Viri Christi



"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,
and men of violence take it by force."
Matthew 11:12

Objective: Spiritual Theology has been referred to as the science of the saints. It can also be referred to as the science of Christian perfection. Spiritual theology attempts to guide the soul from the very beginning of the Christian life through the purgative, illuminative, and unitive way. Over the next six months, we will explore the "science of the spiritual life" as we discover authentic Catholic male spirituality.

- Unit 1 The Nature and End of Man
- Unit 2 Sin & Salvation
- Unit 3 Fundamentals of the Spiritual Life
- Unit 4 The Purgative Way
- Unit 5 The Illuminative Way
- Unit 6 The Unitive Way

Unit 1 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #1: Man – The Image of God
- Episode #2: Powers of the Soul
- Episode #3: What's the point? – Man's Last End
- Episode #4: The Beatific Vision

Monthly Meeting: The Nature and End of Man

I. **Introduction**

1. This month, we are going to investigate the nature and end of the human person.

2. Introduction – High/Low Discussion – Opening Questions

    a. Highs: What were some highlights this month?

    b. Lows: What were some things you found challenging?

    c. Lessons Learned: What are some strategies you learned to help you keep the rule this month?

I. Episode #1: Man – The Image of God

1. Ludwig Ott – "Man consists of two essential parts: a material body and a spiritual soul" and "Every individual soul was immediately created out of nothing by God" (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 106 and 108).

2. The *Imago Dei* – In order to account for the progressive character of Christian life and holiness, professional theologians distinguish several states or moments in which the human person bears the image of God.

    a. The Natural Image of God – In the natural order (i.e. without grace), a person can only attain a degree of knowledge of God by reason and love of God as the source and end of good. This image would be examined in natural theology and ethics.

    b. The Image of Grace – The supernatural image of God and since moral theology is concerned to show how the human person created in the imago Dei attains the image of conformity which perdures unto everlasting life this image is the starting point of moral theology.

    c. The Image of Glory – In glory, the *Imago Dei* reaches its final and fullest state when the soul beholds God face to face.

3. We will also discover that man's biological, moral, and spiritual development also follows a similar threefold progression as well. Biologically, man develops from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Morally, man moves from the stage of disciple to that of progress, and finally to perfection in freedom. Spiritually, man ascends through the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of the interior life.

4. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. Why do you think it is incredibly important that each of us understands that moral and spiritual development happens slowly over time?

    b. Why should we avoid extremes in our spiritual life? In other words, why is a moderate plan for growth the best way forward?

II. Episode #2: Powers of the Soul

1. What is man? – Man is a soul/body composite (soul animates the body). Man is an animal (has a body) and he therefore has passions (appetites or desires) and emotions. Man is also rational and he therefore possesses an intellect and a will.

2. Four Aspects of the Human Person (and the virtues which perfect them)

    a. Intellect – The human faculty of understanding, judging, and reasoning (Prudence)

    b. Will – The rational appetite for what one rationally apprehends as good. (Justice)

    c. Irascible Appetite – A sense appetite for arduous goods. (Fortitude)

    d. Concupiscible Appetite – A sense appetite for pleasurable goods. (Temperance)

3. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. The mission of the St. Joseph Society to help men "To Order All Things to Christ" by growing strong in mind, body, and spirit.

    b. How has our reflection on the nature of the human person and the powers of the human soul reinforced the importance of our mission statement?

III. Episode #3: What's the point? – Man's Last End

1. Thomistic Spiritual Theology is Teleological

    a. Brian Davies – People are creatures that are endowed with an intellect and a will and are drawn to goals that attract them. Human actions are always a voluntary aiming for an end perceived as good. Since goodness is perfective, or fulfilling, proper human action (ie. The moral life) is always a movement to what is fulfilling or perfecting of the agent whose movement it is. People by nature desire or are attracted to what perfects or fulfils them, and in this fact is the foundation of morality" (*The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 227-232).

    b. St. Thomas Aquinas – "The will naturally tends toward its ultimate end; for every man naturally desires happiness. And all other volitions are caused from this natural volition, since whatever a man desires is wished on account of an end. Therefore, the love of the good, which man naturally desires as an end, is a natural love; but the love derived from this, of a good loved for the sake of the end [in other words, the love of a means to the end], is an elective [i.e. free] love" (ST I, q. 60, a. 2, c.)

2. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. How does the teleological nature of the spiritual life help motivate us to live holy lives?

    b. What is first in the order of intention is last in the order of execution. In other words, we must know where we are going before we can get started. What are some strategies to remind yourself each morning of the goal of the spiritual life?

    c. How could you explain to your family, coworkers, neighbors, etc. that a life of pleasure is not the good and happy life?

    d. What do you do to reorient yourself to God throughout the day so that you can sanctify each action?

IV. **Episode #4 – The Beatific Vision**

1. Man's Capacity for God (CCC 1-3, 27-30) – The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.

    a. Jesus – "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

    b. St. Augustine – Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God and "In regard to what is supremely good . . . philosophers have taken many different stands – all striving with the highest earnestness to determine what it is that makes men happy. By definition, our supreme end is that good which is sought for its own sake, and on account of which all other goods are sought" (*Confessions*, 3).

    c. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange – "The blessed souls live above the reach of our hours and days and years. They live in one unique instant which does not pass. This instant, when we enter heaven, when we receive the light of glory and begin to see God forever, must be prepared for. In this preparation three other instants of life have pre-eminent importance:

        i. that of receiving justification by baptism,

        ii. that of reconciliation with God if we have offended Him gravely,

        iii. that of a happy death, that is, final perseverance.

2. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. What should one do on this side of heaven?

    b. Are we scheduling time to get into the confessional booth each month?

    c. Are you meditating and praying for final perseverance?