

Second Stage: The Illuminative Way

Relinquish and Realize, Transcend and Transform

By Jerry Truex
October 4, 2009

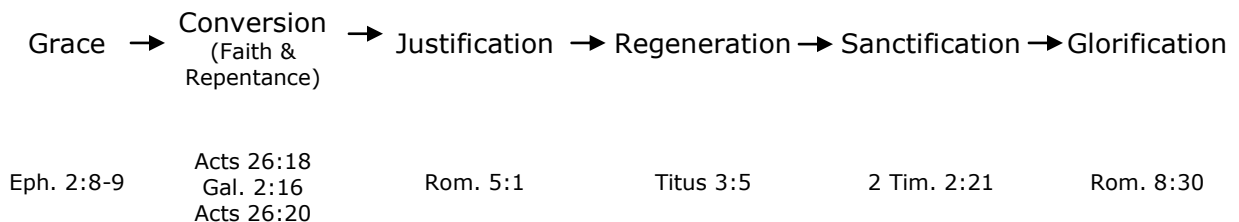
A. Introduction

Our current teaching series focuses on the Three Stages of Spiritual Growth: Purgation, Illumination, and Unification.

In September we looked at purgation. Purgation refers to purging ourselves of unwanted thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. It means getting rid of habits and behaviors that harm us and others, which make us miserable, unhappy, and un-Christlike.

Today, I want to introduce the second stage of spiritual growth: The Illuminative Way. I will try to provide a "spiritual map" for our journey and show how spiritual disciplines help us to *relinquish* the False Self (purgation) and help us *realize* Christ within us (illumination).

B. The Order of Salvation (*ordo salutis*)¹



C. The Process of Spiritual Growth

1. What is spiritual growth?

Spiritual growth refers to the "sanctification" process. It refers to our transformation. 2 Cor. 3:18 puts it this way:

¹ Calvinist: Calling (internal, limited, efficacious), regeneration, conversion (faith & repentance), justification, sanctification (perseverance assured), and glorification. Arminian: Prevenient grace (universal, resistible), calling (external), conversion (faith & repentance), regeneration, justification, sanctification (perseverance not assured), and glorification.

2 Cor. 3:18. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (NRSV)

Christian spiritual growth involves transformation.² What exactly is transformed? What are Christians moving from? What are they moving toward?

2. What are we to relinquish? (Purgation)

What are we to relinquish? That is, what *harmful things* does God want to liberate us from?

[*Instructions:* Read the text in the left column and, in the right column, fill in what you think the text says either directly or indirectly about what we are to relinquish.]

Text	What are we to relinquish?
<p>Rom. 6:12-14. ¹² Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitting to SIN as power - Submitting to evil (wickedness)
<p>Col. 3:5-6, 8-9. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)... ⁸ But now you must get rid of all such things-- anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evil (harmful) desires - Harmful emotions - Harmful behaviors - Harmful attitudes - The Old Self
<p>Gal. 5:19-21 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The flesh - Harmful behaviors - Harmful emotions (the attitudes that cause them) - Depending on things other than God (idolatry) - Conflict and social violence

We are called to leave behind the "False Self." We need to purge ourselves of whatever feeds the false self system.

² I would define "Christian Spirituality" as any attitude, behavior, or practice that strengthens our relationship with God and results in the realization of Christ in us, the Image of God, our True Self, our New Being.

3. What are we to realize? (*Illumination*)

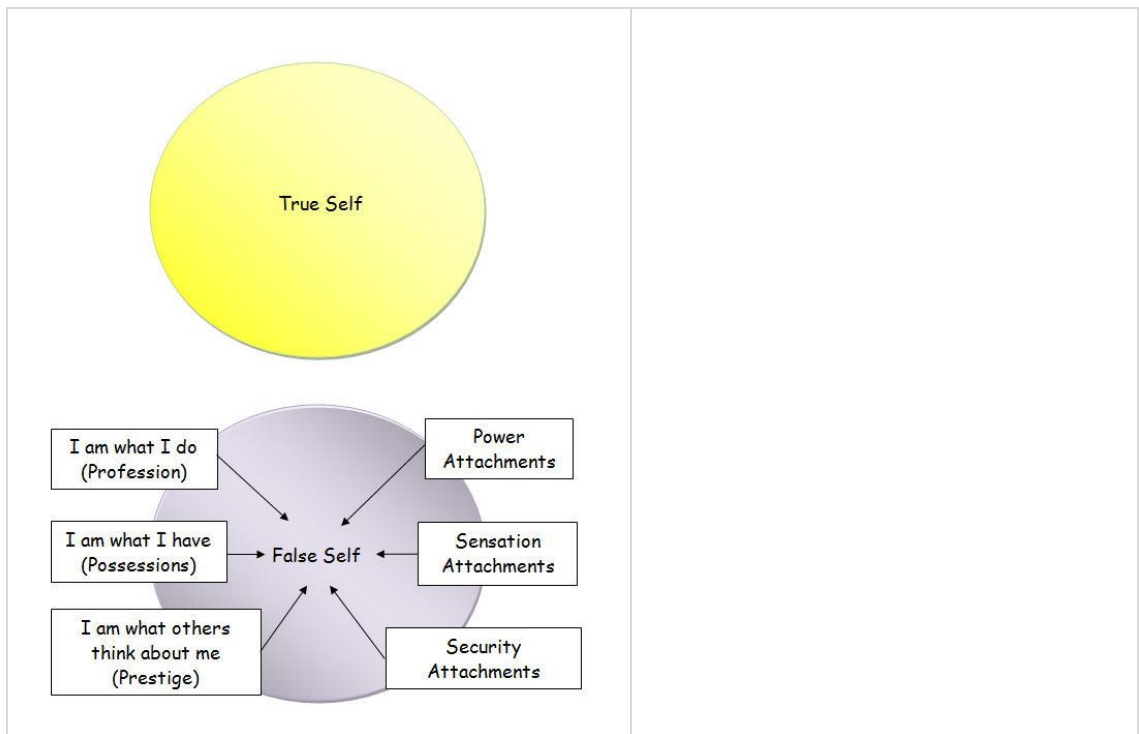
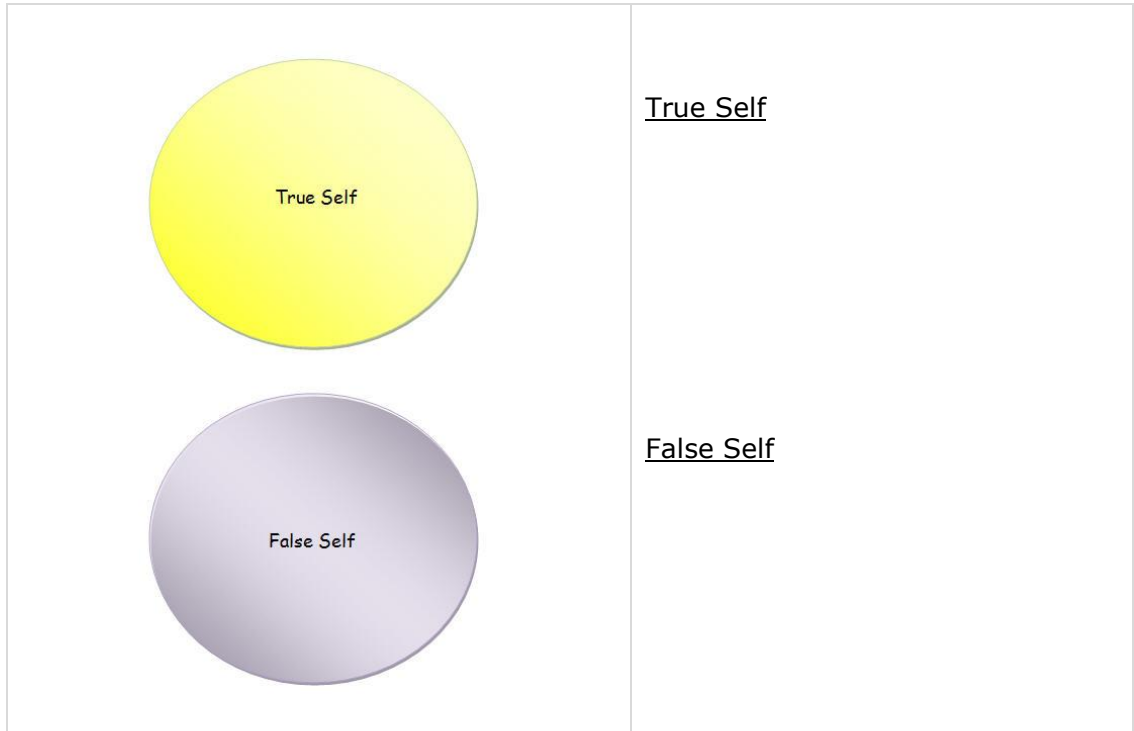
[*Instructions:* Read the text in the left column and, in the right column, fill in what you think the text says either directly or indirectly about the goal of life.]

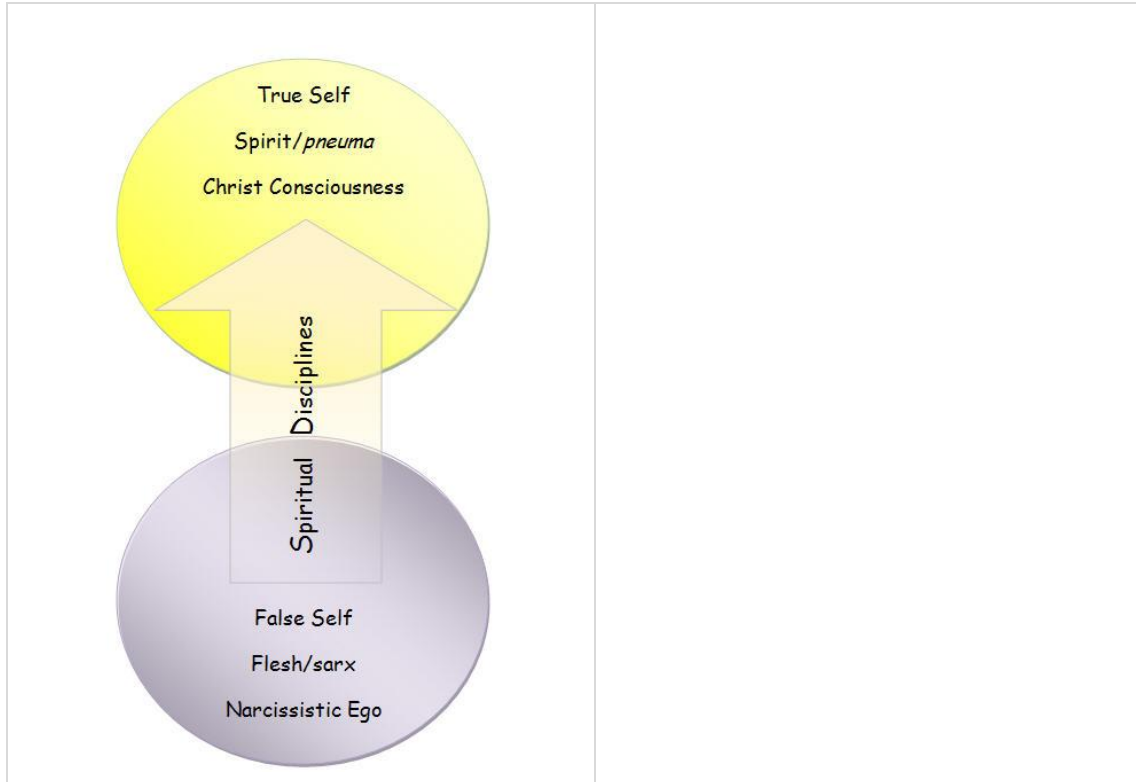
Text	What are we to realize?
<p>John 1:1, 3-4. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The life and light of the Word of God
<p>Rom. 8:29. Because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (NET)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conformity to the image of Christ
<p>Gal. 5:16. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Spirit's will
<p>Gal. 5:22-23.²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The fruit of Spirit - Right attitudes - Right behaviors - Happiness
<p>Eph. 3:16-19.¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God's power in our inner being - Christ in our hearts - Being rooted and grounded in love - The power to comprehend - The knowledge of Christ's love - Filled with the fullness of God
<p>Col. 1:27.²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christ [formed] in you
<p>Col. 1:28.²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maturity in Christ
<p>Col. 3:4, 10.⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. ...¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christ is our life - The New Self - The Image of God
<p>2 Pet. 1:3-4.³ His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness ...⁴ ... so that ... you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature [γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως]. (NRSV)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life and godliness - Partake of the divine nature

We are called to realize the "True Self."

D. Realizing the True Self

[See power point presentation for all 25 images. Here are the key images.]





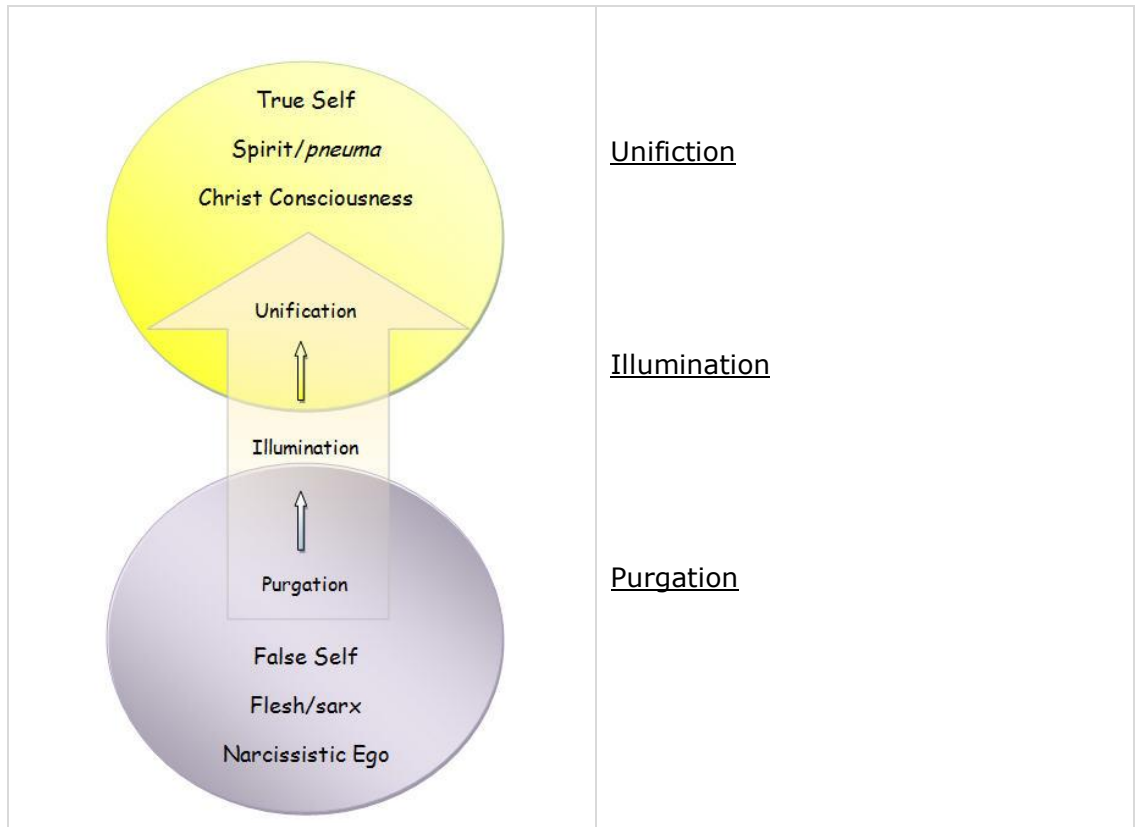
A diagram illustrating the transition from a false self to a true self, identical to the one above. At the bottom is a grey circle containing the text: "False Self", "Flesh/sarx", and "Narcissistic Ego". A large, light-colored arrow points upwards from this circle to a yellow circle at the top. The arrow is labeled "Spiritual Disciplines". The yellow circle contains the text: "True Self", "Spirit/pneuma", and "Christ Consciousness".

Seven Spiritual Disciplines of MCS

A pie chart divided into seven segments, each representing a spiritual discipline. Starting from the top and moving clockwise, the segments are: "Wellness" (green), "Meditative Bible Study" (red), "Scripture Memory" (light green), "Hospitality" (purple), "Rule of Christ" (blue), "Peacemaking" (orange), and "Meditation" (dark red).

Spiritual disciplines help us:

- To transcend the False Self or narcissistic ego
- To realize our True Self or Christ Consciousness



E. The Purgative Way

In the Purgative Stage, we want to use spiritual disciplines that with help us to **detach** from the False Self System and its attachments.

There are **legitimate desires**; desires for food, water, procreation, love, knowledge, and happiness to name a few. In contrast, **attachments** refer to strong, inner compulsive attractions to things, people, or beliefs that harm ourselves or others.

There are three main types of addictions:

1. Addiction to security (self protection)

Addiction to security causes fear, worry, and anxiety.

This is a preoccupation with food, shelter, or whatever you equate with personal security. Consciousness is dominated by trying to get "enough." There are endless future possibilities to worry about.

2. Addiction to sensations (self gratification)

Addiction to sensation causes frustration, depression, and boredom.

This is a preoccupation with finding more or better pleasurable sensations and activities, such as sex, food, music, entertainment, drugs, etc. When we repetitively experiencing a sensation, we become satiated and bored.

3. Addiction to power (self promotion)

Addiction to power causes anger, resentment, irritation, hostility, and hate.

This is a preoccupation with dominating and controlling other people or situations. The focus is on increasing one's prestige, wealth, or status. Constant fear of loss of control and an endless pursuit of power.

4. Purgative Spiritual Disciplines

a. The Examen of Consciousness

[Handout]

b. Change addictive demands to preferences

When you experience a negative emotion, it is probably caused by one of the three of addictive demands. First, note the negative emotions. Second, try to discover the underlying addictive thought, image, or belief that causes the negative emotion. Third, change addictive demands to preferences.

For example, if you discover you are addicted to power, you might say to yourself, "Although I would like to control people and situations, it is unrealistic. Maybe I can influence people and situations, but I really can't control them. What's more, I can be happy without trying to forcibly control situations, which undermines my inner peace and my love for other people."

F. The Illuminative Way

1. From Purgation to Illumination

Because attachments distort our perceptions of God and our selves, because attachments inhibit our ability to love as we should, the spiritual masters have taught that only after significant purgation, only after attachments have been reduced or eliminated, is a person able to move on to the Illuminative Way.

Jesus said:

"First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (NRSV; Matt. 7:5)

We might paraphrase,

"First remove your addictive demands and attachments, and then you will be able to see clearly and love truly."

2. The Experience of the Illuminative Way

The word "illumination" suggests an experience of enlightenment. The Illuminative Way involves enlightenment, but is not a "one off" peak experience.

Rather, "It is a sustained state in which it is easier to pray, give up things that are superfluous or obstruct progress, and work to accomplish more for the Kingdom of God."³

Imitating Christ becomes easier in this stage, because the False Self is held in abeyance or suspended inactivity. Remember what Jesus said:

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9:24)

It is one of the so-called "difficult sayings" of Jesus. It sounds like Jesus wants us to negate our own selves or put other people's interests always ahead of our own. It is a riddle. To solve the riddle it is helpful to introduce the notions of "false self" and "true self."

"For those who want to save their life (False Self) will lose it (True Self), and those who lose their life (False Self) for my sake will save it (True Self)." (Luke 9:24)

When a person has put away the False Self, what remains is the True Self, who is free to love and serve God, others, and oneself with unobstructed energy.

Benedict Groeschel says that a person living the Illuminative Way is less judgmental, less demanding of others, and more accepting. The presence of God ... becomes increasingly clear in the soul during the illuminative way."⁴

³ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 138.

3. The tasks of the Illuminative Way

a. Virtue

Developing the character of Christ, our True Self, is a primary task in the Illuminative way. As Col. 3:12 puts it, we are to “clothe” ourselves with the character qualities of Christ or virtues.

Col. 3:12.¹² *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*

b. Service

With the narcissistic ego in abeyance, the giving and serving dimension of the True Self can be fully exercised. As Col. 3:12 puts it, we are to “clothe” ourselves with love toward others, which is service.

Col. 3:14.¹⁴ *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

c. Scripture

For those who have begun to experience the Illuminative Way, the Christ mediated by Scripture becomes a mirror for the emerging Christ within. For example, when we read the Gospels, we identify with Jesus and even see ourselves in that role in our own world. When this happens, reading Scripture becomes easier; teaching Scripture, more vital.

Col. 3:16.¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*

d. Prayer

In the Illuminative Way, there is a deepening of prayer, often moving from discursive to non-discursive forms, including meditative and contemplative forms. Thankfulness and gratitude are cultivated by people on the Illuminative way.

⁴ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages* (1995) 138.

Col. 3:17. ¹⁷ *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

G. Conclusion

Today, I have tried to:

1. Provide a "spiritual map" for those who desire "sanctification" or spiritual growth
2. Show that spiritual disciplines help us *relinquish* the False Self System (purgation) and *realize* Christ within us (illumination).
3. Introduce the experience and tasks of the Illuminative Way.