

## **“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP**

### **Study Questions - Chapter Six**

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## **-Christian Perfection and Mystical Experience-**

### **References: CCC**

*Spiritual Life: 2012-2029*

### **Other Suggested References:**

“The Dominican Penitent Rule” in *Dominican Penitent Women* by *Classics of Western Spirituality*, pp. 46-56  
“Interior Castles” by Teresa of Avila  
“Dark Night of the Soul” by St. John of the Cross  
“Divine Mercy In My Soul” by Sr. M. Faustina Kwalska  
“Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition “ by Jordan Aumann, O.P.  
“The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena “ -Tr. By Algar Thorold  
“The Rule of Benedict : a Spirituality for the 21st Century “ by Joan Chittister  
“The Treasury of Catholic Wisdom” by John A. Hardon, S.J., Editor  
“Mysticism and Prophecy” the Dominican Tradition by Richard Woods, O.P.  
“The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism” Edited by Bernard McGinn

### **Questions**

1. Define “Mysticism”

*the term mysticism became more refined, so that with Pseudo- Dionysius it signified the experience of the divine, passively received....., mysticism is an awareness of the divine activity on the soul. Mysticism is a passive and not an active experience*

2. How can one experience whatever this thing called “mysticism” is?

*only the Holy Spirit can produce this experience in us by the actuation of his gifts.*

3. What is the difference between *mystical state* and the *ascetical state*?

*Asceticism and mysticism do not constitute two distinct paths to Christian holiness; they are two stages on the same path to the perfection of charity..... Asceticism relates to our activity; whereas, Mysticism is what God's activity in our lives*

4. What determines the intensity of the *mystical experience*?

*The intensity of the mystical experience will depend on the intensity with which the gift has been activated*

5. What happens during the *passive purgation* of the soul?

*During the passive purgations, however, the divine motion of the gifts has as its purpose the purification of the soul from all its attachments. It not only deprives the soul of any delightful awareness of God but also gives the soul a contrary experience of absence and abandonment by God, which is of great purgative value.....During the passive purgation of the spirit, however, the suffering of the soul is much more intense and it is painfully aware of imperfections and miseries that it had been incapable of perceiving before the divine light illumined and purged the soul of its ignorance*

6. If *asceticism* and *mysticism* do not constitute two distinct paths to Christian holiness, but are in fact two stages on the same path to the perfection of charity, then what is the relationship between these two stages?

*One helps to give rise to the other; that is, the perfection of charity is obtained through our activity and God's response to that activity.*

7. Reflect on the statement, "*The life of any individual Christian will be predominantly either contemplative or active.*"

*Each represents the variety of the ways in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate in the Christian life.....*

8. Is the simple actuation of a gift of the Holy Spirit an extraordinary phenomena or is it something perfectly normal and ordinary in the life of grace?

*Mystical activity is a normal concomitant of the perfection of grace and charity*

9. In describing the *mystical state*, Fr. Aumann mentions four characteristics. What are they?

*They are fixed, stable, permanent, and habitual*

10. Does infused contemplation necessarily go with mystical experience?

*No.... that there can be no infused contemplative prayer without mystical activity, since infused prayer requires the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; but there can be mystical activity without infused contemplation*

11. Reflect on the statement “All souls in the state of grace, possessing as they do the gifts of the Holy Spirit, ... already possess the seeds and rudiments of the mystical life and can develop and manifest them little by little.”

*When the soul habitually produces acts of virtue and, denying itself, ordinarily permits itself to be moved without resistance by the touchings and breathings of the sanctifying Spirit,... then we can say that the soul is now in the full mystical state, although from time to time it will still have to return to the ascetical state....the mystical life is in some way already present in the ascetical life. It embraces the whole development of the Christian life and the whole path to union with God, but is clearly and habitually manifested in the unitive way*

12. Can the soul purify itself?

*However assiduously the beginner practices the mortification in himself of all these actions and passions, he can never completely succeed-very far from it-until God works it in him passively by means of the purgation of the said night . . . .*

*But neither from these imperfections nor from those others can the soul be perfectly purified until God brings it into the passive purgation of that dark night of which we shall presently speak .... For however greatly the soul itself labors, it cannot actively purify itself so as to be prepared in the least degree for the divine union of perfection of love if God does not take its hand and purge it in that dark fire*

13. The text states that “A person does not definitively leave the lower stages as he passes to the higher ones; the spiritual life is normally a complex pattern of purgation, illumination and union, a blending of ascetical and mystical element.

Explain “purgation”, “illumination” and “union.”

- a. *Purgation*: (see attachments at the end of this document)
- b. *Illumination*:
- c. *Union*:

14. Reflect on the following: In the *Introduction* (page xvi) to the book, “*The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*,” edited by Bernard McGinn, the Editor writes: “...Mysticism...is essentially comprising new ways of knowing and loving based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts, not as an object to be grasped, but as a direct and transforming center of life.”

*To my way of thinking, the whole of the Christian experience is a gradual movement towards intimacy with God... As we increasingly open ourselves to the Divine Presence, that Presence helps to us to “seek and to find” and “in finding to love,” –God then is “experienced within” –but it is more than a “mindfulness” or “cognitive Knowing”,*

*It becomes and remains a “transformative dynamic at the very core of our being and our “be-ing.”*

#### IV. CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

**2012** “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him ... For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.”<sup>64</sup> (459)

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<sup>64</sup> Rom 8:28–30.

**2013** “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”<sup>65</sup> All are called to holiness: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>66</sup> (915; 2545; 825)

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that ... doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.<sup>67</sup>

**2014** Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments—“the holy mysteries”—and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all. (774)

**2015** The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle.<sup>68</sup> Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes: (407; 2725; 1438)

He who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end. He never stops desiring what he already knows.<sup>69</sup>

**2016** The children of our holy mother the Church rightly hope for *the grace of final perseverance and the recompense* of God their Father for the good works accomplished with his grace in communion with Jesus.<sup>70</sup> Keeping the same rule of life, believers share the “blessed

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<sup>65</sup> LG 40 § 2.

<sup>66</sup> Mt 5:48.

<sup>67</sup> LG 40 § 2.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. 2 Tim 4.

<sup>69</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. in Cant.* 8: PG 44, 941C.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1576.

hope” of those whom the divine mercy gathers into the “holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”<sup>71</sup> (162; 1821; 1274)

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## IN BRIEF

- 2017** The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us sharers in his life.
- 2018** Like conversion, justification has two aspects. Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, and so accepts forgiveness and righteousness from on high.
- 2019** Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.
- 2020** Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God’s mercy.
- 2021** Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life.
- 2022** The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom.
- 2023** Sanctifying grace is the gratuitous gift of his life that God makes to us; it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.
- 2024** Sanctifying grace makes us “pleasing to God.” Charisms, special graces of the Holy Spirit, are oriented to sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. God also acts through many actual graces, to be distinguished from habitual grace which is permanent in us.
- 2025** We can have merit in God’s sight only because of God’s free plan to associate man with the work of his grace. Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly to man’s collaboration. Man’s merit is due to God.
- 2026** The grace of the Holy Spirit can confer true merit on us, by virtue of our adoptive filiation, and in accordance with God’s gratuitous justice. Charity is the principal source of merit in us before God.
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<sup>171</sup> Rev 21:2.

- 2027** No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.
- 2028** “All Christians ... are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*L<sup>G</sup> 40 § 2*). “Christian perfection has but one limit, that of having none” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mos.*: P<sup>G 44, 300D</sup>).
- 2029** “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Mt 16:24*).<sup>1</sup>

## **Division of the states or ways**

In is in the latter sense we have to understand the word *state* in this article, and, according to the various classes of [souls](#) who aspire to perfection in this life, The Fathers and [theologians](#) distinguish three stages or states of perfection. These are the states of beginners, the state of progress, and the state of the perfect. These states are also designated "ways", because they are the ways of [God](#) by which [souls](#) are guided on the road to [heaven](#) according to the words of the Psalmist: "He hath made His ways known to Moses: His wills to the [children of Israel](#)" ([Psalm 102:7](#)). Hence, we have the division of the spiritual life which has been adopted since the time of the [Pseudo-Dionysius](#) into the "purgative way", the "illuminative way", and the "unitive way". (See [St. Thomas, II-II:163:4](#); Francisco Suárez, "De Religione", Tr. VIII, lib. I, c, xiii). [St. Thomas](#) well explains the reason for this division when he says:

The first [duty](#) which is incumbent on man is to give up [sin](#) and resist [concupiscence](#), which are opposed to [charity](#); this belongs to beginners, in whose hearts charity is to be nursed and cherished lest it be corrupted. The second [duty](#) of man is to apply his energies chiefly to advance in virtue; this belongs to those who are making progress and who

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*GLG Lumen gentium*

G 44, 300D).PG J. P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca (Paris, 1857–1866)

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (488–490). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

are principally concerned that charity may be increased and strengthened in them. The third endeavor and pursuit of man should be to rest in [God](#) and enjoy Him; and this belongs to the perfect who desire to be dissolved and to be with [Christ](#).

Among the condemned propositions of [Miguel de Molinos](#), the author of "the Spiritual Guide" (in which the [false mysticism](#) known as [Quietism](#) is propounded), is the following: "These three kinds of way, the *purgative*, *illuminative*, and *unitive*, are the greatest absurdity in [Mystical Theology](#)" (cf. Constitution "Coelestis Pastor" of [Innocent XI](#), 1687). Avoiding this and other [errors](#) of [false](#) mystics, it must be borne in mind that energy and activity are required in every stage of our spiritual life, and that we have to accept the degrees of that life and to follow the kind of [prayer](#) which is proper to one or other of them according to our state, whether it be the purgative, illuminative, or unitive. Various descriptions of these three ways are given by eminent masters of the spiritual life. Substantially they may all be said to agree, though in details and manner of treatment they may differ.

### ***The purgative way***

The purgative way is the way, or state, of those who are beginners, that is, those who have obtained justification, but have not their [passions](#) and [evil inclinations](#) in such a state of subjugation that they can easily overcome [temptations](#), and who, in order to preserve and exercise [charity](#) and the other virtues have to keep up a continual [warfare](#) within themselves. It is so called because the chief concern of the [soul](#) in this state is to resist and to overcome the passions by nourishing, strengthening, and cherishing the virtue of charity. This can and ought to be done not only by keeping the [Commandments](#), but by foreseeing the [occasions in which the precepts oblige](#), so as to be ready by a prompt and well disposed will to resist and avoid any [sins](#) opposed to them. This state, although, in one sense, it is imperfect, in another sense may be called a state of perfection, because the [soul](#) remains united to [God](#) by grace and charity so long as it is free from the stain of mortal [sin](#). Purity of [soul](#) may be said to be the proper end of the purgative way, and the forms of [prayer](#) suitable for this way or state are meditations on [sin](#) and its consequences, and on death, [judgment](#), [hell](#), and [heaven](#). The acts which aid toward uprooting the remnants and habits of former [sins](#), and preventing one from ever returning to them, are corporal austerities, [mortification](#) of the [appetite](#), abnegation of one's own will, and conformity to the will of [God](#). In a word, the distinctive notes of this state are [war](#) against those [temptations](#) which entice the [soul](#) to [sin](#) by the attraction of pleasures of the senses and the natural shrinking from pain; and repugnance to acts known to be contrary to the will of [God](#). The characteristic virtue of this state is [humility](#), by which the [soul](#) is made

sensible of its own weakness and its dependence upon the succours of the grace of [God](#).

What [mystical](#) writers describe as the active and passive purifications of the spiritual life may be brought under, and arranged according to, their three states of perfection, though not confined to any one of them. The active purification consists of all the holy efforts, [mortifications](#), labors, and sufferings by which the [soul](#), aided by the grace of [God](#) endeavors to reform the mind, heart, and the sensitive [appetite](#). This is the characteristic work of the purgative way. The passive purifications are the means which [God](#) employs to purify the [soul](#) from its stains and vices, and to prepare it for the exceptional [graces](#) of the [supernatural](#) life. In the works of [St. John of the Cross](#) these purifications are called nights, and he divides them into two classes, the night of the senses and the night of the spirits. In the state of beginners the [soul](#) is often favored by [God](#) with what are called "sensible consolations" because they have their beginning and are felt chiefly in the senses or sensible faculties. They consist in sensible devotion and a feeling of fervour arising from the consideration of [God's goodness](#) vividly represented to the mind and heart; or, from external aids, such as the ceremonies of the [Church](#). These consolations are often withdrawn, and a state of desolation ensues, and then the passive purification of the senses begins.

### ***The illuminative way***

The illuminative way is that of those who are in the state of progress and have their passions better under control, so that they easily keep themselves from mortal [sin](#), but who do not so easily avoid venial [sins](#), because they still take pleasure in earthly things and allow their minds to be distracted by various imaginations and their hearts with numberless desires, though not in matters that are strictly unlawful. It is called the illuminative way, because in it the mind becomes more and more enlightened as to spiritual things and the practice of [virtue](#). In this grade charity is stronger and more perfect than in the state of beginners; the [soul](#) is chiefly occupied with progress in the spiritual life and in all the virtues, both [theological](#) and moral. The practice of [prayer](#) suitable for this state is meditation on the mysteries of the [Incarnation](#), the [life of Our Savior](#), and the mysteries of [His Sacred Passion](#). As [Ven. Luis de Lapuente](#) says,

Though the mysteries of the Passion belong to the illuminative way, especially in its highest degree, which approaches nearest to the *unitive* way, nevertheless, they are exceedingly profitable for all sorts of [persons](#), by whatever way they walk, and in whatever degree of perfection they live; for sinners will find in them most effectual motives to purify themselves from all their [sins](#); beginners to mortify their passions; proficients to increase in all kinds of virtue; and

the perfect to obtain union with [God](#) by fervent [love](#). (Introduction to "Meditations on the Passion")

The fundamental virtue of this state is recollection, that is, a constant attention of the mind and of the affections of the heart to thoughts and sentiments which elevate the [soul](#) to [God](#) — exterior recollection which consists in the [love](#) of silence and retirement, interior recollection in simplicity of spirit and a right intention, as well as attention to [God](#) in all our actions. This does not mean that a [person](#) has to neglect the [duties](#) of his state or position in life, nor does it imply that honest and needful recreation should be avoided, because these lawful or [necessary](#) circumstances or occupations can well be reconciled with perfect recollection and the most holy union with [God](#).

The [soul](#) in the illuminative way will have to experience periods of spiritual consolations and desolations. It does not at once enter upon the unitive way when it has passed through the aridities of the first purgation. It must spend some time, perhaps years, after quitting the state of beginners in exercising itself in the state of proficients. [St. John of the Cross](#) tells us that in this state the [soul](#), like one released from a rigorous [imprisonment](#), occupies itself in Divine thoughts with a much greater freedom and satisfaction, and its [joy](#) is more abundant and interior than it ever experienced before it entered the night of the senses. Its purgation is still somewhat incomplete, and the purification of the senses is not yet finished and perfect. It is not without aridities, darkness, and trials, sometimes more severe than in the past. During the period of desolation it will have to endure much suffering from [temptations](#) against the [theological](#) virtues and against the moral virtues. It will have to endure sometimes other diabolical attacks upon its [imagination](#) and senses. Also, [God](#) will permit natural causes to combine in afflicting the [soul](#), such as the persecutions of men, and the ingratitude of friends. Patient suffering and resignation have to be borne during all these trials, and the devout [soul](#) should remember the encouraging words of the [pious](#) and learned [Blosius](#):

Nothing more valuable can befall a man than tribulation, when it is endured with patience for the [love](#) of [God](#); because there is no more certain sign of the divine election. But this should be understood quite as much of internal as of external trials which people of a certain kind of [piety](#) forget.

And again he says,

It is the chain of patient suffering that forms the [ring](#) with which [Christ espouses](#) a [soul](#) to Himself. (Institutio Spiritualis, viii, 3)

## *The unitive way*

The unitive way is the way of those who are in the state of the perfect, that is, those who have their minds so drawn away from all temporal things that they enjoy great peace, who are neither agitated by various desires nor moved by any great extent by passion, and who have their minds chiefly fixed on [God](#) and their attention turned, either always or very frequently, to Him. It is the union with [God](#) by [love](#) and the actual experience and exercise of that [love](#). It is called the state of "perfect charity", because [souls](#) who have reached that state are ever prompt in the exercise of charity by loving [God](#) habitually and by frequent and efficacious acts of that Divine [virtue](#). It is called the "unitive" way because it is by [love](#) that the [soul](#) is united to [God](#), and the more perfect the charity, the closer and more intimate is the union. Union with [God](#) is the principal study and endeavor of this state. It is of this union [St. Paul](#) speaks when he says: "He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit." ([1 Corinthians 6:17](#)). Souls thus united to [God](#) are penetrated by the highest motives of the [theological](#) and moral virtues. In every circumstance of their lives the [supernatural](#) motive which ought to guide their actions is ever present to their mind, and the actions are performed under its inspiration with a force of will which makes their accomplishment easy and even delightful. These perfect [souls](#) are above all familiar with the [doctrine](#) and use of consolations and desolations. They are enlightened in the mysteries of the [supernatural](#) life, and they have experience of that [truth](#) proclaimed by [St. Paul](#) when he said: "We [know](#) that to them that [love God](#), all things work together unto good, to such as, according to His purpose, are called to be [saints](#)." ([Romans 8:28](#)). The form of [prayer](#) suitable to [persons](#) in the unitive way is the contemplation of the glorious mysteries of [Our Lord](#), His [Resurrection](#), [Appearances](#), and [Ascension](#), until the coming of the [Holy Ghost](#), and the preaching of the Gospel. These mysteries may also be the subject of meditation for beginners and for those in a state of progress, but in a peculiar manner, they belong to the perfect. Union with [God](#) belongs substantially to all [souls](#) in a state of grace, but it is in a special manner the distinguishing characteristic of those in the unitive way or in the state of the perfect.

It is in this state that the gift of [contemplation](#) is imparted to the [soul](#), though this is not always the case; because many [souls](#) who are perfect in the unitive way never receive in this life the gift of contemplation and there have been numerous [saints](#) who were not [mystics](#) or contemplatives and who nevertheless excelled in the practice of [heroic virtue](#). Souls, however, who have attained to the unitive state have consolations of a purer and higher order than others, and are more often favored by extraordinary [graces](#); and sometimes with the extraordinary phenomena of

the mystical state such as [ecstasies](#), raptures, and what is known as the [prayer](#) of union.

The [soul](#), however, is not always in this state free from desolations and passive purgation. [St. John of the Cross](#) tells us that the purification of the spirit usually takes place after the purification of the senses. The night of the senses being over, the [soul](#) for some time enjoys, according to this eminent authority the sweet delights of contemplation; then, perhaps, when least expected the second night comes, far darker and far more miserable than the first, and this is called by him the purification of the spirit, which means the purification of the [interior faculties](#), the [intellect](#) and the will. The [temptations](#) which assail the [soul](#) in this state are similar in their nature to those which afflict [souls](#) in the illuminative way, only more aggravated, because felt more keenly; and the withdrawal of the consolations of the spirit which they have already experienced in their greatest affliction. To these trials are added others, peculiar to the spirit, which arise from the intensity of their [love](#) for [God](#), for Whose possession they thirst and long. "The fire of Divine [love](#) can so dry up the spirit and enkindle its desire for satisfying its thirst that it turns upon itself a thousand times and longs for [God](#) in a thousand ways, as the Psalmist did when he said: For Thee my [soul](#) hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh O how many ways" ([St. John of the Cross](#), op. cit. infra, bk. II, xi). There are three degrees of this species of suffering designated by [mystical](#) writers as the "inflammation of love", the "wounds of [love](#)", and the "langour of [love](#)".

From: ***[The New Advent Online Catholic Encyclopedia](#)***