



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 16

MORAL CONVERSION



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Credible Catholic Big Book

Volume Sixteen

Moral Conversion

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Editor's Note:

The content of this volume is limited to a small portion of the total document, because much of the material will be published by Ignatius Press by mid 2019 in a new trilogy on moral theology and the struggle between spiritual good and evil entitled *Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil through Virtue and Prayer* (Volume 2). Interested readers will be able to purchase this text from Ignatius Press in mid 2019. Later, the full text of the document will be made available on www.crediblecatholic.com. Readers interested in an abridged version of this document can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book (Volume 16) to read it.

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Three – Life in Christ**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

Part One from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."

If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?

Purpose of this Volume

In Volume 14, we showed the reality of spiritual good and spiritual evil and the cosmic struggle in which they are involved, and in the last volume we showed how the evil spirit works through temptation toward the 8 deadly sins, deceit, and ultimately despair. Recall that the evil One's main objective is to convince us to choose his way of darkness, egocentricity, domination, hatred, and self-worship over the way of the unconditionally loving God revealed by Jesus Christ – the way of light, compassion, virtue, love, other-centeredness, humility, community, and worship of the true God. Using the knowledge about the evil spirit's tactics and strategies described in Volume 15, we may now build our strategy to resist him through the grace of God coming to us through the Holy Spirit, the teaching of Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church. The Lord has not left us defenseless against the evil One; He has given us remarkable gifts with which to resist and fight our enemy so that we can move with the Lord into the process of moral conversion. Some of these gifts were addressed earlier and some remain to be addressed in this volume and the next. The following is a quick reference guide to the description of those gifts:

1. The Catholic Church as teacher, as presider over sacraments and liturgy, as head of the community in Christ's mystical body, and center of a rich tradition of spiritual life, wisdom, service, and worship (Volume 6 & Volume 12).
2. The word of Jesus in the New Testament (Volume 8)
3. The sacraments and liturgy of the Church Mass and the Holy Eucharist-- Volume 9, Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick, and Holy Orders—Volume 10, and Marriage—Volume 11.
4. The rich traditions and practices regarding spiritual life, devotions, theology, intellectual life and spiritual aesthetics—including devotion to Mary and the saints (Volume 12).
5. The teachings of Jesus (as interpreted by the Catholic Church) on personal morality, the Commandments, and social ethics (Volume 17).

If we are to make proper use of these gifts to deepen our spiritual and moral conversion, we will have to engage in two *disciplines* to deepen our spiritual and moral conversion:

1. Personal and contemplative prayer (Volume 12 and Volumes 18, 19, and 20).
2. A discipline of moral conversion to resist temptation and become what St. Paul calls, “the new man” (this volume—16).

If we do not seriously engage in these two disciplines, it will be very difficult to move from what we will call “the lower self” (“the old man”) to the “higher self” (“the new man”). This leaves us open to our spiritual enemy who uses the proclivities of the lower self to tempt us into the 8 deadly sins and into a minimal, if not empty, spiritual life.

As noted above, if readers want more than the two sections given below, they can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book, Volume 16 for an abridged version of the whole text.

Please note: The following Table of Contents gives only the sample sections used in this document.

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Please note: The steps for resisting temptation given below presume a daily habit of contemplative prayer, which infuses the steps given below with the grace and love of a personal relationship with the Lord. See Volume 12, Chapter Three, Section II for developing a contemplative personal relationship with the Lord.

First Sample

From Chapter Two, Section II.A

II.

Resisting Temptation and Cultivating the Higher Self: A Practical Approach [Back to top](#)

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.

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.¹ 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

¹ See Ignatius of Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* – First Week, "Particular and Daily Examen."

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.

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.²

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

² 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>

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.³

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 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 – described in Volume 15, Chapter Two, Sections II and III). 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)

³ Ibid -- “Fourteenth Rule for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul”.

and many other spiritual writers⁴ 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? (see 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 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, the particular persona-personality-identity gives definition and character to self-consciousness--conveying feelings, desires, character attributes and thinking processes.⁵ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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*, 2nd ed. (Guilford Press). This volume is widely recognized as the definitive fieldwork on self and identity.

II.A.1

The Lower and Higher Self as Natural and Essential

In Volume 13 (Chapter One), 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 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).⁶ This is not to say that children do not have a higher self—for they have empathy for parents, siblings, and friends,⁷ and a sense of

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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>.

nobility and guilt (associated with conscience)⁸ and a strong unrefined natural sense of the spiritual and God.⁹

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,¹⁰ Plato,¹¹ and Aristotle.¹² 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).¹³ 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 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

⁸ Robert Coles 1986 *The Moral Life of Children* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press)

⁹ See Robert Coles 1990 *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin)

¹⁰ Sirach 6 & 30; Wisdom Ch 1-5

¹¹ See Plato *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *The Republic* (Books VI and VII)—Which concern education in virtue, piety, and immortality.

¹² See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2 *Politics* Book 7

¹³ See Spitzer 2014 *Finding True Happiness* (Ignatius) Chapter 3.

many (like Gollum) do not – preferring instead to lapse into their addictions to the deadly sins (the power of the ring).¹⁴

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:¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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,¹⁷ 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.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ *Phaedrus* 246a-254e.

¹⁶ Plato 1961 *Phaedrus* trans. by R. Hackforth in *Plato: Collected Dialogues* ed by Edith Hamilton (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 248a.

¹⁷ 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*, 2nd ed. (Guilford Press).

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,¹⁸ 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 father’s called St. Paul’s “flesh”, “concupiscence” (the tendency to act unreflectively in accordance with the lower self toward sensual pleasure and egocentricity).¹⁹ 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 significantly to resist the urgings of the lower self (“concupiscence”) by making the higher self more preminent—if we cooperate with those fruits in our thoughts and actions.²⁰

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 have omitted a lengthy section on my early spiritual autobiography.

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

¹⁸ See Volume 8 for a description of these gifts.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1264.

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 16th 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 chapter, 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,²¹ but also applied it to the topic of moral agency.²² 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,²³ St. Augustine,²⁴ St. Thomas a Kempis,²⁵ and St. Ignatius Loyola.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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 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,

²¹ See Albert Bandura, 1997. *Self-Efficacy: The exercise of control*. (New York: Freeman).

²² Albert Bandura 2002. "Selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency". *Journal of Moral Education*. 31 (2): 101-119

²³ Eph 4:22-23 and Col. 3: 9-10.

²⁴ St. Augustine. *The Teacher* Books I-III.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ See Lou Tice 1990 *Smart Talk* 2003 (Provo, UT: Executive Excellence Publishing).

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 18th 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.²⁸

²⁸ See Albert Bandura 1997 *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman) pp.36-61.

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.²⁹

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 affirmations³⁰ (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 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

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰See 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.

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.³¹ 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.³²

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. 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

³¹ 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.

³² 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.

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.³³

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 from Chapter One of this Volume (which is 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 us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.³⁴

³³ Lou Tice *Smart Talk* p.20

³⁴ St. Ignatius of Loyola *Spiritual Exercises*-- “Fourteenth Rule for Knowing the Different Movements in the Soul”.

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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. To get a better idea of what these virtues consist in, return to Chapter One (Section II) and read the extended descriptions of the virtues on which you are focusing.

Eight Deadly Sins	Counteracting Virtues
Gluttony/drunkenness	Temperance (natural virtue)
Greed	Generosity —sub-virtues--contributive and transcendental identity as well as gratitude
Lust	Chastity – sub-virtues--covenant romantic love, respect for others, plus temperance
Sloth	Zeal – sub-virtues--contributive and transcendental identity plus fortitude (natural virtue)
Vanity	Modesty –sub-virtues-- contributive and transcendental identity and respect/humility
Anger	Forgiveness and/or Patience – sub-virtues--gentle-heartedness, respect, and compassion.
Envy	Gratitude —sub-virtues-- contributive and transcendental identity respect for others and humble-heartedness
Pride	Humility – 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 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* (Mediatix), 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).³⁵

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 (see Volume 12, Chapter Four, Section IV), 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."³⁶

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

³⁵ The three-volumes: *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*; *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism to the Transfiguration*; *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*

³⁶ St. Ignatius of Loyola *Autobiography of St. Ignatius* ed. by JFX O'Connor
http://s3.amazonaws.com/manybooks_pdflrg_new/loyolas2453424534-8pdfLRG.pdf.

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.

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 desires³⁷ – 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.

³⁷ 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.

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 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.³⁸

Using techniques derived from Dr. Bandura’s work on self-efficacy,³⁹ 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.

³⁸ Lou Tice *Smart Talk* p.3.

³⁹ See Albert Bandura *Self-Efficacy* pp. 36-78.

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.

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 simply 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.”

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- “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 examen—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 examen 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.⁴⁰

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

⁴⁰ St. Ignatius Loyola *Spiritual Exercises* “Method for Making the General Examen”
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/seil/seil09.htm>

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).

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 chapter 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.

Third Sample From Chapter Two, Section IV

IV. A Shortcut to Resisting Temptation [Back to top](#)

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 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 (favoring 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.”

You do not have to use the above somewhat lengthy expression (“I am going to stop thinking with my lower self...”) to bring your higher self to the forefront of your self-consciousness. Once your higher self has become strong enough in your subconscious mind, you can use much shorter expressions that reflect the strength of your higher self. Some of the more effective ones I have used are:

- “I am more Christ-like than that.”
- “I am better than that.”
- “I am more mature than that.”
- “I am above that.”

The first expression (using the Lord’s name) is most effective, because it not only brings our higher self into focus, but associates it with the Lord and simultaneously brings the Lord (and our love for him) into the process of resisting temptation. I use this expression every day – sometimes several times – and find it remarkably incisive and effective – and so I will repeat it in bold:

“I am more Christ-like than that.”

This expression 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,⁴¹ St. Peter,⁴² St. Paul,⁴³ St. Ignatius,⁴⁴ 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).

⁴¹ 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).

⁴² Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith (1 Pet. 5:8).

⁴³ Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

⁴⁴ “[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>