

The Structure of Man

fr. Jean-Emmanuel, ocd Lyon, France 2017

The **Challenges** we face in **interior prayer** & **what happens** to us in **Prayer**.

In our society today, we have a problem knowing who we are and what goes on inside of us. We tend to **live on the surface of ourselves** and to define ourselves by the **roles we play in society** and/or in **relationship with one another**. We have trouble identifying what happens within ourselves but, there are however **guideposts**, ‘**maps**’ to help us navigate within.

Part 1 **We are not a Solid Block**

1/ The Human Being is **Multi-dimensional**:

We are **not** a **solid block**: this is one of the first important things to know about ourselves.

Example of cutting the finger, only the part cut hurts not the whole body.

Bringing this idea to our **interior world**, into our **prayer**, something can happen at one level of the soul while the other levels are not affected. People get discouraged though & give up because of the distractions on one level but we have several realities within us. These different levels have to gradually be discovered. We realize we are complex beings. **Self-Discovery or Self-Knowledge**: We progressively learn who we are. One of the **first fruits** of prayer is the discovery of **ourselves**. Once we begin to learn to live less at the **surface of ourselves**, we see our poverty, we learn that we are **incapable** of praying as we ought, we yawn, get bored, get distracted, look at our watch.

Part 2 **What happens to our Senses in Interior Prayer?**

2/ **Dimensions of Man**:

St. John of the Cross tells us that we have **two dimensions** — a Body (senses) & a Spirit (soul & spirit).

A. **SENSORY Self**:

Our bodies have 5 external senses & two internal senses that connect us to the world around us. It **isn't here that God acts in prayer**.

What happens to these **senses** in prayer?

Some traditions want us to cut ourselves off from our senses...but is this the goal?
It isn't easy to do either.

External Senses: Sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste;

Internal Senses: Imagination & Appetites.

-Imagination: is the cinema open 24/7; John of the Cross calls it the **fantasia**. It is part of the **sensory world** (interior senses). It is between the senses of the body (turned outward) & the faculties of the soul (or spiritual part of man, turned inward).

What should we do since we **can't stop the imagination** in prayer? We have to **give the imagination something to do** because we can't stop it—there are techniques to stop the imagination but is this the goal?

Teresa says we have to give it ‘**some grain to grind**’.

If we are **sad** St. Teresa tells us to keep Jesus company in the Garden;

If I am **joyful**, I can be with our Lord during the Transfiguration.

It is also possible to use a **book**, an **image**, an **icon**. These are **techniques** to occupy the imagination so that it **doesn't scatter** in a million directions.

The difficulty for us is that we tend to **identify** with our imagination. We think that if it is **agitated** that our whole being is agitated.

This isn't true. A good example of this is a storm at sea (calm beneath the surface, surface in turmoil). We have to discover & then access this deeper reality within ourselves.

Part 3 **Goal of “Real Prayer”**: Inside to govern Outside

-Appetites (St. John of the Cross) are another problem. They are our **Needs and Desires**, 2 sides of a same coin. We have to manage our Needs/Desires or a desire can get out of control. We are full of them and they demand satisfaction of what's missing. Sometimes they contradict one another—I want to pray; I don't want to pray. I want calm; it is too calm I want noise. This happens at the sensory level. **Real prayer** doesn't take place at this level.

In prayer we discover the unsatisfied and contradicting appetites. How can we bring them into **harmony**? We try to deal with them at a sensory

level by forcing ourselves to quiet them but this is ineffective. It isn't about eliminating God-given desires, necessary in themselves; It isn't about anorexia vs bulimia -all or nothing-.

What is important is to know that we have **disordered appetites** and **God** gradually, through prayer, orders our appetites at the **spiritual** level allowing this deeper, more stable level, to take over **governing** the sensory level.

When we **begin** the practice of prayer it is the exterior, sensory level that governs the interior, more stable level of the faculties of the soul.

The practice of prayer progressively **'flips'** this order so that the interior spiritual self, governs the exterior sensory self. It isn't an easy process.