

NATIONAL NEWMAN CHAPLAINS ASSOCIATION
COLLEGE OUTLINE OF SACRED DOCTRINE

A Basic Lecture for Students in Non-Catholic Colleges and Universities

General Editor

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THE CHAPLAIN'S LECTURE

LAY SPIRITUALITY

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I. SPIRITUALITY: THAT ASPECT OF CHRISTIAN LIVING WHEREIN ONE DEVOTES SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE CONDITION OF HIS INTERIOR LIFE.

What is meant by "spirituality?" We are concerned with a supernatural manner of understanding this which goes beyond a merely philosophical concept.

Spirituality refers to that aspect of Christian living which describes the special attention which the believer devotes to the condition of his interior life. He is convinced that such serious consideration is basic in the striving for Christian perfection.

The degree of charity and participation in the divine life indicates the depth of one's perfection.

Although fundamentally there is only one Christian perfection, lay spirituality does have distinctive features.

II. ALTHOUGH ALL CHRISTIAN PERFECTION CONSISTS IN PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE LIFE, LAY SPIRITUALITY HAS DISTINCTIVE FEATURES.

An introductory observation which prepares the way for a later examination of the distinctive features of lay spirituality is the derivation of the term, layman.

"Layman" is derived from a Greek noun, *laos*, which means "people." (Cf. L. Bouyer, *Dictionnaire Théologique*, 377). In the New Testament this signifies in a special way the Christian "People of God" in which the emphasis has been placed upon the community in worship. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2, 35 and Ap. 5, 10).

III. WHEREAS THERE IS A THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LEADER AND THE "PEOPLE OF GOD" IN THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY, A SOCIAL UNION EXISTS WHICH IS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE.

We do distinguish between the hierarchy and the faithful. This distinction is of divine origin. However their social union is becoming clearer particularly in the developing sacramental theology.

Granted the theological distinction between the leader and the "People of God," a social union exists which is particularly evident in the sacramental life.

For a sound understanding of the spirituality of the layman, it is important to perceive this note of union. (Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, Sheed and Ward, 1963.)

IV. THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION: CHARITY . . . WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW . . . (MATT. 22, 35).

The heart of Christian perfection as presented in Our Lord's own teaching.

Our Lord clearly stated the essence of Christian perfection in the following words:

"And one of them, a doctor of the Law, putting him to the test, asked him, 'Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.' This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22, 35-40)

V. LAY SPIRITUALITY IS NOT BASICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE, BUT RATHER IT CONSISTS IN THE ACCENTUATION OF A PARTICULAR FORM OF PIETY.

This is important in order to show the oneness of religious and laity in the struggle for perfection. When this unity is appreciated one is more easily able to appreciate varying accentuations.

Because Christ does not distinguish between states of life, we should say that lay spirituality is not basically different from religious perfection. It is in fact the application of ascetical principles of universal validity to the special circumstances of the lay state which results in the accentuation of a particular form of piety.

This oneness of Christian perfection in charity is also shown by St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 44, art. 6) who in discussing perfection and the means to acquire it, does not speak of specific forms of spirituality.

Particularly since the Reformation, because of too great an emphasis upon the visible, hierarchical aspects of the Church, in practice the layman has been given less attention than he deserves in the Church. Since this would include his spirituality it is important that we study more carefully the specific accentuation of lay piety.

VI. THUS WE REFER TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MONK, THE PRIEST, AND THE LAYMAN. THE MONK AND THE PRIEST EXPRESS CHARITY POSITIVELY IN ESCHATOLOGICAL LOVE, WHILE THE LAYMAN REGARDS THE WORLD WITH A "COSMIC" LOVE. HE SEEKS TO AID IN ITS REDEMPTION BY POSITIVE PARTICIPATION IN ITS LIFE.

The monk and the priest orient their efforts more toward the final things whereas the layman seeks a more immediate redemption of the world.

In view of varying emphases in piety we may speak of the spirituality of the monk, the priest, and the layman.

The monk and the priest express charity positively in eschatological and redeeming love.

The layman's love for the world is a more immediate one by means of which he aids in the world's redemption by a positive participation in its life. The monk and the priest vow to follow the evangelical counsels in certain well defined ways, while the layman who is working seriously for perfection finds it morally necessary to practice the spirit of these counsels.

There are degrees of intensity of the counsels. These degrees are not proper to the religious life, but pertain to the Christian life in general.

In the religious life these common elements are realized only under a special modality, that is, by means of the vows and the common life. (Cf. K. Truhlar, S.J. *Laics et conseils*, 189.)

Therefore, all souls endeavoring conscientiously to fulfill the commandments in love need to practice in some way the spirit of the counsels, as well as observe the obligations of the virtues of chastity and obedience. Such practices condition the soul for the great sacrifices all are called upon to make from time to time.

In the practice of the spirit of the counsels the unity of the life of perfection becomes clearer. Also in this, while in a certain manner the layman can be a monk interiorly, his spiritual life is clearly not a mitigated type of monasticism. By reflecting upon both worlds, the layman is, as St. Clement of Alexandria has said, "both worldly and yet unworldly."

VII. IN THIS THE LAYMAN DOES PRACTICE THE SPIRIT OF THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS, AND IN DOING SO HE IS KEEPING HIS EYES ON BOTH WORLDS AT THE SAME TIME. HE LOVES THE WORLD AND ITS RELATIVE VALUE WHICH DOES NOT CONTRADICT MAN'S FINAL END. THERE IS UNDERLYING THIS A DEVELOPING THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF TERRESTRIAL REALITY.

Explain how it is morally necessary for spiritual "tone" that the layman observe the spirit of the evangelical counsels. There is here an effort to positively appreciate terrestrial realities.

While the monk and the priest manifest their eschatological and redeeming love for the world by negating certain of its values, the layman regards the world with a more "cosmic" love. Here there is implied what Father Yves Congar speaks of as the two states of the Kingdom of God; the final state of the Parousia; and the intermediate period in which there is a duality of the world and the Church. (*Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, Chapter III.)

In the intermediate period certain relative values of the world need not contradict man's final end. The theology underlying this is the developing theology of the world and terrestrial reality (G. Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres*). Consequently dedication to one's personal holiness and commitment to the proper values of the world do not contradict one another. One's holiness is put into relevant perspective by a sound involvement in the world.

VIII. THUS WHILE LAY SPIRITUALITY IMPLIES A DETACHMENT FROM CERTAIN WORLDLY VALUES IT IS ALSO A POSITIVE AFFIRMING OF THE WORLD IN ORDER TO AID IN ITS REDEMPTION.

In this the layman respects the proper relative value of things as he endeavors to develop his own full professional effectiveness.

While lay spirituality implies a detachment from worldly values which could hinder redemption, it also implies a positive affirming of the world in order to aid in its redemption.

That this consecration is particularly the task of the layman was clearly brought out by Pope Pius XII in his address to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate:

"The consecration of the world is essentially a work of laymen who are deeply involved in the economic and social life, and who participate in government and legislative assemblies."

(Author's translation. Cattin-Conus: *Sources de la Vie spirituelle*, II, n. 4313.)

This affirmation is really a reflection of God's own love for the world, and renders assistance in the continuation of God's creation.

An authentic commitment to Christ will be realized in a true renunciation of Satan. In this commitment the legitimate values of the world can thus be consecrated in two ways: "... positively, in this positive human value: the enrichment that they can give, along their own proper lines . . . And they can also be consecrated negatively, simply by the abnegation they require, and so by the witness given to the cross, to its fruitfulness in 'Christ'; a witness which they provide the Christian the opportunity to render by providing him with a cross which is peculiarly his own." (L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 169.)

IX. WHILE THE CHRISTIAN LAYMAN DISCOVERS HIS CROSS IN HIS PROFESSION, IT BECOMES EVEN CLEARER IN THE MARRIAGE STATE. IN THIS BLESSED STATE THERE IS OPPORTUNITY FOR A TYPE OF SELF ABNEGATION WHICH CAN BE DEEPLY SANCTIFYING.

In the truly Christian marriage there is a dispossession of oneself that is deeply sanctifying.

While the Christian layman finds the cross in his profession, it becomes even clearer in the marriage state. In this a partner so gives himself to another, both physically and spiritually, that such a dispossession can be deeply sanctifying.

In the marriage state some such penance as fasting is necessary that partners may more readily dispose themselves for prayer and almsgiving, and even for mutual continence on occasion.

Married persons should endeavor to grow in "the spirit of virginity" which does not consist in the exclusion of the conjugal life, but in an interior attitude of detachment and love for Jesus Christ, as a means of imitating him, and growing in union with him. (Cf. C. Colombo, *Perfection Chretienne et Vie Conjugale*, 225.)

In all of this, generosity should be blended with discretion in terms of one's strengths and weaknesses.

Not only are the layman's profession and matrimony means of sanctification, but likewise his participation in the apostolate. Some of the specialized lay groups such as that of the Christian Family Movement can assist him to appreciate more clearly his Christian vocation to activities which need not dissipate, but rather can strengthen, his interior life. (For further material on this relationship cf. J. Creusen, *Perfection personnelle et apostolate*, 31-39.)

X. IN ALL OF THIS THE LAYMAN EXPERIENCES A SPECIAL TENSION BEING NOT ONLY IN THE WORLD, BUT HELPING TO TRANSFORM IT IN ITS RETURN TO GOD. CORRECTLY ACCEPTED THIS VOCATION CAN BE MOST SANCTIFYING.

The way in which the layman can serve as a collaborator in the work of God's continuing creation.

In working for his perfection the layman realizes that both he and the world are prisoners of evil, subject to sin, and needful of the redemption which only God can give under the sign of the cross. He experiences a special tension, being not only in the world, but helping to transform it in preparation for its return to God as well (G. Thils: "Le Laïc dans le monde d'aujourd'hui," *Civitas*, II, 1955/1956, 170-174).

His love is also soteriological. In achieving a spiritual synthesis, the layman should guard against becoming either too natural or too monastic. His love will also need to be soteriological and eschatological.

In achieving a synthesis of the more immediate love for the world with the more ultimate concerns we again see that oneness of Christian perfection which is common to various spiritualities.

Consequently, the spirituality of the layman is not fundamentally different nor "easier" than that of the monk or priest, but rather there is a distinct form of realizing it.

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Published by THE PRIORY PRESS, 2005 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60608
for the use of Newman Chaplains

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NOTES FOR THE STUDENT

LAY SPIRITUALITY

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Father Pelton, for the last few years head of the department of theology at Notre Dame University, is now superior and principal of St. George College in Santiago, Chile. He took his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome and has been president of the Catholic Conference on Inter-American Student Problems. The past academic year he spent in Europe doing research and is the author of SPIRITUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY LAY STUDENT. He has edited several books and written a number of scholarly articles. He is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross.

Explanatory Note: Herein we present ten basic points about Lay Spirituality. Each one of these divisions is followed by a development which will be of assistance in your own deeper understanding and later review.

- I. Spirituality: that aspect of Christian living wherein one devotes special attention to the condition of his interior life.

Our understanding of this is supernatural, and thus refers to man's growing in God's favor through conscious effort. Specifically spirituality here applies to that aspect of Christian living which describes the special attention which the believer devotes to the condition of his interior life. He is convinced that if he is to grow in Christian perfection he should give serious and

systematic consideration to his spiritual life. The depth of one's perfection is measured by the extent of his participation in the divine life. From what we have said it can be deduced that there is in reality only one Christian perfection.

- II. Although all Christian perfection consists in participation in the divine life, lay spirituality has distinctive features.

Although we say that fundamentally there is only one Christian perfection it is true that lay spirituality has distinctive features. In order to more properly appreciate these features it will be helpful to examine the notion of "layman." The word is derived from a Greek noun, *laos*, which means "people." In the context of the New Testament this signifies in a special

way the Christian "People of God" gathered in community worship. (Cf. I Pet. 2, 35 and Ap. 5, 10).

- III. Whereas there is a theological distinction between the leader and the "People of God" in the worshipping community, a social union exists which is particularly evident in the sacramental life.**

The theological distinction between the hierarchy and the faithful has always existed in the Church. However there is a significant note of social union which is to be found in the sacramental life. This social aspect of the sacramental encounter is becoming clearer in the writings of modern theologians such as E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., in his work, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (Sheed and Ward, 1963.) For a correct understanding of the layman's spirituality we should appreciate this note of union.

- IV. The essence of Christian perfection: Charity . . . which is the greatest commandment in the law. . . . (Matt. 22, 35).**

Our Lord presents the heart of Christian perfection in Matt. 22, 35-40: Charity: the greatest commandment in the law upon which the whole law and prophets depend.

- V. Lay spirituality is not basically different from the spirituality of the religious life, but rather it consists in the accentuation of a particular form of piety.**

Christ does not speak of different states of life when discussing perfection. This oneness of Christian perfection in charity is also reflected in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 44, art. 6). Thus in order to determine what is the spirituality of the layman we need to apply the ascetical principles of universal validity to the special circumstances of the lay state.

- VI. Thus we refer to the spirituality of the monk, the priest, and the layman. The monk and the priest express charity positively in eschatological love, while the layman regards the world with a "cosmic" love. He seeks to aid in its redemption by positive participation in its life.**

The monk and the priest express their charity in a manner which tends to be more eschatological, i.e., more toward the final things while the layman's love for the world inclines to be more

immediate by means of positive participation in its life. It is clear that neither of these tendencies exclude each other but this is a question of emphasis.

There are common means employed to grow in the life of grace. One of these is to answer the invitation of Our Lord to observe the evangelical counsels. These are invitations to the practice of virtue which carry one beyond that which is of strict obligation. In the practice of the spirit of the counsels the unity of the life of perfection becomes clearer. The monk and the priest vow to follow the evangelical counsels in certain well defined ways, while the layman who is working seriously for perfection finds it morally necessary to observe the spirit of these counsels.

- VII. In this the layman does practice the spirit of the evangelical counsels, and in doing so he is keeping his eyes on both worlds at the same time. He loves the world and its relative value which does not contradict man's final end. There is underlying this a developing theological understanding of terrestrial reality.**

Practically speaking if the layman does not observe the spirit of the evangelical counsels, he will fail to measure up as a Christian, especially in certain great periods of stress. There is implied here a delicate balance between a detachment from those values of the world which will spiritually compromise one, and a positive appreciation of those terrestrial realities which do not contradict man's final end.

While the monk and the priest tend to manifest their redeeming love for the world by negating certain of its values, the layman tends to regard the world with a more "cosmic" love. (Cf. Congar's, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*). The holiness of the layman is put into relevant perspective by a sound involvement in the world.

- VIII. Thus while lay spirituality implies a detachment from certain worldly values it is also a positive affirming of the world in order to aid in its redemption.**

Pope Pius XII in the 2nd World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, 1957, indicated that the consecration of the world is essentially the work of laymen because they are deeply involved in the economic and social life, and participate in government and legislative assemblies.

In this the legitimate values of the world can be consecrated in two ways: positively, through the enrichment they can give along their own proper lines, and negatively, simply by the abnegation they require in witnessing to the cross. (Cf. L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*)

IX. While the Christian layman discovers his cross in his profession, it becomes even clearer in the marriage state. In this blessed state there is opportunity for a type of self-abnegation which can be deeply sanctifying.

While the Christian layman finds the cross in his profession, it becomes more evident in the marriage state. In this a partner so gives himself to another, both physically and spiritually, that such dispossession can be deeply sanctifying. In order to grow in union with Our Lord married persons will need to have a balanced sense of mortification.

Not only are the layman's profession and matrimony means of sanctification, but also his participation in the apostolate is an important means toward his personal spiritual perfection.

It will be a real advantage for university students to become acquainted with various forms of the apostolate, and seriously reflect upon what part they may play in this.

X. In all of this the layman experiences a special tension being not only in the world, but helping to transform it in its return to God. Correctly accepted this vocation can be most sanctifying.

In working for his perfection the layman realizes that both he and the world are prisoners of evil, subject to sin, and needful of the redemption which only God can give under the sign of the cross. He experiences a special tension, being not only in the world, but helping to transform it in preparation for its return to God as well.

In achieving a synthesis of the more immediate love for the world with more ultimate concerns we again see that oneness of Christian perfection which is common to various spiritualities.

Consequently, the spirituality of the layman is not fundamentally different nor "easier" than that of the monk or priest, but rather there is a distinct form of realizing it.

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for distribution by Newman Chaplains