

INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION

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TOPIC:

UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL READING IN NKOKONJERU NOVITIATE AS

AWAY TO FOSTER SPIRITUAL GROWTH, AMONG

LITTLE SISTERS OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI-UGANDA

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Diploma in Spirituality with Focus on Franciscan Studies

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this integration paper is my original work and has never been submitted to any college or University for academic credit. All sources of information have been cited and acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

This integration paper has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed: _____

Supervisor: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved Novices and the Formation Houses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the almighty God for his continuous love and care granted to me especially by giving me good health and energy to realize this work. And to all my parents for all that have done for me.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 General introduction

In this work, the researcher will look at the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the statement of the problem, Justification of the study, Purpose of the study, the research objectives, possible research questions, Methodology, Difficulties and how to overcome them and Organization of the study.

1.1 Background

The biblical basis of this practice is St. Paul's advice to his disciple Timothy whom he appointed bishop. St. Paul told him to "Attend to reading." The word "attend" an allusion to the many other concerns that a bishop has to attend to. By this, according to St. Alphonsus Liguori, Doctor of the Church on Moral theology, the Apostle Paul "wished him to apply to the reading of holy books. Not in a passing way and for a short time, but regularly and for a considerable time.¹

" Spiritual reading to our console sorrow deepens our joy, prompt our transformation, aid s growth in reflection and orient our whole being toward the divine. The Fathers of the Church recommended this practice: St. Jerome says that when we pray we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us. St. Ambrose of Milan says the same: "We address him when we pray; we hear him when we read."²Spiritual reading is an instruction in prayer and virtue, according to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and thus he said that "spiritual reading and prayer are the arms by which hell is conquered and paradise won." St. Jose Maria Escrivá explained that spiritual reading "builds up a store of fuel. — It looks like a lifeless heap, but I often find that my memory, of its

¹ BENEDICTINE MONKS. *The Book of Saints*. P.5-20

² J. CUMMING. *Letters of Saints to Sinners*. P. 59

own accord, will draw from it material which fills my prayer with life and inflames my thanksgiving after Communion." (The Way 117)³

Spiritual reading provides access to spiritual advice from masters of spirituality, says St. Alphonsus Liguori. Thus, St. Pius X further thoroughly explained: Everyone knows the great influence that is exerted by the voice of a friend who gives candid advice, assists by his counsel, corrects, encourages and leads one away from error. Blessed is the man who has found a true friend; he that has found him has found a treasure. We should, then, count pious books among our true friends. They solemnly remind us of our duties and of the prescriptions of legitimate discipline; they arouse the heavenly voices that were stifled in our souls; they rid our resolutions of listlessness; they disturb our deceitful complacency; they show the true nature of less worthy affections to which we have sought to close our eyes; they bring to light the many dangers which beset the path of the imprudent. ⁴

They render all these services with such kindly discretion that they prove themselves to be not only our friends, but the very best of friends. They are always at hand, constantly beside us to assist us in the needs of our souls; their voice is never harsh, their advice is never self-seeking, their words are never timid or deceitful." When I read holy books," says St. Gregory the Theologian about the books of St. Basil the Great, then the spirit and body are illumined and I become the temple of God and the harp of the Holy Spirit, played by divine powers through them I am corrected and through them I receive a kind of divine change and I am made into a different person.⁵

³ R. P MCBRIEN. *The life of saints*. P.55-159

J. CUMMING. *Letters of Saints to Sinners*. P. 59

⁵ R.P MCBRIEN. P.55-159

Reading of holy books is also a way to fight temptations: Endeavor to have always in your hand a pious book," advised St. Jerome to his disciple Salvina, "that with this shield you may defend yourself against bad thoughts." St. Francis on the other hand comments on how temptation affects one's life the researcher quotes, " Truly I understand and believe that if God had to a highway man or to the greatest of all sinners the mercies and favors that he has done to me he would be a much better man than I am and more grateful than I, and on the other hand I understand and believe that if God withdrew His hand from me and did not hold me up, I should commit greater sins than all the rest of mankind and be the worst of them."⁶

All the founders of religious institutes have strongly recommended this holy exercise to their religious, said St. Alphonsius Spiritual reading is a great concern for all Christians in the world today. Despite many measures by the church to enhance spiritual reading in formation houses, it is still a challenge today for all the Formees and continues to affect the congregations and the church at large. One scholar once said that if you want to hide something from Africans, put it in writing, this sounds like reading only challenges Africans but in actual sense, it is and remains a challenge for the whole world and for all races whites and blacks.

A good date the beginning of the modern world is the dawn of the age of print St. Edith Stein., Patron of Europe, converted to Catholicism after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Ávila on a holiday in Göttingen in 1921, at the age of 29. One evening Edith picked up an autobiography of St. Teresa of Ávila and read this book all night. "When I had finished the book, I said to myself: This is the truth." She went out the next day to buy a missal and a copy of the

⁶ V. BOURKE, *In the Fathers of the Church*, p.1ff.

Catholic catechism. St. Francis on the other hand who called himself an idiota having listened to a gospel text in Mathew changed totally.⁷

Man's history will never be the same. But the real proof for the significance of the printed word is the seldom realized fact that when God began what we call His public revelation, first to the Jews and then to the people of the New Israel who followed Christ, invented writing through inspiration of the holy spirit enabled people of different back ground to write both old and new testament. This is how God intended to reveal his love to humanity that as we read Scriptures we see His work at hand. In Formation houses however and in particular, Little sisters of St Francis, Spiritual reading might still remain as a challenge despite the tireless efforts of the Formators.

1.2 The purpose of the study

This study intends to explore the factors affecting effective spiritual reading in formation houses and in particular Nkokonjeru Novitiate for the Little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. After the findings, this study will then come up with possible solutions and measures to rejuvenate the spirit of reading spiritual books. These measures however will include motivation of Formees for any effective learning to take place, there should be motivation either through positive or negative reinforcement. Once spiritual reading is enhanced, the Formees will enrich their souls, they will be able to console their sorrows, deepen their joys, prompt a transformation, aid growth in reflection, and orient their whole being toward the divine in many ways. Spiritual reading is necessary as the normal way of nourishing the Christian faith a kind of reading that nourishes the life of the spirit which might love and serve God accordingly. The Formees will develop a

⁷ J. CUMMING. *Letters of Saints to Sinners*. P. 59.

continually growing interest in Holy Scriptures and the writings of the spiritual masters to preserve their supernatural life where revolutions in the media of mass communications, magazines, movies, papers, radio, televisions internet have acted as a threat.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT.

All the founders of religious institutes have strongly recommended this holy exercise to their religious, said St. Alphonsus. St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of what is considered as the largest religious order in Catholicism, decided to live a saintly life, after reading a volume of the lives of the saints which he accidentally took up while he was in a hospital bed. St. Augustine of Hippo, considered one of the greatest Fathers of the Church, converted to the Catholic Church upon hearing a boy tell him "Take, read; take, read." He recounted that "I took (the epistles of Paul the Apostle), I opened, I read in silence; it was as though the darkness of all my doubting was driven away by the light of peace which had entered my soul."⁸

Having worked in formation for quite a long time, the researcher realized that the Formees don't take spiritual reading serious partly due to their negligence and mainly due to the fixed time schedule, they are immersed in busy round of duties and heavy responsibilities. Understandably under the pressure of daily preoccupations, the novices become distracted like any other person from dimensions of the spirit, yet the inner person in each one of us does not cease to cry out for something serious about living a spiritual life. The researcher realized that more time is allocated for not only manual work but also classroom studies. As soon as Formees wake up, whatever they are to do is clearly laid down in the Time Table. And to make matters worse, time allocated for spiritual reading precedes manual labor for example after an hour's lesson, follows gardening,

⁸ J. CUMMING. *Letters of Saints to Sinners*. P. 59

Rosary, lunch and then spiritual reading, all these require energy and there is no time to regain the lost energy in between in that once the Formees get the thirty or one hours' time for spiritual reading, they will instead be lulled off to sleep. Looking at these factors, there is great need to address this problem before it is too late.

1.4 Hypothesis

The novices do not like spiritual reading. In formation there is no proper time allocated for spiritual reading in the formation houses. Spiritual reading fosters spiritual growth.

1.5 STUDY OBJECTIVES

To investigate the church's teaching on spiritual reading.

To explore challenges of spiritual reading among the novices of Nkokonjeru novitiate of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi—Uganda.

To propose strategies for more efficient and effective spiritual reading among the novices of Nkokonjeru novitiate- Uganda.

1.6 POSSIBLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the church's teaching on spiritual reading?

What are some of the challenges affecting spiritual reading?

How can spiritual reading be more effective among the novices of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi Nkokonjeru –novitiate Uganda?

1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

To investigate the church's teaching on spiritual reading.

To explore the impact and challenges of spiritual reading among the novices of Nkokonjeru novitiate of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi—Uganda.

To propose strategies for more efficient and effective spiritual reading among the novices of Nkokonjeru novitiate- Uganda.

1.8 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study will be restricted to Nkokonjeru Novitiate in Kyagwe, Mukono District in Uganda. The researcher will use the constitution of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi and other articles of the congregation, Internet, e-mail, and phone calls to assist carry out investigation. The researcher will also refer to congregational documents by reading the history of the foundress.

1.9 DIFFICULTIES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

In our modern time there are many factors that put spiritual reading at a halt. It is clear that the researcher will encounter some challenges in carrying out this study. Since the researcher is going to interact with Novices who are under training and who are full of anxiety of becoming sisters, they may withhold some information fearing that once they disclose it, it may be used against them. On the other hand the novice mistress may not be so free with the fear that the loopholes of the formation house be disclosed. So to overcome this, the researcher will first of all establish rapport with them, share a number of life experience with them and later on go to the main point. The researcher will share with the novice mistress the purpose of the study beforehand.

2.0 Methodology

In order to test the hypothesis of the study and examine the main questions raised, the following methodology will be employed: The researcher will observe and hear them bring their observation during their time arguing, debates and presentation in their different groups and the results is used. The aim will be to collect more qualitative information about their lifestyle and behaviors in relation to spreading the gospel both in deed and in words and prayer. Library and online materials shall also be employed to find out the scholarly and more advanced knowledge on these matters.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHURCH TEACHING ON SPIRITUAL READING

1.0 General introduction

In this chapter, the researcher explores the definition of spiritual reading, the origin of spiritual reading, the Catholic understanding of spiritual reading with examples from the life of Saints, benefit of spiritual reading with focus on the Institute of the Little Sisters of St. Francis and finally the conclusion of the chapter.

1.1 Definition of spiritual reading

Spiritual reading is a practice of reading books and articles about spirituality with the purpose of growing in holiness. Spiritual reading is devoted to the reading of lives of saints, writings of Doctors and the Fathers of the Church, theological works written by holy people, and doctrinal writings of Church authorities. It is different from focuses on the bible. Spiritual reading is a visitor information update from a medium conveyed to a human being in relation to their choices, life and purpose

1.2 Origin of spiritual reading

The biblical basis is St. Paul's advice "Attend to reading" which meant that Timothy his disciple should "apply to the reading of holy books, not in a passing way and for a short time, but regularly and for a considerable time. Saint Augustine says that "he who wishes often to be with God ought to pray frequently and read pious books," and all spiritual writers after him, without exception, have insisted on the necessity of spiritual reading for all those who wish to lead a real

interior and supernatural life.⁹ Holiness is the fruit of prayer, and mental prayer is extremely difficult without the reading of spiritual books. Such reading provides the foundation on which the work of meditation is to be built upon.

The same St. Jerome recommended Demetriade to avail herself of spiritual reading as of a mirror. He meant to say that as a mirror exhibits the stains of the countenance, so holy books show us the defects of the soul, in reading holy books we receive many lights and divine calls. St. Jerome says that when we pray, we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us.¹⁰ St. Gregory, speaking of spiritual reading, says: "There we perceive the losses we have sustained and the advantages we have acquired; there we observe our falling back or our progress in the way of God.

It is known to all that St. Augustine, when miserably chained by his passions and vices, was, by reading one of the epistles of St. Paul, enlightened by divine light, went forth from his darkness, and began to lead a life of holiness. Thus St. Ignatius, while a soldier, by reading a volume of the lives of the saints, which he accidentally took up, in order to get rid of the tediousness of the bed to which he was confined by sickness, was led to begin a life of sanctity. From that experience, he became the Father and Founder of the Society of Jesus—an Order which has done so much for the Church. By reading a pious book accidentally and almost against his will, St. John Colombino left the world became a saint, and the founder of another religious Order.¹¹

To the researcher think, a great way to organize it is an adaptation of St. John Paul II's recommendations in *Pastores DaboVobis*.¹² (The encyclical was on the training of priests, and he called attention to four basic areas of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Even

⁹AUGUSTINE, (ST.). *Confessions*, p.1ff

¹⁰LAWRENCE. *The Practice of the Presence of God*, p.1ff

¹¹J. CUMMING. *Letters of Saints to Sinners*. P. 59

¹²JOHN PAUL . *Pastores DaboVobis*. Encyclical Letter, p.1ff

though most of us are not ordained priests, we can still apply this to our spiritual reading habits. Good spiritual reading will ideally aid us in all four of those elements—or at least focus on one or two. Many spiritual works exhort us to form the “human”; that is, to become the best version of ourselves. To form the spiritual side of us is to draw us deeper into communion with Our Lord. The intellectual aspect is important; we have to know what we believe.

St. John Paul II opens up *Fides ET Ratio* extolling the complementarity of faith and reason. They are “like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”¹³ Every Catholic isn’t expected to get an advanced degree in theology, but each one of us has to understand what we believe. St. Peter reminds us to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

St. Benedict appointed two monks to go round the Monastery at a fixed hour to see that everybody was "making" his spiritual reading¹⁴. Similarly, St. Ignatius writes in his rules: "The religious should twice a day employ (therein) the time allotted, for examination of conscience, for meditation and spiritual reading; and with all possible care and diligence apply themselves thereunto in the Lord."¹⁵ It is a matter to be regretted that this devotional exercise is confined mostly to those who have given themselves to the religious life. It is also unfortunate that books dealing with the characteristics and lives of the saints, as well as with the principles and laws of

¹³JOHN PAUL , *Fides et Ratio* Encyclical Letter, p.5ff

¹⁴ BENEDICT, *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English*. P.1ff

¹⁵IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *The Spiritual Exercises*. P.50ff

the life of union with God find a place in few libraries except those of religious houses. They should find a place on the bookshelves of every truly Christian home.

1.3 The Churches Understanding Of Spiritual Reading on the Life of Saints

The code of canon law; in the formation of novices directs the Formators to always give time in reading scripture and prayer and meditation. In addition to that the obligation of the religious to read sacred scripture always. Throughout the history of Christian spirituality, spiritual reading has been seen to be of great benefit to many souls. There are many striking examples of the salutary effects of the reading of pious books and some examples are

St. Augustine of Hippo, considered one of the greatest Fathers of the Church, converted to the Catholic Church upon hearing a boy tell him "Take, read; take, read." He recounted that "I took (the epistles of Paul the Apostle), I opened, I read in silence; it was as though the darkness of all my doubting was driven away by the light of peace which had entered my soul."¹⁶

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of what is considered as the largest religious order in Catholic church, decided to live a saintly life, after reading a volume of the lives of the saints which he accidentally took up while he was in a sick bed in hospital.¹⁷

St. Edith Stein, Patron of Europe, converted to Catholicism after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Ávila on a holiday in Göttingen in 1921, at the age of 29. One evening Edith picked up an autobiography of St. Teresa of Ávila and read this book all night. "When I had finished the

¹⁶AUGUSTINE, (ST.). *Confessions*. P.12

¹⁷ IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *The Spiritual Exercises*, P.12-14

book, I said to myself: This is the truth." She went out the next day to buy a missal and a copy of the Catholic catechism.¹⁸

Thomas Merton, a known spiritual writer, read a book by Étienne Gilson, on "The Elements of Christian Philosophy," and decided to study Catholicism. He later converted and became a Trappist monk.¹⁹

1.4 St. Francis understanding of spiritual reading

There are many ways to follow Christ. "One way of following the spirit has been exemplified by Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) who became a kind of model for others who wished to learn from and illuminated by his life. Those who admire his way of life both religious and lay faithful up to date make their way to Assisi as all other pilgrims do to visit his tomb and to learn from the art and architecture inspired by him. To engage deeply with the life of Francis is to see a man who was consumed totally in the desire to live a radical life following Jesus a life shining forth the radical poverty of the incarnation and the conviction that everything from creation to our redemption comes as sheer gift from God. What we read from St. Francis is that the bible is not just a book to read but a text to be lived and performed."²⁰

St. Francis revered the bible to the extent that whenever he found any flying paper he would order for it to be picked in case it was the word of God being trampled on. To the luxurious pretensions of medieval church men, he exemplified the simple way of Jesus. To the poor, he identified with the dignity of every one made, "in the image and likeness of God." To the emerging mercantile class with their proto-capitalist desires for profit, he lived in such a way as to show the

¹⁸E. STEIN. *The Science of the Cross*. P.30ff

¹⁹T. MERTON, *What is Contemplation*, p.10ff

²⁰R. ARMSTRONG. *Francis and Clare*, pg. 107

snarcs of wealth. To the medieval Cathars, who despised the material life he hymned the goodness of God's creation. To the smug pretensions of the medieval church, he pointed to the cross, to the class system of his day he insisted that all should be called brothers and sisters. Francis encouraged his brothers to preach through their way of life and if necessary to use words. He demonstrated by his life that the gospel is ever open to a new reading while always remaining the same and ever challenging to those who confront it with serious openness.²¹

1.5 The Understanding of Spiritual Reading According to Mother Kevin

It is after reading from such spiritual writings about St. Francis that one by names of sr. Teresa Kearny also known as "Mother Kevin" an Irish lady, got insight of founding the congregation of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. The title of "little sisters" is derived from the life of St. Francis where he called his brothers' minors- little ones referring to a life of humility and simplicity of heart as following that of Jesus Christ at the crib- Incarnation, cross, holy Eucharist, and Jesus reflected on all creation including every human being.²²

Mother Kevin was a woman of prayer. She encouraged her sisters to be faithful in moment of prayer, read the bible and the lives of saints especially the life and works of St. Francis whom we emulate. She would always express how we live in a cruel world thus the need for one to be spiritually equipped. According to the constitution of the little sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, under the topic spiritual exercises, each sister is to set aside time for spiritual reading at least two hours every week. This is more focused to deepen the knowledge and awareness of our Franciscan spiritual heritage. She goes on to say how the sisters are to read together on the compilations of

²¹ L.S. CUNNINGHAM. *Francis of Assisi*, P9-30.

²² A. NASIMIYU. *Constitution of the Little Sisters of St. Francis*, P.1-8.

the Franciscan writers, “Omnibus” and other Franciscan sources. Libraries are to be kept up-to-date and well stocked with spiritual reading books. Spiritual reading helps in the continuity of the life of the members of the congregation. Reading the lives of saints challenges our day to day lives and encourages continuation even in moments of hardship.²³

1.6 Benefit of spiritual reading

The spiritual lesson is that we must seek within ourselves to be holy, emulating the saints of the Church. St. Clement of Rome wrote: "Come to the saints, for they who cleave to them shall be made holy." What we have to ask ourselves then is this question: is our life as holy as that of the saints? When we admit that it is not, then we can take the step of seeking to be holy, learning from the saints of the Church, the example of whose lives is ever before us. As we take this step, then our lives will have increasing spiritual value, and, just as the saints strove valiantly for their own salvation, so both the desire and ability to strive will become ours on our own path towards salvation.

The reading of spiritual books has not only contributed to the conversion of saints, but has also given them during their whole life great aid to persevere and to advance continually in perfection. The glorious St. Dominic used to embrace his spiritual books, and to press them to his bosom, saying, "These books give me milk."²⁴

We read in the Chronicles of the Discalced Carmelites that a lady in Vienna was prepared to go to a festivity, but because it was given up she fell into a violent passion. To divert her attention she began to read a spiritual book that was at hand, and conceived such contempt for the world, that

²³ A. NASIMIYU. *Constitution of the little sisters of St. Francis*, pg 72-73

²⁴ GUARDINI, ROMANO. *The Art of Praying*. P.10-25

she abandoned it and became a Teresian nun. The same happened to the Duchess of Montalto, in Sicily. She began also by accident to read the works of St. Teresa, and afterwards continued to read them with so much fervor, that she sought and obtained her husband's consent to become a religious, and entered among the Discalced Carmelites.

In the fourth place, in reading holy books we receive many lights and divine calls. St. Jerome says that when we pray we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us. How many saints have, by reading a spiritual book, been induced to forsake the world and to give themselves to God?²⁵ It is known to all that St. Augustine, when miserably chained by his passions and vices, he was, by reading one of the epistles of St. Paul, enlightened with divine light, went forth from his darkness, and began to lead a life of holiness.²⁶

1.7 Conclusion

The doctors of the church and Saints lived just like any of us, yet after thousands and thousands of years we are able to access their lifestyle through reading their inspiring lives which have surpassing lessons today. The Saints and Doctors of the Church are evidence that the teaching of the Church is meaningful in every era. Their writings help us see that we too can live the faith and be able to help others encounter Jesus Christ – a new task of new evangelization. In spiritual reading we come to discover how the saints and doctors of the church also had their little failings / weaknesses some like Augustine were terrible sinners but came to conversion, others like Jerome, dealt with anger, Athanasius was a model of fortitude devoted his life to defeat of heresy. Pope Gregory the great devoted self to little ones after renouncing all his goods for the interest of taking

²⁵ Work of St. Jerome, p1-5.

²⁶ Ibid, p.10.

care of the needy and desperate. Theresa of Avila had power of prayer we read how she taught praying as means of being in terms of friendship with God frequently conversing in secret with him who we know loves us.

While there are still many questions left unanswered about spiritual reading and many possible truths to be drawn from the lives of Saints and Doctors of the Church. However, the researcher has aimed in this chapter to establish that at least even though none of us or the writers were there when the information was secured, however reading their lives helps feed the minds and hearts enabling spiritual growth. The researcher contends that turning away from spiritual reading may result in spiritual dryness and keeps us far away from being able to understand what the doctors of the church and saints carried out to achieve their heights.

CHAPTER TWO

CHALLENGES OF SPIRITUAL READING

2.0 Introduction

True development in spiritual reading is not about running away from or avoiding the problems of life, it is about learning to see such challenges as opportunities for growth. The researcher intends to explore more on how personal comfort, lack of self-examination/ evaluation, secularism/worldliness, distractions, interference, ignorance, poor planning, lack of discipline, poor role models, discouragement act as great challenges in spiritual reading. As each person is on pilgrimage the direction to be taken is very vital to note and the freedom is set for us either we choose to move toward God or wander away from Him.

2.1 Personal comfort

A dangerous contentment .No more stretching and believing God for something; limited vision of what my life in Christ looks like; no great desires for the Kingdom; limited passion for service and work. We say; “I am comfortable where I am right now.” the Problem is that we cannot live on our past growth in our relationship with the Lord.²⁷ God wants us to experience Him daily in our lives and continue to experience Him in an “abundant life” (John 10:10).When we go “off the boil” we simply stop growing because there is no energy being used to get momentum. If you are growing, you will always be outside of your comfort zone. When last did you get uncomfortable? When last did you commit to something that was inconvenient, learn a new skill

²⁷ T. KEMPIS. *The Imitation of Christ*. P.5-50.

that was difficult, take on a task that was complicated, start a new discipline which took away some leisure time, went out of your way to do something for someone else.²⁸

2.2 Failure in Self-Evaluation

Personal insight into your strengths and weaknesses is an empowering gift for change and improvement. Many of us do not take the time to examine our lives: how are we doing in our relationships; are we being our very best; where in our lives can we develop new strengths; what habits have I developed that are not contributing to my future.²⁹ We have many reasons why we do not evaluate ourselves: it does not come naturally to us; we just never take the time; don't think it is good to look too intently on ourselves; other people don't do it, why should I! If we do not self-evaluate, we do not see the consequences for our life choices, we fall into a false pride: "I'm O.K. I'm doing fine!" The enemy hides the consequences of bad choices until it is often too late for us. It is important to keep a solid foundation of humility in our lives, which involves evaluation.³⁰

2.3 Secularism/Worldliness

This is perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to spiritual reading to grow today. Far too many Christians fail to grow as they ought to because the world has too great of an influence in their lives. We want to serve the Lord, but we do not want to give up the world in the process.³¹ As a result, we seek for a happy medium. The problem is that what makes us happy displeases God. "The world is too much with us" tells more than a poet fancy. It is a fact to be faced. On Sad

²⁸J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, P30-40.

²⁹AUGUSTINE, (ST.). *Confessions*. P.44-50.

³⁰R. NUBIOLA, *Challenges to Religious Life Today*, 17-18.

³¹AUGUSTINE, (ST.). *City of God*. P.4-8.

note the world stands ever at hand to win us to its ways; happily so does spiritual reading.³² We do not always have at hand devotions and sermons presenting heavenly values; we do not always have lofty principles exemplified by living Saints but spiritual reading is always available, and always in that reading we can find principles, heroic examples and sound stimulus to devotion.³³

The religious who are in teaching either in schools or formation houses spiritual reading has special claims. One such claim is drawn from the fact that most of us number religion among the subjects we teach which may be contrary to popular belief, ranks high among those difficult to present attractively in classroom setting. So it is that the more spiritual reading is carried out the more direct bearing upon the ability and inspiration we will manifest in the formation houses as well as classroom setting. By this means a depth of understanding doctrinal truth and an awareness of its delicateness is acquired there by creating a firm and full founded base where all the interest and burning fire which is gained by the readers will be found to be contagious, insights which would not otherwise be available will be imparted more than ever and the novices and other readers will be influenced. Not only knowledge will be gained but also love of what is known. This will counteract the limitation of secularism.³⁴

Jesus understood this mentality as He described the various soils in the Parable of the Sower. That seed (the word of God) which fell on thorny ground was described as, "he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matt 13:22). If we are going to grow we have to decide that God is going to be our ONLY ruler. Matthew 6:24 says, "'No one

³² E. F. KENRICK. *The spirituality of teaching sister*. P.62.

³³ R. NUBIOLA, *Challenges to Religious Life Today*, 17-18.

³⁴ R. NUBIOLA, *Challenges to Religious Life Today*, 17-18.

can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. “The gospels record an account of a ruler who met Jesus one day requesting information on inheriting eternal life.

He admitted that he had been a devout Jew having kept the commandments since his youth. But Jesus knew his heart and said to him, “one thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come take up the cross and follow Me.” (Mark 10:21) Sadly, the rich, young ruler went away sorrowful, “for he had great possessions.” If we are not willing to give up the ways of the world, we will never grow to the degree we ought to. And Satan is fully aware of this and will do all that he can to keep the ways of the world coming. John wrote, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:15). This has hindered spiritual reading.

2.4 Distractions

This is perhaps one of Satan's most effective weapons in hindering our spiritual reading. He knows that all the desire in the world to do something good is worthless if he can keep you busy doing everything else. You can know the word of God inside and out, but if you fail to apply it, you are not going to grow as you ought to. We live in a world that so far is too busy. From the time we wake up in the morning until we go to bed, our schedule is micromanaged. We have so many more things we think we have to do that there is little time left to do things necessary to grow spiritually. ³⁵We “pencil in” a little reading time and maybe a short prayer, and a couple of

³⁵FRANCIS OF ASSISI. *The little flowers of St. Francis*. P.40.

hours of worship each week, but beyond that we are just too busy to take our spiritual reading serious.

Growing in Him certainly does involve making time for Him, but it also involves a determination not to let anything distract us. On one occasion, some disciples came to Jesus offering to follow Him, but they had other matters to take care of first. Jesus was not willing to accept that. Luke 9:57-62 shows that Jesus must be first before all things if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. Consider what made Mary's actions more pleasing to Jesus than Martha when He was at their home. She knew what was most important while Martha was "distracted over many things" (Luke 10:38-42). If we are not careful, we will allow many things, some of the very honorable within themselves, to distract us from growing as we ought to.

It is my hope that we have seen and understand that growth in the Christian's life is something that is expected. Whether it be the growing that every newborn in Christ needs (1 Peter 2:1) or continued growth throughout your life as a Christian (2 Peter 3:18) growth is a key element to being pleasing to God. If that be the case, why is that so many either fail to grow or their development is much slower than it ought to be (cf. Hebrews 5:12)?

The main reason can be attributed to the obstacles Satan puts in our way. He knows that if he can find something to put in your way it could keep you from becoming what you ought to be. If his efforts persist he will cause you to be lost.³⁶ We must take every step we can to remove all obstacles to our spiritual growth if we are to be pleasing to God. That begins with understanding what obstacles are standing in your way. In our last article we noted two major obstacles – worldliness and distractions. Today, we want to examine a few more.

³⁶TERESA OF AVILA. *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila*. P.76.

2.5 Indifference

Perhaps you have heard the joke about the man who was asked by a preacher if he knew about the dangers of ignorance and indifference. He responded by saying, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” While such may bring a chuckle, the truth is that many possess one of these attitudes (or both). Such obstacles will get in the way of one’s own spiritual reading as well as the growth of others. The fact is that many fail to grow in spiritual reading because they simply do not care as they ought to. They know they ought to grow and often they know what they need to do. They may even be concerned (i.e. worrying) about their spiritual malnutrition. But they do not care enough to do something about it. Continually, the Bible speaks of the heart. It is at the center of that which drives our moral, spiritual and intellectual life in whatever direction we are going.³⁷ It is sometimes described as the seat of our emotions, passions and appetites (ISBE).

The spiritual heart is very important. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders because their heart was not pure. Quoting from Isaiah 29:13 He said, “These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Matthew 15:8-9. If the heart is not pure, God will not accept your actions. Another example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 where the importance of love is described. I encourage you to read these verses.

Indifference is a matter of the heart. It is an indication that your heart is not spiritually pure. At best, indifference means that you serve God with divided loyalty.³⁸ Jesus said that such is unacceptable. He said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the

³⁷TERESA OF AVILA. *The Interior Castle*. P.61.

³⁸B. GROESCHEL, *Stumbling blocks or Stepping Stones*.p.40-60.

other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Matthew 6:24

Indifference will manifest itself sooner or later. It will be seen in unfinished projects, poor execution of tasks, slow learning, sloppiness and unpreparedness.³⁹ Indifference caused 5 virgins to be left outside of their wedding because they were unprepared. Solomon wrote, “I went by the field of the lazy man, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When the researcher saw it, the researcher considered it well; the researcher looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest; So shall your poverty come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.” Proverbs 24:30-34. When one doesn’t care it shows up and affects all that you do. It was indifference that made Laodicea such a distasteful church to the Lord (Revelation 3:15-16).

2.6 Ignorance as Deterrent to Spiritual Reading

Satan loves the soul that fails to investigate truth. He takes delight when someone reasons “I will simply follow my heart” instead of determining whether or not something is the truth.⁴⁰ The Lord spoke of Israel saying, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Hosea 4:6. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”(Matthew 7:21) The true believer knows better. If one is considering obeying the gospel they need to know ahead of time that they are expected to grow and keep growing until they leave this earth.

³⁹ T. GREEN, *When the Well Runs Dry*. P.87.

⁴⁰BENEDICT OF NURSIA, (St.). *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English*, P10-15.

There are some who have never been taught that they need to grow. Others who have obeyed the gospel have never been shown what they need to do. They assume that all that is expected is to "go to church on Sunday" and maybe give a little in the collection. Jesus demanded growth and we know that ignorance is no excuse (Acts 17:30). Consider the final instructions of Jesus as He was about to ascend to heaven. In Matthew 28:19-20, He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you..."

This last phrase does not mean one has to know everything before they become a Christian, but they do have to understand the concept that whatever the Lord commands they must do. How will they find out "all things"? There is only one way. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding." Proverbs 4:7. Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul is here calling for study so that we can handle God's word accurately.

Solomon also said, "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, Discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you," Proverbs 2:10-11 Satan thrives on indifference and ignorance in our lives. Let us determine that we will remove such obstacles and grow as God would have us to grow. . An improper mindset. Growth starts in the mind. I am convinced that most people with the desire to grow who do not start with an attitude that they can't grow. They have good intentions, but when they see how much effort it will take, they become overwhelmed.⁴¹ The Bible is a big book to learn, changing behaviors after years is such a hard

⁴¹ BENEDICT OF NURSIA, (St.). *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English*, P.10-15.

thing to do, altering your schedule takes tremendous effort, etc. The result is many think they cannot grow. Here is a fact: If you do not think you can grow, you are right (until you change your mind).

However, it does not have to be that way. While it is not easy, you can reprogram your mind. In fact that is what Paul called for in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Ephesians 4:20-24 says, “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus. That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” We all have things we are passionate about. Whether it is a hobby, a cause or a television show, we find ways to do what we want to do. When obstacles arise, we find ways around them. It is all about our mindset.

2.7 Poor planning

Often we fail to grow because we do not give ourselves the time to do the things we need to do to promote spiritual reading. There is always something else to do so that we do not have time to study house work, manual work in garden, recreation, handwork, pray, visit our brethren, teach others, and for some, even worship. When we make plans or set up commitments, we do not think about how it will affect our spirituality. When we apply for a job, we make no efforts to build in time to attend to spiritual reading.⁴² When we go on trips, we just cast God aside to pursue

⁴² R. NUBIOLA, *Challenges to Religious Life Today*, 17-18.

our pleasures. Is it any wonder we do not grow? Others do not have a systematic plan in place to ensure growth. For example, if your knowledge is to increase, there needs to be some sort of plan with which you will systematically read and study the Bible. There needs to be a time set aside regularly so that you can develop your knowledge. Another example is our failure to take a spiritual inventory (2 Corinthians 13:5). We need to know where we are and where we need to be if we are to start reaching toward our goals. We also need a plan to get there.

Formulating a plan is not an easy task. Often people see where they are and where they need to be and they see the huge gap between the two. As a result, they are overwhelmed. Many in discouragement give up. Good planning not only involves the long-range goal (growth), but short-range goals and directions on how to get there. Jesus told us to count the cost of serving Him. In Luke 14:26-33 He used the examples of building a tower and going to war with a smaller army than the enemy did. Such efforts require planning. Truly, growth takes effort and good planning. In addition, Satan would love nothing more than to hinder your good planning.

2.8 Lack of discipline

We have already noted that spiritual growth takes planning and a proper attitude. Implementing these plans takes discipline. When we lack spiritual discipline, we are not going to do that which will promote our growth. We will allow everything that comes along to distract our growth. Everything we start will fail either to be completed or finished with less than our best. One who lacks discipline is quick tempered, easily discouraged and led into sin. Because of a lack of self-control, he might set out to do right, but quickly he returns to his old ways⁴³

⁴³ R. NUBIOLA, *Challenges to Religious Life Today*, 17-18.

2.9 Poor role models

Sometimes people do not grow because they don't see growth in those they look up to. The scriptures teach the importance of being a proper example (Matthew 5:14-16). This is important not only in dealing with those of the world, but our brethren as well. When one first becomes a Christian, he begins observing his brethren. While he has a fervent desire to do what is right how long will it last? What happens if he sees everyone in the congregation simply existing as they always have? What if in time he sees that the only thing that happens is the members “go to church”? Unless he is taught different, he is going to adopt that same attitude. Which means his growth will be stunted.

Paul told Timothy, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2. How was he to teach? One way was found in an earlier letter, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” 1 Timothy 4:12. Consider also Titus 2:3 notes that older women are to be “teachers of good things” to the younger. This is one of many examples that could be given which call for proper role models in all things, including growth.⁴⁴

Our entertainment driven society. While this actually fits under the category of worldliness, it deserves its own attention. We live in the television, video game, computer age. For many hours are spent every day in front of a screen at home and now, even as we are driving around town. The goal is to be entertained. While such media can be good, and in reality, they are a blessing, often they become the primary reason why we do not grow spiritually. We spend

⁴⁴ JOHN PAUL II *Vita Consecrata* www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2vita.htm. P10-15.

so much time being entertained that we have little time left to study God's word, pray and visit those who need edification. In addition, because of the intensity of entertainment they offer, it can make worship, prayer and bible study boring.⁴⁵

There are reasons why we are called upon to make a total commitment to God. The allure of the world is one of them. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24). John said, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). Paul warned Timothy of those who would be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). He concluded this by saying, "and from such people turn away!" When we allow entertainment to become an obsession in our lives, we will be affected by it. Moreover, it will stunt our spiritual reading.⁴⁶

3.0 Discouragement

Often times when one observes a failure to grow in others or in one's own life, he becomes discouraged. When things do not progress as quickly as he would like, he can become frustrated and tempted to give up. Obviously, as long as this attitude is present, growth will not be. Jesus described this heart in the parable of the Sower. It is the stony ground. Matthew 13:20-21 says, But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately

⁴⁵ The turmoil in religious life especially women's after Vatican II. <http://www.twotlj.org/OW-4-4->

⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II *Vita Consecrata* www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2vita.htm, P.10-13.

receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.⁴⁷

The fact that one is discouraged is not wrong within itself. We all become discouraged from time to time. Even Jesus was discouraged occasionally. But the key is to keep going and not let whatever it is that is so discouraging hinder our spiritual growth. When it comes to spiritual matters, we want growth and we want it right now. Well, growth does not work that way, spiritually either.

3.1 Conclusion

We cannot reach God or fulfill His commands by human effort; God is always prior working in our hearts by his grace. Original sin and lack of grace can prevent us from God's love. Confessing/repenting the sins of original life eventual faith in Christ the savior, understanding self and having frequent dialogue with God can help set example for spiritual exercises through spiritual reading. As Augustine puts it, "every step we take in life moves us either closer to God or far away from Him and that God uses the twists and turns in life to draw all to him.

Although the above challenges seem to be a threat to one's life, forgiving self after self-realization of the sin committed and not dwell on the past sorrow/ guilt but ask for the grace to rise up again and continue penance and confession. Daily self-examination by the help of the Holy Spirit and the assistance of spiritual directors for guidance and checks in one's life is very vital and all this needs personal effort and total openness.

⁴⁷ IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *The Spiritual Exercises*. P.90.

CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE CHALLENGES OF SPIRITUAL READING

3.0 Introduction

Novices of Little Sisters of St. Francis in Assisi-Uganda are the focus of this chapter. This is to address some of the challenges of Spiritual reading among them. The chapter discusses ways of overcoming the challenges of personal comfort, ways of responding to secularism or worldliness, distractions, indifference, ignorance as deterrence to Spiritual reading. This chapter also explores tips that may help novices to make decision to be determined and self-disciplined in the exercise of Spiritual reading. It also explores the role of models as inspiration for faithfulness to Spiritual reading. It investigates tips for overcoming the challenges that lead to discouragement in regular exercise of Spiritual reading. The chapter then explains the impact of failure in self-evaluation and finally the conclusion.

3.1 Overcoming the Challenge of Personal Comfort

For many mindful practitioner the key to Spiritual evolution is simple. Instead of focusing on having the "right" answer to every question, the task is witnessing and accepting that which is unknown. Through detachment, surrender and grace, novices can expand beyond current habitual patterns, feelings and beliefs into a broader experience of whom and what they truly are. With an attitude of openness, eagerness and humility, they can embody what many practitioners use. To ignite the magic of the beginner's mind, Novices and all who wish to grow Spiritually, ought to try

practicing the following techniques in their everyday life in overcoming the challenge of personal comfort.⁴⁸

Be Present: So many people especially most Novices live in the past or in the future, hoping to change what has already happened or control what may come. Although in general terms this attitude is seen as most human tendencies. However, it does not justify that Novices should ply thus. There is need to practice being fully aware and awakened in the present moment, taking life at just one step at a time with all one's senses engaged.

Practice Detachment: When we are fixed on achieving a particular outcome, we can block ourselves from being open to others and to more expanded possibilities. By novices letting go of personal attachments, desires and ambitions, then there are spaces in the heart for the Universe to fill their needs beyond any pre-conceived limitations or expectations.⁴⁹

Curiosity of the Novices: Instead of jumping to find the “right” answer to every situation, novices ought to practice being with the question and be a detective of one's own life. One need to seek for clarifications when necessary and derive a tangible goal-the beginning of true wisdom.

Eliminate “Should” thinking: The creative process of inquiry requires an open mind that is able to respond intuitively to circumstances as they arise in the moment, not how we assume things should be. Novices when they become less judgmental and give your beginner's mind permission to unfold experiences filled with lots of changes.

⁴⁸ R. ARMSTRON. *Francis and Clare*. P, 163.

⁴⁹ S.A. MUTO, *A practical Guide to spiritual reading*, pg. 136.

Novices are admonished to Enjoy the Adventure: Each day, take an emotional risk: switch off your usual routine and try something you have never done, whether it is playing a new sport, learning a foreign language or starting up conversation with a stranger. The point is getting out of your known comfort zone. By finding comfort in discomfort, novices will make space for growth in Spiritual journey and uncover new paths which were unknown as existing

Embrace disappointments and failures: To truly win in life, we have to be willing to risk total failure. This means courageously embracing the possibility of personal disappointments and public humiliations, which may result if our efforts appear unsuccessful. Whether in relationships or in professional lives, great reward often follows great risk. Though it takes tremendous faith and courage to open oneself up to rejection and the chance of falling flat on ones face, not getting what one wants can teach us the life lessons needed to help in growth and eventually emerge victorious. Hence, Novices should accept the fact that disappointments and failures are not obstacles but stepping stones to greatness.⁵⁰

3.2 Overcoming Challenge of Failure in Self Evaluation

Every day we are becoming either more like Jesus or less. Spiritual formation is the name for that process by which novices and other Christians, in union with Christ are guided by the Holy Spirit, until they become conformed both internally and externally to the character of Christ for the purpose of communion with God. Every closing of year and the beginning of a new one is an opportune time to reflect on our Spiritual formation and to develop habits to help us become more like Jesus. We will consider some Spiritual habits to be developed by novices: assessing Spiritual

⁵⁰ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

growth, hearing from God, speaking to God, engaging with God's word, communion with God, conforming internally, responding in obedience and daily examination of conscience⁵¹

For the case of effective use of self-evaluation for fostering Spiritual growth illustration on how Israel had failed to measure up to God's standard, can be looked into. God gives Amos a vision: "This is what He showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in His hand; and the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer⁵²

Christ is our standard of comparison for holiness, the objective of our sanctification. "Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives." This is why self-examination is essential to the process of sanctification and Spiritual growth: it shows us how we measure up to Jesus. Christian self-examination is not a form of navel gazing. We are not to be self-absorbed and keep looking inward to see how we feel about ourselves or how we compare to other people. Instead, we are to look inward to see how we measure against the plumb line of Jesus.⁵³

Novices ought not to take Self-examination as an introspective self-obsession, but a humble, clear-minded assessment of themselves through the gospel. It means looking into Scripture and seeing God's commands as the Holy Spirit points out the sins we harbor that are contrary to the truth. Novices ought to regularly engage in the process of self-examination so that

⁵¹ W. GRUDEM. Self-evaluation, P.3

⁵² W. GRUDEM, P.60

⁵³ *ibid*

they grow in awareness about how they are measuring up in accordance to God’s perfect standard.

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3.3 Responding to the Challenge of Secularism or Worldliness

The departure from reliance on religious faith to reason and science marks the beginning of the secularization of education and Society in history. The Novice should know that there is a relationship between faith and reason. The Novices should learn that faith lighten the thing that cannot be understood by human reason or trust in education alone. St. Augustine would say I believe in order to understand. It is faith coming first not reason. Human reasoning is only proved after believe. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, said, “I believe in order to understand” (credo ut intelligam) and centuries later, St. Anselm of Canterbury, echoed his statement in similar fashion: “I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.” These great Christian thinkers understood the proper use of reason must be preceded by faith in the proper object. Not faith in ourselves or science, but faith in God, specifically in His revelation of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ.⁵⁵

This work observes the statement that echoes the words of the writer of Hebrews when he said “By faith we understand that the Universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” (Hebrews 11:3 – NIV). Our understanding of the World is driven to a large degree on how we understand ourselves. If we believe we are the accidental result of a blind and uncaring natural process, then we will view the World through those lenses. If, on the other hand, we believe that we were purposefully created by a Greater

⁵⁴ MEGAN K. MCNALLY, Self-evaluation.P.1-5

⁵⁵ S.A. MUTO, *A practical Guide to spiritual reading*. 90

Power, then the lenses we look through become significantly different as does our view of the World.

Based on observation, as Christians we believe this Greater Power is God in the Bible who created us in His own image. We also believe that we can come to understand both ourselves and Him through His revelation of Himself in His Son. In Jesus, the transcendent God intersected with humanity in a way that gives us an understanding of who God is and how we were made to be. In other words, in Jesus we see both God and man and by believing, we are given the ability to understand as much as our finite minds and rebellious souls can handle.⁵⁶

3.4 How to Deal with Distractions

According to the findings in this work, the Novices need to develop a culture to isolate themselves for a few hours from the busy environment around them in order to focus better on what they are reading. Try these 9 strategies to create a distraction-free and reading-friendly zone, Make the time and space first. There is need to Start treating reading time as a ritual to be practiced daily. The Formator endeavors in a way to see to it that such a time table is faithfully followed and practiced daily. Ways To Read Faster with Better Focus: Use Your Hand to Guide Your Eyes While Reading. Your eyes are naturally attracted to motion. Eliminate Distractions. If you find yourself easily distracted when you read, then you need to figure which distractions can be eliminated.⁵⁷

This write up encourages the novices that, Instead of memorizing, try setting a review plan without any tension and be relaxed. Read with concentration, and then leave it. Read again in the

⁵⁶ R. ARMSTRONG. *Francis and Clare*, P.163.

⁵⁷ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

evening, then again the next day, and then again the next week. Test yourself on the 15th day, and then review after one month. You will notice that your memory, of what you heard, read, or listened, will not decline so easily then notice you will remember most of it including subtle details related to or within the material.

Improve on how you pay attention when reading the Spiritual books. You can improve your attention span by increasing the time slowly, but it is better to take a short break (5 minutes) after about an hour of focused study. The short break will allow you to regain about 90% of your attention span. Another important thing regarding memory is reading a topic from many sources. It has two benefits, less boredom and many different aspects of the same scenario. Later one increases latency of information from different areas of mind when required.

In addition, the more connections your brain makes with the information, the more likely it will stick in your mind. Another important consideration is the productive hours. It may be different for few people but mostly early morning is the most productive time. Being in a formation house Formators ought to help Novices make friendly time tables which allow for Spiritual reading during morning hours. Keeping in mind that the room temperature be a little bit warm to help in proper focusing.

3.5 How to Overcome the Challenge of Indifference

According to the observations in this section, Spiritual apathy, coldness, or indifference can affect even the most sincere Christian at one time or another. Human emotions being as fickle as they are, feelings of apathy or disinterest can sometimes replace the fervor we once felt for the things of God. Overcoming such apathy is necessary for continuing our walk with God. The one who realizes he/she is Spiritually apathetic needs to, first of all, make sure he/she is a true believer

in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:13, Romans 8:16) If he/she knows that him/herself is a true believer in Christ, they need to then ask this question: “What caused them to lose their love and passion for the Lord?” One cause of Spiritual apathy is sin in the believer’s life. When David sinned, he felt separated from God (psalm 51:11) As he confessed his sin to God, David prayed for God to “renew a steadfast Spirit” within him (verse 10), and he had this request: “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing Spirit, to sustain me” (verse 12).⁵⁸

A Novice who feels spiritually apathetic should confess any known sin and ask for God’s cleansing and renewal. Another cause of Spiritual apathy is allowing dead feels/discouragements disappointment to replace a true love for the Lord. A Christian is to be marked by his/her love for and obedience to Jesus (John 14:21), but it is possible to obey without love. It is possible to cling to the truth and serve God yet do so in a loveless, lifeless fashion. We are in fact God’s off-springs. It is undeniably true that man carries in him/herself a likeness to God that makes him/her a ruler over the earth that places creation to prostrate at His feet. In the second place, you must read not in order to acquire learning, nor to indulge your curiosity, but for the sole purpose of advancing in Divine love.⁵⁹

To read for the sake of knowledge is both not Spiritual reading but is at the time likened to study that is unprofitable to the soul. It is still worse to read through curiosity. What profit can be expected from such reading? All the time devoted to such reading is a lost time. St. Gregory says that many read and read a great deal, but, because they have read only through curiosity, they finish

⁵⁸ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

⁵⁹ FRANCIS DE SALES. *Introduction to Devout Life*. P.10-50.

reading as hungry as if they had not been reading. Hence, the saint corrected a physician called Theodore for reading Spiritual books quickly.

Taking Hosea 6:6 "*For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*" Some Novices do not consider themselves indifferent because they have an amazing Church record. They attend mass daily and are very punctual in all other activities like class attendance, singing in the choir, reading of the Bible, give helping hand during their free time , serve the sick and the needy and even they are hardworking Novices in the formation houses. There are few activities from which they shy away. Yet, in the midst of all of their religiosity, they fail to make time for their own relationship with God. Activity for God has become a place for intimacy with God. Placebos appease us and even may reassure us, but they never help us. We assume that they are working and helping us simply because we are taking them.

3.6 Overcoming Ignorance as Deterrence to Spiritual Reading

Set your intention. The first step in establishing a Spiritual practice is acknowledging that you actually want one in the first place. Do not worry I am not going to ask you to start wearing crystals or chanting mantras. Well...not right away.) Your intention can be as simple as saying to yourself, "I want to learn more about Spirituality in general", or it could be as formal as creating a ritual to mark your start on this life-long journey. Consciously acknowledging your yearning and curiosity, even if it is only to yourself, is like opening a door and formally setting your feet on the path of the seeker.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ AUGUSTINE. *The Confession of St. Augustine* p.5-52.

Read everything you can lay your hands on. Start with something, go to your local New Age-y bookstore and ask for recommendations. Feed your inquisitiveness. Knowledge and curiosity are the cornerstones of a truly rich Spiritual journey.⁶¹

2.7 Planning and Managing the Spiritual Reading

Novitiate programs may schedule at least two hours a day. Novices should define a study schedule even though their nature of study as spiritual reading is not for passing examination papers. Humans can concentrate for 50 minutes on a subject and so short breaks ought to be put in place.

This write up encourage the Novices to use different sources for them to find the beauty of spiritual reading and its treasure. Do not rely solely on repeated encounters with the assigned text(s). A variety of input from different sources. The basics will be redundant, helping to solidify your learning foundation, but because the delivery of info is varied, you are much more apt to remain as an attentive audience. You are looking for "resonant" descriptions that can leave an imprint on you, like that oh-so-special teacher you had in grade three. This is important because so many Spiritual books suck at delivery, but not all in the same ways. A particular (or peculiar) diagram in a book you found on your own could be the answer to your quest for a spiritual nourishment exposition/illustration of a given Concept. Train your brain to focus better, keep the big goal in mind, visualize your progress, and do it all in less time than you anticipated.⁶²

3.8 Make the Decision to be Determined and Self-Discipline

⁶¹ G. K. Saint Thomas Aquinas. p.50-111

⁶² Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

The Novice has to make a strong, specific decision so as to become more determined in anything. This decision indicates your direction. It shows you how to move forward even when you begin to encounter challenges on your path. This decision is set in stone, motivates you through hard times and keeps you focused during easy times. As such, determination begins by deciding what you want and sticking to your decision no matter what.⁶³

Discover your why, will-power is fueled by emotion. It is a motivation to keep going. For you to keep it burning, you need to have a strong reason. This is your reason for doing what you have chosen to pursue. Ensure that your why is strong. This will help you to know what to do next. Do not fear. One of the biggest killers of determination is fear. When you are determined, you perform at a high level. However, fear interferes with this process and makes you deliver lower results than is required. As such, you have to be brave and face your fears so as to become more determined.⁶⁴

Control your stress: One of the ways to restore will-power is to manage stress better. As indicated above, will-power is emotional in nature. Therefore, when we are stressed, negative emotions are released and we are diminished. As a result, we are unable to perform effectively when our relationship, sport or profession requires us to. Therefore, to increase this source of strength, we have to manage our stress in such a way that we reduce it. This can be accomplished using breathing exercises or meditation. Exercise regularly. Exercise is well known to be good for our bodies. However, do you know that it is great for our minds too? Seeing as determination is a

⁶³ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

⁶⁴ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination, P.2-3.

mindset, exercising regularly can increase our capacity for determination. It can help us to release stress and reach fitness goals. This encourages us to achieve more in life by being determined.⁶⁵

3.9 Role Models as Inspiration for Faithfulness to Spiritual Reading

The Novice should first seek to look at Jesus as the perfect role model, of course. Although He suffered the same temptations as we do, He remained sinless throughout His life (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus spent much of His spare time in conversation with His Father (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35), He showed love and compassion (Luke 7:13; Matthew 15:32), and He worked hard (John 5:17; Matthew 9:35). Jesus, the Son of Man, is a role model to all, and there is none better to follow. We are to “follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).⁶⁶

Throughout the Bible, the Lord often called imperfect people to act as role models, including Moses, Elijah, King David, Simon Peter, and many others. The Apostle Paul often spoke of his important job as a role model for the early Church (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:5–7; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9). Peter warned of false teachers within the Church who would be negative role models: “Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into dis-repute” (2 Peter 2:2).

When it comes to finding a good role model, the Novice should consider whether the person you look up to consistently seeks to imitate Christ (see 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21). Does this person display the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)? Does he or she strive to live in harmony with others (Romans 12:16)? No human is perfect, and everyone will

⁶⁵ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination, P.2-3.

⁶⁶ T. AKEMPIS, *The Imitation of Christ*. P.67-70.

falter at some point in their lives (Romans 3:23), but if you can answer “yes” to these questions, then you have probably found a good and Godly role model.⁶⁷

3.10 Overcoming the Challenge of Discouragement

Job felt discouraged with his wife and friends. They did not get it right. In the midst of his suffering and questioning God, they tried to be helpful, but they ended up heaping more shame and blame on Job for his afflictions. We too can feel let down by our friends and family. They do not understand what we are going through or do not offer to help as we wish they would. Our disappointment can turn to discouragement. . Be honest, it does you no good to pretend you do not feel what you feel. You cannot take action against a negative feeling until you first admit you have it. A strong Christian is not someone who never experiences negative feelings. It is someone who has learned what to do with them when he or she has them and how to process them biblically. Pay attention to your thought life. Maturing as believers means we learn to think truthfully (Philippians 4:8) and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).⁶⁸

Novices ought to look at the example of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was also told himself things about God that were not true but because his mind believed his version of reality instead of God’s, he lost his hope. Read through Lamentations 3. Notice in verse 21 Jeremiah begins to have a change of mind and heart. He says, “This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope.” When his thoughts changed his negative emotions also lifted even though his circumstances stayed the same.

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⁶⁷ T. AKEMPIS, *The Imitation of Christ*.p.5-30.

⁶⁸ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination, P.2-3.

⁶⁹ ibid

Novices when discouraged should reflect on the Apostle Paul's counsels to us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2), hence, our mind needs to be trained to think differently than we had in the past. Part of this training is to learn to see both the temporal (life is hard) and the eternal (God has a purpose here) at the same time. Paul speaks honestly of his temporal pain when he says he is hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. Yet he did not become crushed, despairing, abandoned, or destroyed. Why not? Because he learned to firmly fix the eternal perspective on his Spiritual eyes. He says, "Therefore we do not lose heart.... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:8-18).

Paul never minimized the pain of the temporal, yet discouragement did not win because he knew that God's purposes were at work. (See Philippians 1:12-14 for another example). The truth is that life is hard, people do disappoint and hurt us, and we do not always understand God or His ways. The best way to chase out a negative feeling is with another feeling. The Bible teaches us "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Gratitude is a powerful antidote for discouragement. We may not be able to give God thanks for the difficult situation that we find ourselves in, but we can learn to look for things we can be thankful for in the midst of all circumstances.⁷⁰

3.11 Conclusion

Everyone knows the great influence that is exerted by the voice of a friend who gives candid advice, assists by his counsel, corrects, encourages and leads one away from error. Blessed is the man who has found a true friend; he that has found him has found a treasure. We should then

⁷⁰ Practical Ways to Boost Your Willpower and Determination
<https://greatperformersacademy.com/.../top-15-practical-ways-to-b>, P.2-3.

count pious books among our true friends. They solemnly remind us of our duties and of the prescriptions of legitimate discipline; they arouse the heavenly voices that were stifled in our souls. They also rid our resolutions of listlessness; they disturb our deceitful complacency; they show the true nature of less worthy affections to which we have sought to close our eyes; they bring to light the many dangers which beset the path of the imprudent.

They render all these services with such kindly discretion that they prove themselves to be not only our friends, but the very best of friends. They are always available, constantly beside us to assist in the needs of our souls; their voice is never harsh, advice is never self-seeking and words are never timid or deceitful.

"When I read holy books," says St. Gregory the Theologian about the books of St. Basil the Great, "then the Spirit and body are illumined and I become the temple of God and the harp of the Holy Spirit, played by Divine powers through them I am corrected and I receive a kind of Divine change and I am made into a different person."

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