

Spiritual, Not Religious

Around this time of year, in the midst of Advent and getting ready to celebrate Christmas, many of us probably hear it said: “I’m *spiritual*, but not *religious*.” Well, what does that even mean, and how can we respond?

Question: “I consider myself spiritual rather than religious; why isn’t that enough?”

Answer: “Because God loves you and wants even better things for you.”

When people say that they are spiritual rather than religious, they frequently mean that even though they do not practice a specific religion, they recognize that there really is more to the world than matter, that the world has a spiritual dimension. This is good! But it does not go very far. It would be good to know more about the world’s spiritual dimension. In every field of our human endeavor, having more knowledge generally is better, and so it makes sense to ask if we can learn more about the world’s spiritual dimension.

From a Christian perspective, we can learn more. The Lord loves us and wants us to know Him – not just have feelings or guesses about Him. When He created the universe, He left evidence that allows us to learn certain things about Him. “Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what He has made.” (Rom 1:20)

God has also left evidence in the human heart: “With [man’s] openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God’s existence. In all of this, he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the seed of eternity that we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material, can have its origin only in God.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 33)

Furthermore, God has entered into history, communicating with us through the Prophets and, most importantly, through God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Apologetics examines and presents the evidence that shows that God has communicated with us, and the ultimate purpose of apologetics is to help us discover God as well as the joy and happiness that we are meant to have. “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness He never stops searching for.” (CCC 27)

Or, as Saint Augustine wrote: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” (*Confessions* 1:1:1)

In addition these insights, it seems that many people who claim to be spiritual and yet not religious use this mantra as an excuse not to be committed to something greater than themselves, and a lot of these people seem to exude a fear of commitment in general. This trend seems to be growing in recent years and seems to be related of other similar trends: the fear of commitment in relationships (resulting in fewer marriages, for example); fear of commitment to long-term careers; fear of commitment in oneself for the long-term planning for the future (resulting in fewer people actually saving for retirement, for example); and the fear of commitment to faith and religion. The virtue and Gift of the Holy Spirit of Fortitude is what is needed to help folks get over any fear of commitment that they may have. And so, let us pray for ourselves and for others, that the Holy Spirit would bless all of us with a greater share of Fortitude.