

Braxton An Aniboom Animation by Brad Warren

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VH1tBHarxTk>

On the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive Stages of Spiritual Life, as seen in a Cartoon

Msgr. Charles Pope • November 8, 2013

<http://blog.adw.org/2013/11/on-the-purgative-illuminative-and-unitive-stages-of-spiritual-life-as-seen-in-a-cartoon/>

In the spiritual journey, there are generally denoted three basic stages through which the soul must pass that draws us to deeper union with God: the Purgative, the Illuminative and the Unitive.

And those who seek union with God must realize that such union, while always the gift of God, requires process, often painful, that must pave the way the way for that union. For, if a box is filled with sand, it cannot be filled with gold dust. The sand must be emptied, the vessel cleaned, and then there is the room for the Gold of God's presence.

The touching Aniboom cartoon below illustrates these stages. Briefly stated the stages described are these.

1. The Purgative Stage – In this stage the soul our desires and affections must be purged of attractions to sin. The disorder caused by sin must be set right by the Lord, for a disordered soul cannot perceive or appreciate well the glory and beauty of God. The distractions of the world must be diminished and wrongful passions, attachments, and evil inclinations must be subjugated so that we can more easily overcome temptations, and preserve and exercise charity. There is a focus, in this stage of uprooting the remnants and habits of former sins, perhaps through mortifications, the practice of austerity and simplicity, and the submitting of our will to be in conformity to the will of God. We seek to diminish and purge the attraction of wrongful or excessive pleasures. We also seek to diminish our natural shrinking from pain and to develop a repugnance to whatever is contrary to the will of God. The main virtue of this state to be cultivated is humility, which help us be aware of our own weakness and or our dependance on the grace of God.

In the video a young son seeks to be close to his father and enjoy his presence. The father is delighted at his enthusiastic love but must gently show the son that other necessary duties have not been attended to yet. The room of his life is not in good order, and must be rendered as such before he can come and sit close to his father. He shows his son what must be done. And the son to his credit runs to put things in order. The purgative way is now underway.

2. The Illuminative way – Those in this stage have made progress and have their passions better under control, so that they easily keep themselves from mortal sin, but still do not easily avoid venial sins since they still take pleasure in earthly things and are distracted by various imaginations and desires, not all of which are necessary unlawful but may get in the way of deeper union with God. The mind becomes more and more enlightened (illuminated) to spiritual things and the practice of virtue. Love is stronger and the soul seeks progress in the spiritual life and in all the virtues. But purgation is still somewhat incomplete, and the purification of the senses is not yet finished. There are also aridities, difficulties, and trials, sometimes more severe than in the past and the need to endure suffering from temptations.

In the video, the young boy makes progress, but he still has not fully understood or implemented what must take place before the deepest union is possible. Twice his father must correct him and help him to see, to be illuminated as to what is needed. But in stages the young boy is understanding and conforming.

3. The Unitive Way – This the way of those who have their minds detached from temporal things such that they enjoy great peace, and are not agitated by various desires nor moved to any great extent by sinful passion. Having been largely purged of these things, they have their minds fixed chiefly on God. It is called “unitive” since at this stage, there is a union with God by love and the actual experience and exercise of that love.

And thus, in the video, the young boy having been led through stages by his father is now able to enjoy close union with him. His life is now in good order. There is a beautiful detail at the end of how his original desire to play a video game with his father is now deepened and he is content merely rest in union with his Father, for his own sake and not for some pleasure outside his Father’s embrace.

The video is not perfect. It shows a father who points to what must be done but does not otherwise assist his son. Obviously in terms of grace, we cannot make any progress through these stages with out God’s absolute assistance. Nevertheless it is a lovely video that rather nicely illustrates the stages of our growth toward intimacy with God.

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