processes, feelings, and character attributes. This will *disempower* the suggestions of temptations because the higher self has “little interest” in sensual and egotistical feelings, desires, and thoughts. Simply shifting from the thought processes of the lower self to those of the higher self – of the mature, noble, loving, faith-filled saintly self--greatly empowers our “no” to temptation because of the higher self’s detachment from them.

Even if our lower self becomes initially engaged by a temptation, we can quickly dispel it by a voluntary shift to the mindset of the mature, noble, saintly, higher self—*if* our subconscious

identity has successfully appropriated our higher self by visualizations, affirmations, and spontaneous prayers.

The above strategy is the only one that will work over the long term; for if we do not conform our subconscious identity to our higher self we can only reject temptation by a *conscious* act of the will which is continuously mitigated by our lower self's feelings, desires, and character attributes within our *subconscious* identity. Inasmuch as this scenario forces us to fight with ourselves continuously, it will make resistance to temptation a struggle with a very protracted prospect of success.

So if we are to extricate ourselves from needless interior fighting (between the conscious and subconscious mind) and appropriate an easier, more successful method of resisting temptation, we will want to reinforce our higher self within our subconscious mind by every means possible. We have already explored the effectiveness of visualization for doing this, and contemporary psychology offers one more important tool—affirmations. We will address a spiritual tool in the next section—spontaneous prayers. For the moment, we will want to focus on affirmations.

Lou Tice summarizes this technique as follows:

Affirmation means the exercise of faith and belief in your inherent potential, imagined ideal, desired result, and set goal. You affirm them as if they were presently realized in your life. Affirmation applies to every step: You apply positive, proactive thinking to create vision, shift attitudes, see options, seize opportunities, expand comfort zones, and build teams and organizations.<sup>48</sup>

Using techniques derived from Dr. Bandura's work on self-efficacy,<sup>49</sup> Tice explains how to reinforce the ideals and models we have chosen for our new subconscious identity. The objective is to write a simple one-line statement about the ideal, model, or virtue (of the higher self) one wants to subconsciously reinforce. Though our treatment of affirmations will focus solely on ideals that reinforce the higher self within the subconscious mind, we can use Bandura's techniques to reinforce other kinds of ideals—such as, goals of performance, life-style, athleticism, work performance, etc. So long as the goals do not surpass our intrinsic physical, emotional, and/or intellectual capabilities, affirmations can reinforce them in our subconscious mind which will help us to move naturally and almost effortlessly toward those goals. Since our focus is on cultivating the higher self in our subconscious mind, we will restrict our discussion of affirmations to this area.

Though Tice does not restrict the number of affirmations one can have, the limits of psychic energy and concentration will probably dictate that the first three affirmations will create a stronger impression on the subconscious psyche than additional ones beyond them. Before discussing how to use affirmations, we will want to discuss how they work and how to write them.

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<sup>48</sup> Lou Tice *Smart Talk* p.3.

<sup>49</sup> See Albert Bandura *Self-Efficacy* pp. 36-78.



As Tice implies in the above passage, affirmations should be stated in the *present tense*—as if the desired ideal is already a reality. Though we will address this in more detail below, we must clarify one important aspect of Tice’s assertion—namely that we are not affirming a fiction about ourselves. You the reader might be a bit nervous about writing an affirmation stating a desired goal in the present tense—e.g., “I love God and desire to serve Him like St. Ignatius of Loyola.” You might want to say, “Well that’s not truthful—I don’t have St. Ignatius’ love of God or his freedom to serve—right now. After all, this is my desired *ideal or goal*.” Truthful as this may seem, it is also partially false.

Recall from our discussion of visualizing the mentality of the saints above, that Baptized and practicing Christians already have a partially actualized “saintly higher self.” We noted there that if we are reading about this saint—admiring their love of God and others—we are already in the process of imitating them in our subconscious mind. Hence it is not untruthful to say that we already have within us St. Ignatius’ love of God and desire to serve Him. Your affirmation statement therefore is only *reinforcing* a truth about your higher saintly self which is already in the process of imitating St. Ignatius. We may now give some simple rules for how to write affirmations—and then move to the topic of why they work.

There are two dimensions to writing an affirmation—first, selecting the content and secondly, writing them in a first person, positive, emotionally engaging way. We will begin with the first dimension—selecting content for the affirmation. We can focus the content of our affirmation on either a *person* we want to imitate or a *virtue* we want to appropriate. Since we do not want to write a negative affirmation (explained below), we will want to avoid selecting a person whose conduct we do not want to imitate, for example, “I am *not* like Adolf Hitler” or “I am *not* like Ted Bundy.” For the same reason, we will want to avoid focusing on vices that we don’t want to appropriate, “I am *not* proud” or “I am *not* envious.”

With respect to persons we want to imitate, we can profitably begin with the saints we most love and admire—and have already begun to visualize being like. When we write the affirmation, we may want to include a particular attribute of this saint as well. So for example, we might write the following affirmations:

- “I am like Jesus in my gentleness of heart.”
- “I am like Jesus in my sincere respect for others and their freedom.”
- “I am like Jesus in my forgiveness of others after they have insulted or harmed me.”
- “I am like Jesus in the chasteness my heart and life.”
- “I am like St. Ignatius in my tireless commitment to build the kingdom of God.”
- “I am like St. Ignatius in my commitment to prayer.”
- “I am like St. Peter Canisius in my desire to bring the truth of Christ to the world.”
- “I am like St. Thomas More in my fidelity to defend the Church even at the cost of my life.”
- “I am like St. Paul in my commitment to chastity and obedience to follow the example of Jesus.”
- “I am like St. Paul in my deep love of Christ and my desire to follow Him.”
- “I am like Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in my commitment to use every means possible to evangelize the world.”

By associating a particular virtue with the Lord or a saint we admire or love, we create a natural affinity between that virtue and our subconscious mind. The more we repeat our affirmation, the stronger this affinity becomes, which has the benefit of strengthening both the virtue and the higher self within our subconscious mind. This strong subconscious self-image will prove invaluable for resisting temptation.

Beyond imitating the Lord or a saint we admire or love, there is another very powerful way to reinforce virtues and our higher self within our subconscious self-identity—namely, associating the virtue with our positive reason for wanting it—e.g., “for the sake of building the kingdom,” “because I love the Lord,” or “in order to imitate the Lord I love, etc.” When we use this method, we will probably want to concentrate on the virtues we need the most. I recommend that readers focus on the deadly sins to which they are most vulnerable and then select the virtues that are opposed to it. In view of this, you may want to return to the table of deadly sins and opposing virtues given above in the previous section and select the virtues on which you want to concentrate. For example, if you are working on the deadly sin of anger, you will want to focus on the virtues of patience, forgiveness, and their supporting virtues; if you are working on vanity, then the virtue of modesty and its supporting virtues; if pride, then the virtue of humble-heartedness and its supporting virtues, etc. Once you have made a selection, then you will want to write a positive present tense affirmation associating this virtue to yourself along with your reason for wanting it. You may also want to concomitantly associate the virtue with one of the sub-virtues on the above table. So, for example, if you are working on chastity, you might write the following:

- “I am chaste to respect others and their salvation.”
- “I am chaste in imitation of Jesus my Lord.”
- “I am chaste to respect my wife and our family.”
- “I am chaste to consecrate my sexuality to the Lord I love.”
- “I am chaste to consecrate my sexuality to my wife and family.”
- “I am chaste to please the Lord I love.”
- “I am a chaste man to be in the company of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”
- “I am chaste because it is the right thing to do.”

Some people prefer to associate a virtue with themselves by supporting it with a reference to their personhood—such as “I am a man who...”; “I am a gentle-hearted person who...”; or “I am a patient woman who...;” etc. If this helps you to identify with a virtue, then try the following forms for your affirmations:

- “I am a chaste man to respect others and their salvation.”
- “I am a man who is chaste to please the Lord I love.”
- “I am a chaste man in imitation of Jesus my Lord.”
- “I am a woman who is chaste to respect my husband and our family.”
- “I am a chaste woman to consecrate my sexuality to the Lord I love.”
- “I am a chaste woman to consecrate my sexuality to my husband and family.”

The objective is not only to reinforce the virtue in the subconscious mind, but also to associate the virtue with positive emotion which frequently comes from a noble cause, a sense of integrity, admiration for a role model, love of Christ, and love of the Blessed Virgin or one of the saints.

One last point should be mentioned to prevent a frequently made mistake. Since we want our affirmations to be stated in the present tense (explained below), we must avoid using the expression, “I want to...” in our affirmations. Phrasing the affirmation this way inadvertently pushes it into the future—at which point your subconscious mind does not interpret it as your *present* reality. So, for example, we will not want to say:

- “I *want* to be chaste to please the Lord I love.”
- “I *want* to be gentle-hearted to be like St. Francis.”
- “I *want* to be humble for the sake of the Lord I love.”

You will probably recognize the problem of phrasing the affirmation this way. By saying that you *want* a particular attribute, you are saying to yourself that you do *not* have that attribute now, which suggests to your subconscious mind that you are *not* a chaste person, a humble person, etc. This is precisely the opposite of what you *want* to do.

We may now consider the topic of how to write affirmations—and some additional pitfalls to avoid along the way. Recall the four essential points mentioned above:

1. Every affirmation should begin with “I” – the first person singular pronoun. Failure to use “I” will render the affirmation powerless to affect our subconscious identity (explained below).
2. Every affirmation should be phrased in the present tense—“I am,” “I am like,” “I have,” etc. Any affirmation written in the future tense or as an aspiration or wish (e.g., “I want”) will be powerless to affect our subconscious identity (explained below).
3. Do not introduce *negative* content into the affirmation: e.g., “I am chaste to avoid being sinful” – or “I do not want to be a pornography addict” or “I do not want to be like Adolf Hitler” (explained below).
4. Associate the affirmation with an emotional (felt) motive for valuing it e.g., “To please the Lord I love” or “To consecrate myself to my wife and children” or “To respect others and their salvation,” etc (explained below).

Why do we want to write an affirmation as if it were present reality? Briefly, because our subconscious mind will do everything it can to identify with the present reality is supposed to be. Recall that our higher self already exists within our mind, but may be recessive in comparison to our lower self in our subconscious mind when we begin the process of moral conversion. When we repeat an emotionally engaging affirmation in the first person present tense, it appeals immediately to our higher self—calling it to the forefront of our subconscious mind. For example, if I repeatedly say to myself, “I *am* a chaste man to please the Lord I love and to edify the Church I desire to help” or “I am like Jesus in my chastity to be in his special service,” I immediately bring my higher self to the forefront of both my conscious and unconscious mind (because these qualities belong properly to the higher self). When my subconscious mind feels

the positive emotion associated with the saints and virtue in my affirmation, it begins the process of natural imitation. The more I repeat the affirmation with its positive emotion, the more I stimulate this natural process of imitation—reinforcing the virtue and my higher self within my subconscious mind.

When we reinforce a virtue and our higher self *as present realities* within our subconscious mind, our subconscious mind will join our conscious mind in resisting vice and our lower self (because they do not correspond to our present reality—virtue and the higher self). This gives us an automatic advantage when temptation presents itself (whether it originates from within us or from the evil one). Recall that temptation appeals to the lower self and derives its power from it. Thus, if our subconscious mind identifies our present reality with our virtuous saintly higher self, it will automatically be either disinterested in or resist this temptation. Our conscious mind is now supported by our subconscious mind—instead of being undermined by it (when it was mired in the lower self).

For example, if my subconscious self-image is that I am chaste because of my love for the Lord, and I am being tempted away from that, my subconscious mind will introduce feelings of emptiness, alienation, and inauthenticity into my conscious psyche as I am entertaining a temptation that is opposed to its image of who I really am. These negative feelings arising out of believing that I am “out of sync” with my present beloved reality can break the spell of temptation to resume my present reality—my virtuous saintly higher self.

We may now move to our next point about writing affirmations—avoiding any negative content. Why is this so important? We have already noted above that negative assertions are very difficult to maintain over the long term, but affirmations are aimed precisely at the long term – indeed, one might say, at a permanent term. For this reason alone, negative content in affirmations is unsuitable. Yet there is an even more important reason for avoiding it in our affirmations. We do not want to engrain the negative content we are trying to avoid in our subconscious self-image by implication. If we repeat to ourselves that we don’t want to be an unfaithful person, it reinforces our concern or fear of being unfaithful in our subconscious mind which implies that we believe ourselves to be capable, if not tending, toward infidelity and unchastity. Ironically, trying to engrain a negative motive in our subconscious mind, strongly suggests that we are inclined in that direction at the present moment. Our subconscious mind will not miss the implication. Hence, putting negative content into our affirmations is tantamount to preparing our subconscious mind to fight against itself! The solution is simple – keep your affirmations positive – focus on your higher self, your ideals, and the saints you admire – and make these your present reality by writing your affirmations in the first person present tense.

If you have a fairly good grasp of the above instructions for writing affirmations, I would suggest consecrating about three hours to the Lord—perhaps after Mass on a Sunday-- to sit down and write a set of ten affirmations bearing in mind the virtues you want to appropriate, the saints you want to imitate, and the positive emotional reasons for doing so. If you repeat these affirmations in your daily examine—or at another time every day—you will see the power of Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy in your own moral conversion which will make your efforts completely worthwhile. There is yet another way of reinforcing our higher self (and its virtues) within our subconscious mind—namely through spontaneous prayers and grace. Before doing

this, we will want to briefly examine how to use our affirmations (in the next subsection) and then review the above steps for cultivating our higher self within our subconscious mind.

#### **II.B.4 Using Our Affirmations**

How do we use our affirmations? There are two main ways of doing so. First, repeat them at least two times per day—either within your daily examine or outside of it (see below II.A.3). If you have associated these affirmations with Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or one of the saints, you may want to reinforce them by praying to them asking for their help and inspiration so that you might be like them in prayer, virtue, and zeal for the kingdom. Now put yourself in the position of St. Ignatius Loyola when he was convalescing in the hospital and consider what it would be like for you to act, pray, and embrace virtue like these role models. If you are practicing the Examen Prayer, you may want to insert your affirmations into it by adding a step to the prayer (see below II.A.3).

The second way in which affirmations can be used is within the context of resisting temptation itself. Recall the three dimensions of resisting temptation given above – asserting “no” to temptation for the sake of Christ, appealing to your higher self, and reinforcing this with spontaneous prayers. We can use our affirmation to appeal to our higher self (the second dimension of resisting temptation) and also within the context of our spontaneous prayers (see below Section III.A). We will focus on the second dimension of resisting temptation here, and save the third dimension (spontaneous prayers) for Section III.A.

Since our affirmations appeal to our higher self, we need do nothing more than repeat our affirmations to bring our higher selves to bear in the process of resisting temptation. Doing this not only appeals to our higher self, but also to the specific virtue which is opposed to the temptation being experienced. If our subconscious mind is already strongly conformed to our higher self (and its virtues), a simple statement of the affirmation will incite the subconscious mind to join the conscious mind to successfully resist temptation. Alternatively, if our subconscious mind is *not* yet strongly conformed to our higher self (and its virtues), the lower self may still be dominant in it—in which case our subconscious mind will act *against* our conscious mind’s attempts to resist temptation. Affirmations are still exceedingly helpful in this eventuality, because they challenge the dominance of the lower self within the subconscious mind which further mitigates the subconscious mind’s engagement of the temptation. If the affirmation even temporarily disengages the lower self within the subconscious mind, it gives the conscious mind much freer rein to resist the temptation (without the opposition of the subconscious mind). This might provide the edge needed to successfully resist a persistent temptation. Successfully resisting the temptation might also reinforce the higher self (and its virtues) within the subconscious mind at the same time.

In sum, repeating our affirmations at times of temptation is always likely to be helpful. If our subconscious mind is already conformed to the higher self, than a simple recitation of the affirmation might well dispel the temptation. Even if our subconscious mind is not conformed to the higher self, repeating our affirmation is likely to be quite helpful, for it could disengage a

counterproductive subconscious mind, give an edge to our conscious mind in resisting temptation, and reinforce the higher self (within the subconscious) in the process.

We can also combine the first and second dimensions of our process for resisting temptation by simply using the phrase, “I’m not like that” before we state our affirmation. Thus, if we are tempted toward pride, we might say something like, “I’m not like that—I’m humble-hearted like the Lord I love” or if we are being tempted toward lust, we might say something like, “I’m not like that—I am like Jesus in being chaste to build the kingdom of God.” We might also use other words for the first assertion – such as, “I am better than that—I am chaste...” or “That’s not like me-- I am chaste...” We might also use another phrase to reject the vices of the lower self within the temptation.

One final observation should be mentioned here (and will be taken up in more detail below in II.B). When our subconscious mind becomes strongly conformed to our higher self (and its virtues), we will likely not have to use our affirmations in the process of resisting temptation anymore, because we can do this by taking a “short cut”, using one simple phrase—“I am going to quit thinking with my lower self, and think with my higher self—my mature, noble, virtuous, saintly self--now.” Even if we have to repeat this phrase several times (during persistent temptations), our previous efforts at forming and using affirmations will very likely enable this one phrase to successfully resist the temptation. Generally, the more strongly conformed our subconscious mind is to our higher self, the less we have to repeat the above phrase. One or two recitations are sufficient to allow our strong higher self to emerge and disengage even the most persistent temptations.

As noted above, there are three other ways (besides visualization and affirmations) to conform our subconscious mind to our higher self:

1. Repeated success in resisting temptations (forming a virtuous habit).
2. Using our affirmations within spontaneous prayers.
3. Using affirmations in St. Ignatius’ daily Examen.

We will discuss St. Ignatius’ daily Examen below (in Section II.C), spontaneous prayers in Section III.A, and forming a virtuous habit below in this section.

## **II.C**

### **St. Ignatius’ Daily General Examen**

The General Examen is a short daily exercise (around 10 minutes) which aims at moral conversion. It is not meant to be implemented at the time one is resisting temptation, but rather at some regular time during the day. When it is practiced faithfully, it has a cumulative effect that empowers the three dimensions of our technique to resist temptation – saying no for the sake of Christ, making recourse to the higher self, and spontaneous prayers. As noted above, our visualization and affirmations toward our new subconscious identity can be fruitfully integrated into this daily discipline – though they should not be limited to their place in the Examen Prayer.

When St. Ignatius developed this discipline in his *Spiritual Exercises*, he indicated that it consisted of five points:

**First Point.** The first Point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits received.

**Second Point.** The second, to ask for the grace to know our sins and cast them out.

**Third Point.** The third, to ask account of our soul from the hour that we rose up to the present Examen, hour by hour, or period by period: and first as to thoughts, and then as to words, and then as to acts, in the same order as was mentioned in the Particular Examen.

**Fourth Point.** The fourth, to ask pardon of God our Lord for the faults.

**Fifth Point.** The fifth, to purpose amendment with His grace.

OUR FATHER.<sup>50</sup>

The first point – the prayer of thanksgiving – may at first seem to be out of place with respect to the other four points, because it focuses on the positive blessings of the day while the other four points focus on the temptations and sins of the day. As might be expected, it is not out of place, because St. Ignatius is trying to help us toward moral conversion – and the first step of moral conversion is spiritual conversion (spiritual depth) which consists in recognizing the Lord’s love for us and our response of love back to Him. As noted earlier, this love of and for the Lord is most incisively aroused by recognition of His blessings to us which elicits profound gratitude (love). St. Ignatius wants us to reflect not only about the blessings of the day, but also the blessings of our lives – our families, friends, community life, work life, and faith life – the blessings of creation – particularly our unique soul, the blessings of redemption through the self-sacrificial love of Jesus, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit who guides and animates us. As we recognize the love of God for us and all humanity, we cannot help ourselves – we are moved to love Him in return.

This positive framework is essential to the rest of the Examen Prayer, because the objective of the Examen is not to beat ourselves up, to focus on our imperfections, and to feel a profound sense of guilt and alienation, but rather to desire to move beyond our temptations and sins – namely to increase resolve against temptation, strengthen our higher self in Christ (“the new man”), and to free ourselves toward greater love and service of the Lord and His kingdom. We can deepen our experience of this First Point by preparing some lists of blessings we have received throughout our lives – the blessing of our immortal transphysical soul made in the image and likeness of God, the blessing of our families, our many friends throughout life, our gifts and opportunities to make a positive difference and to see our and our family’s well-being, the blessing of our faith, and the Spirit’s guidance into deeper intellectual, spiritual, and moral conversion, the blessing of our many opportunities to serve and be served throughout our lives, etc. This list may prove particularly helpful when we are drawing a blank about items for which to be grateful in the first step of the General Examen. I have discussed this in much greater detail in *Finding True Happiness* (Chapter 9).

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<sup>50</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* “Method for Making the General Examen”  
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/seil/seil09.htm>

We cannot stop at the First Point, because Points 2-5 (concluding with our firm purpose of amendment) are essential to the purpose of the Examen Prayer – *moral conversion* – that is, greater resistance to temptation, a stronger new identity fashioned in virtue through the imitation of Christ (the “new man”), and greater freedom to love and serve the Lord, His kingdom, and His people. Yet should we stop at the Fifth Point? Since the objective of the Examen is to deepen our moral conversion and visualization and affirmations accomplish this objective by reinforcing the higher self, why wouldn’t we want to integrate those points into it – along with spontaneous prayers? I can’t imagine that St. Ignatius would object to it since he was in favor of using every legitimate tool to move the believer to spiritual and moral conversion. In view of this, I would recommend adding three points to St. Ignatius’ original five points (if I might be so presumptuous):

Sixth Point – To visualize the Lord and/or your favorite saints exemplifying the virtues you wish to imitate – and to visualize *yourself* imitating them (see above Section II.B.2).

Seventh Point – Recite your affirmations about your ideals, models, and virtues, allowing them to affect you emotionally (see above Section II.B.3).

Eighth Point – Recite your spontaneous prayers for the desire and grace to imitate the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints (see below Section III.A).

Then say the Our Father to conclude the Examen.

By adding the above three steps, we risk prolonging and over-complicating this daily discipline to a point where individuals may begin to shrink from it, but I ask the reader to seriously consider running these risks and bearing patiently with the possible tedium and over-complication, because the benefits will be substantial. Fortunately, points two through five will already be quite familiar to any Catholic who has availed himself of the sacrament of reconciliation over the years – they come right out of our childhood religious education – asking for the grace of contrition, examining our conscience (according to thoughts, words, and deeds), asking for pardon from the Lord through an act of contrition, and making a firm purpose of amendment through the same act of contrition. By noting this, I do not at all want to imply that we trivialize the first five points so that we can get to the additional three points – quite the opposite. The sincerity with which we consider the first five points affects the efficacy and depth of the additional three points. Hence, sincerely considering and expressing gratitude for the blessings of the day, creation, redemption, and our lives helps to deepen our love for the Lord which in turn, will deepen our desire to imitate Him through visualization (Sixth Point), affirmations (Seventh Point), and spontaneous prayers (Eighth Point). Similarly, the sincerity with which we ask for the grace of contrition, examine our conscience, and say our Act of Contrition (Second through Fifth Points) deepens our desire and conviction to resist temptation for our salvation and for the Lord we love.

St. Ignatius thought that the Examen Prayer is so important in our ongoing prayer toward moral conversion that it should be the second to the last thing we abandon if we are in a state of hardship or crisis. The last thing to be abandoned, of course, is Holy Mass. Given the importance



of this discipline, it is essential to put it into practice. St. Ignatius -- and all spiritual entrepreneurs, for that matter -- have one rule in common -- if you want to get something done, get going -- even if it is not in any way perfectly planned. I would recommend making a large-print type-written copy of the above Eight Points, and clipping it into your prayer book or breviary; then find a 10-15 minute period in your day you can routinely dedicate to this prayer -- and then getting started. Don't worry about drawing blanks on the First Point, feeling superficial on Points 2-5, and "not getting it right" on Points 6-8. You will improve in all of these areas over the course of time if you review this article and give some thought to how you might integrate it into your Examen Prayer. If you do this, you will be like generations of Jesuits who grounded their moral conversions in this sage prayer and discipline. Please know that faithfully carrying out this discipline will allow the Lord's substantial grace to take effect within you -- helping you to resist temptation ever more deeply, and to replace the "old man" with your new subconscious virtue-identity grounded in Jesus our Lord.

## **II.D**

### **A Brief Summary of Techniques for Conforming the Subconscious Mind to the Higher Self**

Now let's review for a moment the various steps we have elucidated to resist temptation. We might divide this task into two stages -- a preparation stage and an implementation stage. The *preparation stage* consists in two simple steps:

1. Reinforcing our higher self in the subconscious mind through the techniques of visualization and affirmations. There are three substeps in forming this new subconscious self-image:
  - a. Selecting some role models -- such as Jesus, The Blessed Mother, or one or more saints to help us with visualization of our new identity.
  - b. Identifying the deadly sins to which we are most vulnerable and studying their opposing virtues.
  - c. Writing several affirmations according to the three principles listed above -- first person present tense, positive content only, and associating it with motivations eliciting positive emotions.
2. Learning some spontaneous prayers to help us during times of temptation -- see below Section III.A.

The *implementation stage* has two major steps:

1. Repeating our affirmations (along with visualizations and prayers to the Lord and the saints) two times per day -- and if possible, integrating one of those times into our General Examen prayer (see above Section II.C).
2. Resisting temptation through the above three dimensions -- saying no for the sake of Christ, replacing the lower self with the higher self, and using spontaneous prayers.

## **III.**

### **Spontaneous Prayers and Habits**

Up to now, we have explored how a preeminent higher self can outshine our lower self which can disengage the power and influence of temptation (recall that temptation exerts its power over the lower self but has little power over the higher self). We also addressed four major sources for strengthening our higher self:

1. Spiritual conversion – baptism, Holy Communion, and religious practice.
2. Visualization of ourselves exemplifying ideals modeled by the Lord and the saints whom we love.
3. Repeated affirmations of ourselves being like the Lord or the saints (and having their virtues) out of love for the Lord, the saints, and the people around us.
4. St. Ignatius' Daily Examen.

Though these techniques are highly effective in helping the higher self to become preeminent, they can be complemented by two other practices recommended by Christian saints from the very inception of the Church:

1. Spontaneous prayers.
2. Habits.

We will discuss spontaneous prayers in Section III.A and habits in Section III.B.

### **III.A Spontaneous Prayers**

As noted above, spontaneous prayers – short, memorable, and easily repeatable prayers – are particularly important in bolstering our efforts to resist temptation. We might group them into two kinds:

1. Prayers asking for protection from temptation – particularly from the evil spirit.
2. Prayers expressing our desire to be like the Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or one of the saints.

We will discuss each in turn.

Let us begin with prayers for protection from the evil one, because these are the simplest to recall and repeat. I intentionally do not use complex prayers to ask for protection, because invoking the name of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or the saints is far more important than adding lots of words of petition. Recall the early Church's view of the power of the Spirit working through the *name of Jesus* in the Acts of the Apostles. The early Church soon discovered the same power by calling upon the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as the names of the saints. Invoking the name of St. Michael the Archangel for protection from the evil spirit goes back to the early Church, because of his prominent role in the defeat of Satan in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12: 7-12) which harkens back to the book of Daniel in which Daniel has a vision of Michael as the protector of Israel (Dan. 10:13-21). Pope Leo XIII wrote the well-known prayer to St. Michael as protection against Satan and other evil spirits after having a vision of demonic spirits surrounding Rome in 1880. He also wrote the prayer of St. Michael in the Roman ritual of exorcism.

In view of the above, I recommend reciting and repeating the following three simple prayers when facing temptation, particularly those that seem to have a demonic influence (temptations having an extraordinary vividness or force beyond self-originating desires or emotions):

- Lord Jesus please protect me.
- Mother Mary please protect me.
- St. Michael please protect me.

It is not necessary to add anything to these prayers beyond the simple invocation of the names of our protectors and the petition for protection, but if you the reader find it helpful, you might add the words “From this temptation” or “From the evil behind this temptation.” Hence you might pray the longer prayers:

- Lord Jesus please protect me from the evil behind this temptation.
- Mother Mary please protect me from the evil behind this temptation.
- Lord Jesus please protect me from the evil behind this temptation.
- Saint Michael please protect me from the evil behind this temptation.

I would recommend saying these prayers at least three or four times, particularly if you feel an overriding desire to sin -- or you sense the emptiness, loneliness, and alienation that typically mark the evil spirit’s presence. I can personally attest to the fact that the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Michael do in fact come to our aide. They can break the grip of evil and temptation and can restore a sense of equanimity and peace to our souls.

Powerful as these spontaneous prayers for protection are, they can also be complemented by prayers expressing our desire to be like the Lord or the saints. We might begin by giving some simple versions of this prayer:

- Lord, I want to be like you in your chastity/patience/humility, etc.
- Lord, help me to be like you – chaste in mind and heart – or gentle in mind and heart – or humble in mind and heart.
- Mother Mary, I want to be like you in living chastity, patience, and humility.
- Mother Mary, help me to be like you – chaste in mind and heart – or gentle in mind and heart – or humble in mind and heart.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, I want to be like you in living chastity, patience, and humility.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, pray that I may be like you – chaste in mind and heart – or gentle in mind and heart – or humble in mind and heart.

When temptation strikes, it is generally helpful to repeat these prayers three or four times to reinforce through grace our higher self and the virtues we have affirmed.

When we have just begun to reinforce our higher self in our subconscious mind, these spontaneous prayers may not be as effective as we would like, because the higher self in our subconscious mind is not very strong, and we may not yet have developed the habit of resisting

temptation for the sake of Christ. Hence, a temptation to unchastity, vanity, or greed – or the emotion of anger, pride, and envy might be quite powerful by comparison to the resistance we can muster against it. Do not get frustrated or discouraged by this, bearing in mind that every effort you make to use these prayers and resist temptation (along with continued visualization, affirmations, and daily Examen) is reinforcing your higher self in your subconscious mind. As St. Paul implies in Romans 7:15-30, moral conversion is a long process, requiring patience in ourselves and trust in the Lord's unconditional mercy, healing power, and grace. Discouragement and frustration are counterproductive, and are most assuredly encouraged by the evil spirit (see Section V) who will do everything within his power to stop your progress in moral conversion. After a while, you will notice that your ability to fight off temptation will increase. Slowly but surely, your appeal to your higher self within your subconscious mind, in combination with spontaneous prayers, will have longer and more powerful effects, and eventually even the most persistent temptations will begin to fade in power and duration.

We must be careful to avoid overconfidence in our newly emerging higher self and its capacity to resist temptation because the evil spirit will look for ways to surprise us or discourage us. Recall the Lord's many admonitions to remain vigilant and persistent over the long term -- building our house on solid ground (Mt. 7: 24-27), buying sufficient oil for our lamps (Mt. 25: 1-13), and keeping our hearts open to His Word (Mt. 13: 1-13). Recall also the words of Peter regarding our spiritual enemy:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith... (1 Pet. 5: 8-9).

Though spontaneous prayers can be very effective in helping us to resist temptation while it is occurring, other kinds of prayer can also reinforce our moral conversion. This is why spiritual conversion is such an important foundation for moral conversion (see above Section I). There are three other kinds of prayer that support our progress in the moral life which strengthen our spontaneous prayers in depth and efficacy:

- contemplative prayer,
- the prayer of thanksgiving at the beginning of the General Examen,
- prayers of forgiveness in times of transgression.

The time to engage in these three kinds of prayer is *not* when we are contending with temptation because they are not directed toward resisting temptation and they are too lengthy to be helpful when our passions are aroused. Nevertheless, if we are faithful to these other kinds of prayer before and after contending with temptation, we will notice that our spontaneous prayers are stronger and more effective. We will not discuss these three kinds of prayer in this article. We have also discussed the prayer of thanksgiving in the General Examen above in Section II.C. and very extensively in *Finding True Happiness*(Chapter 9).

Finally, there is one prayer which is pertinent in extraordinary cases of temptation manifesting preternatural evil phenomena – deliverance prayers, and in cases of possession, exorcism. Though the scope of this article does not extend to deliverance ministry, there are some good resources for this ministry within the Catholic Church. The National Catholic

Charismatic Renewal's NSC Chariscenter offers several resources and hosts training programs in deliverance ministry.<sup>51</sup> The Catholic charismatic movement has approved and given guidelines for deliverance ministry in the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services Doctrinal Commission's book entitled *Deliverance Ministries*.<sup>52</sup> Some other excellent resources are books by Fr. Mike Driscoll,<sup>53</sup> Neal Lozano,<sup>54</sup> and Michael Scanlan.<sup>55</sup>

### **III.B Using Habits (Virtues) to Reinforce Our Higher Self**

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle recognized the power of habit to ease the force of “willpower” in making ethical decisions.<sup>56</sup> The Catholic philosophical and theological tradition recognized the importance of habits in the formation of virtues, and St. Thomas Aquinas devoted an entire treatise to it in the *Summa Theologica*.<sup>57</sup> Though these great philosophers did not know about the subconscious mind or its role in the appropriation and use of habits, they were well aware of the power of repeated behavior to form proclivities toward future behavior. Repeated bad behavior leads to bad habits which in turn lead to a future proclivity toward bad behavior – and repeated good behavior leads to good habits (virtues) which in turn lead to proclivities toward future good behavior. This insight has not changed for over 2,400 years, with the notable exception of the discovery of the subconscious mind as the agency through which good and bad habits obtain their power to influence our behavior with minimum involvement from our conscious mind and will.

The above philosophers also recognized that the time to build virtuous habits is childhood, because when a good habit is formed, it will continue to build on itself throughout life. Therefore, good childhood training, good families, and good education is essential for using habits to reinforce the higher self throughout life. However, the question arises, “What happens to a person who did not receive good formation and education in his younger years?” Indeed, what happens to someone who received precisely the opposite – a reinforcement of materialism, sensual pleasure, ego-comparative advantage, and even the deadly sins themselves? Is this person consigned to a life of evil? After all, bad habits reinforce bad behavior into the future. How can we break the spell of such habits for even a little while so that good habits can have a chance to “get off the ground”?

By now the reader will know the answer. We can break the spell of bad habits and the lower self by using the fruits of spiritual conversion (the grace of the Holy Spirit and the

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<sup>51</sup> See their website [www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org) for these resources.

<sup>52</sup> International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services 2017, *Deliverance Ministry* (National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the US, Inc.).

<sup>53</sup> Fr. Mike Driscoll 2015, *Demons, Deliverance, Discernment: Separating Fact from Fiction about the Spirit World* (Catholic Answers Press).

<sup>54</sup> Neal Lozano 2010 *Resisting the Devil* (Our Sunday Visitor).

<sup>55</sup> Michael Scanlan and Randall Cirner 1980, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits* (Servant).

<sup>56</sup> See Plato *Republic* (Book 7 518e ff and Book 10 619c ff).

See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*. This classic, concerned with virtue ethics, speaks about good habit (virtue) in almost every book – starting with Book 1, Chapter 4.

<sup>57</sup> For the nature of habits, see St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, QQ. 49-54; for the impact of habits on virtues, see I-II, QQ. 55-67.

mystical body through baptism, Holy Communion, and religious practice) as well as the techniques of Alfred Bandura and Lou Tice (visualization and affirmations). The remarkable part of these graces and techniques is that they can transform a subconscious mind firmly entrenched in the lower self into one that is open to and even receptive of the higher self. The more we practice these techniques, the more receptive we become to the higher self – and eventually we begin to act on it. As we begin to act on the higher self with greater frequency, good habits (virtues) begin to form. Slowly but surely, these virtues are reinforced in the subconscious mind which ultimately leads to the preeminence of our higher self – moral conversion.

Habits are yet another indispensable arrow in the quiver of moral conversion. For those, who from their youth were active in the Church and given good moral formation, habits can be lifetime agents of moral freedom and the higher self. However they are not the whole answer. As most of us know, the lower self can still exert considerable power over us not only because of our youthful proclivities toward Level 1 and Level 2 desires, but also because of concupiscence (the proclivity toward sensual pleasure and egocentricity which is the damage of original sin). If we do not go beyond habits to counteract the influence of the lower self – which can emerge quite powerfully in adolescence – we may wind up like St. Augustine, who after being raised in a good religious household with good moral formation by his mother St. Monica, allowed himself to be pulled ever more deeply and powerfully into the grip of sensual pleasure and egocentricity. St. Augustine was fortunate enough to experience the extreme emptiness, loneliness, and alienation arising out of his abandonment of the Christian Church as well as the mentorship of St. Ambrose to answer his questions and reconnect him with Christ and the Church. The grace of God was exceedingly active in his conversion and he also displayed a remarkable awareness of the higher self to which he opened himself and the grace of the Spirit. After his conversion – marked by his final acceptance of the need for moral conversion and his surrender to God to actualize it, habits took their natural course forming him into the saint we know today.

You, the reader, might be asking yourself how St. Augustine was so successful at breaking the spell of the lower self and embracing the higher self (after years of moral decline) when he did not have the benefit of Bandura's techniques of visualization and affirmations. The simple answer is he had an incredibly powerful faith and love of the Lord. Ask yourself a question – how do visualizations and affirmations affect, influence, and recondition the subconscious mind toward the higher self? What is the power behind these techniques? Go back to the process of picking out a saint with whom you identify for your visualizations – and go back to the positive emotional appeal you included in your affirmations. If you return to Sections II.A.2.b and II.A.2.c, you will notice that the central terms that emotionally empower our visualization and affirmations are “the Lord,” “Jesus,” “love” (e.g. for the sake of the Lord I love...), and the various subordinate virtues that define love and counteract the deadly sins. Faith and love are precisely what emotionally empower visualization and affirmation. Yes Bandura has found two techniques to make a *direct* connection with the subconscious mind, which no doubt would have helped St. Augustine quicken the pace of the last stage of his conversion – *moral conversion*. Nevertheless, Augustine had the two virtues – faith and love – as well as the grace of God needed to empower moral conversion in the subconscious mind over the long term. When he made his decision to take the final step, he prepared for a lengthy journey (which he intuited from St. Paul's long-term struggle with the flesh -- Rom. 7:15-30), and appealed to the Lord he knew and loved to help him embrace the “new man” (the higher self). The Lord did not

disappoint him – giving him the grace to become like his beloved Son – Jesus. As noted above, St. Augustine and St. Paul could have quickened the pace of their moral conversion by making a *direct* appeal to the subconscious mind through the techniques of Bandura. Though they had to endure a longer struggle to effect the change they were looking for, God’s grace completed the process of connecting their subconscious mind to their higher self through their powerful faith and love. Once this occurred, habit – virtue – would help to continue the process throughout the rest of their lives.

What might we now conclude about the important role of habits in fostering the “new man” (the higher self)? First, habits are indispensable for helping us persevere in our moral conversion (the preeminence of our higher self). They are also powerful in reinforcing moral conversion. For those raised in an active religious household with good moral formation, habits can take effect quickly and last throughout a lifetime. For those raised in a neutral or negative moral environment, habits can only become helpful after the spell of the lower self has been broken and the higher saintly Christ-like mature noble virtuous self has been discovered and embraced. This will very likely take renewed religious practice (beginning with “first fervor”) as well as some form of enlightenment (such as Augustine’s St. Ambrose) to initiate the process. As noted above, this process can be greatly assisted by Bandura’s techniques of visualization and affirmations.

Jesus spoke of perseverance as one of the key virtues of Christian life,<sup>58</sup> and as we might infer from the above, habits are quite important for persevering in virtue and religious practice (the preeminence of the higher self) – and so we must take them seriously. Though it can be a real struggle to get to the stage where habits can be useful – i.e. discovering the darkness, emptiness, and alienation of sin and breaking the spell of the lower self through religious practice (faith) and the highest virtue (love) – habits can help us to persevere – to remain continuously faithful – to the Christ like self which has become preminent.

#### **IV. A Shortcut to Resisting Temptation**

We might make one final observation – when our new subconscious self-identity is strong, we can use it effectively in the very first step of resisting temptation – saying “no” for the sake of Christ. If we have a strong proclivity toward the higher self, then we will instinctively feel the contrast between it and the call of temptation. This recognition enables us to take a shortcut in resisting temptation.

Recall that as we engage in the process of replacing the old man with the new man – the lower self with the higher self -- we will probably enter an intermediary zone for a significant period of time (such as St. Paul experienced for 20 years – between his conversion and the writing of Romans 7:15-25). During this period our lower self and higher self will likely be in a struggle with one another (as St. Paul describes in that passage). Recall also that each self has a

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<sup>58</sup> Perseverance is explicitly mentioned as an important virtue, particularly in times of persecution (Mt. 24:13). Being vigilant throughout one’s life is a complementary virtue to it (Mt. 24: 42-44). Perseverance is one of the needed virtues for salvation in the Parable of the Sower (see Mt. 13: 1-23). Preparing for a lengthy journey and being vigilant on it is also emphasized by Jesus in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13).

mode of thinking appropriate to the desires and objectives it seeks. The lower self continues to seek sensual and egotistical satisfactions (which has its own mode of thinking) while the higher self seeks faith, love (and its supporting virtues), and relationship with God in the image of Jesus and the saints (which also has its own mode of thinking). The more we deepen our spiritual conversion and use affirmations, visualization, prayer (grace), and habit to deepen our moral conversion, the stronger and more preeminent our higher self becomes.

When our higher self becomes strong enough, self-consciousness does not have to work very hard to choose the higher self and to allow it to do the thinking, because it knows that the higher self is “higher,” that is, it seeks objectives that will be eternal, pervasive, and grounded in truth, goodness, love, and above all, God. Self-consciousness also knows that the lower self is “lower” and seeks objectives which are beneath it – objectives that can sometimes be countered to truth, goodness, love, and above all, God. Furthermore, the fortification of the higher self will partially disempower the lower self, making it less able to resist the transcendent and eternal ideals of the higher self.

This means that we need only do two things to resist temptation – even strong temptations:

1. Be aware that we are being tempted and therefore we are thinking with our lower self.
2. Reflectively choose (through rational self-consciousness) what we really want – the higher self – which means thinking with our higher self.

If we can remember to associate temptation with our lower self, and choose what we really want – to think with our higher self – then the temptation is essentially defeated. For temptation only has power over us when we are thinking with our lower self, and when we intentionally switch to the higher self, it has very little power over us. The stronger our new subconscious self-identity (the higher self) becomes, the less power temptation has over us when we switch from thinking with our lower self to thinking with our higher self.

The reader might be thinking – “This sounds too easy to be usable,” but in point of fact it works exceedingly well when we have a strong sense of the higher self -- reinforced by our new subconscious self-identity. Try it for yourself after you have done your visualizations and affirmations (or your General Examen) – for a few weeks. The next time you are being tempted toward any of the deadly sins, simply use the following assertion to intentionally change the “self” who is doing the thinking – “I am going to stop thinking with my lower self – and I am going to start thinking with my higher self – the mature, virtuous, Christ-like self.”

This can be so effective that the temptation could actually disappear before you bring spontaneous prayers to bear against it. Of course spontaneous prayers can reinforce your intentional change from lower to higher self – from temptable self to virtuous self, but you may already be well on your way before the prayer leaves your lips. As implied above, the stronger your new subconscious self-identity, the faster and more effective your change from “thinking with the lower self” to “thinking with the higher self” will be – and you will be well on the way to imitating the Lord in thought, word, and action.



One last caution -- we cannot afford to think that our lower self will simply disappear – for it can reemerge with remarkable strength if we are not vigilant about keeping the higher self in its preeminent place. Jesus,<sup>59</sup> St. Peter,<sup>60</sup> St. Paul,<sup>61</sup> St. Ignatius,<sup>62</sup> and the whole Catholic spiritual tradition warn us that the evil spirit will take advantage of *any* lapse in vigilance. It does not matter how preeminent our higher self has become. We have to remember to use it when unexpected and strong temptation arises. Hence, we will want to keep our “shortcut” technique ready at hand for the times when temptation (particularly through the evil spirit) rears its ugly head. The Pauline author of the Letter to the Ephesians sums up our challenge as follows:

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Eph. 6:12-18).

## V.

### Conclusion: Beware of our Spiritual Enemy

As St. Augustine repeatedly stated in *Confessions*, moral conversion is likely to be the last and most challenging stage of our spiritual journey toward purification and salvation.<sup>63</sup> The spiritual practices explained above – spiritual conversion, visualization, affirmations, the General Examen, spontaneous prayers, and habits – will assuredly assist in this process by helping us to disengage temptation by appealing to our strong, noble, mature, virtuous, saintly higher self (the “new man”). Despite these techniques and our best efforts, the Lord has warned us that we can

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<sup>59</sup> When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Lk. 11:24-26).

<sup>60</sup> Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith (1 Pet. 5:8).

<sup>61</sup> Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

<sup>62</sup> “[The evil one] behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defenses of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola, 2017 “Fourteenth Rule for Discerning the Movement of Spirits” in *The Spiritual Exercises* <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2017/01/the-spiritual-exercises-of-st-ignatius.html>

<sup>63</sup> See St. Augustine *Confessions* Book VIII – which addresses his struggles with temptation, particularly concupiscence and the deadly sin of lust, after he had made significant progress in intellectual and spiritual conversion.

fall prey to temptation either out of lapses in vigilance, assaults and deceptions of the evil one, and the reemergence of human weakness. Yet the Lord has accounted for this as well, bringing to us the overflowing gift of His unconditional love and mercy.

Before closing, I would ask the reader to familiarize yourself with the ways in which the evil spirit assaults a person who has entered deeply into moral conversion (what St. Ignatius calls “a person of the second week”). Recall that the evil one is unlikely to use overt temptations toward the deadly sins – at least up front, but will instead make recourse to three other “tools” that will weaken the trust, hope, and confidence of a deeply converted believer:

1. *Deceit* – disguising himself as an angel of light to make suggestions that seem pious, but will lead to decreases in faith, hope, and love.
2. *Discouragement* – coming to the believer as “the accuser of his human nature” (Rev. 12: 10), telling him that he is repulsive and disgusting to God – and that the believer should hate himself, and then do God the “favor” of separating himself from His presence.
3. *Spiritual pride* – telling the believer that he has completed the process of conversion, reaching the heights of sanctity by his own discipline and diligence – a position from which he can look down at others, and see himself as indispensable and central to the whole order of salvation.

Deep spiritual conversion does in fact place the believer in a position to leave a legacy similar to canonized saints, and so the evil spirit is put at an extreme disadvantage when this occurs. He cannot make recourse to his usual overt temptations, and if he is unsuccessful, the consequences for “his kingdom” will be disastrous. Having few tools left, he will use them with all his skill and cunning – but we need not be afraid. We will have the inspiration, guidance, and protection of the Holy Spirit to combat his wiles. All we need do is remain vigilant in our moral conversion, humble in our hearts, and wise to the evil one’s deceptions. The Lord will take care of the rest. Even if we should fail miserably, He will save us from ultimate defeat through His unconditional love described.