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 investigate this "science of the spiritual life" as we discover an 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 4 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #18 – Introduction to the Illuminative Way
- Episode #19 – Prayer of the Proficient
- Episode #20 – The Moral Virtues
- Episode #21 – The Theological Virtues
- Episode #22 – The Counterattacks of the Enemy

Monthly Meeting

I. Introduction

1. This month, we will discuss the illuminative way.

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?

II. Episode #18 – The Illuminative Way

1. The Nature of the Illuminative Way – The illuminative way "is thus named because the great aim of the soul is now the imitation, the Following of Christ, by the positive exercise of the Christian virtues" (Tanquerey, 454). The main differences between the purgative and the illuminative way is that beginners struggle against sin and its causes, while the souls in progress also practice penance and mortification. Still, they struggle to become more like our Lord.

2. The goal of the Illuminative Way is to follow Christ by the imitation of His virtues. The ideal we try to realize from day to day is to make Jesus the center of our thoughts, our affections, and our entire life. Doubtless, in the course of our progress in the spiritual life we are to expect counter-attacks on the part of our enemies. The Seven Capital Vices seek more subtly to reassert themselves, and, if we are not on our guard against them, they will cause us to fall into a state of lukewarmness.

3. The Program to be Followed – First, a man needs to make Christ the center of his thoughts. This knowledge will lead to a greater love of God, in which Jesus becomes the center of his affections. Eventually, the love of God leads him to imitate our Lord. Second, he needs to practice affective prayer and the moral and theological virtues so that his actions are not based on his emotions but on deep-rooted convictions.

4. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. What would be some signs that a man may be on the illuminative way of the interior life?

    b. What are some practical ways a man can turn his thoughts to Christ more often throughout the day?

III. Episode #19 – Prayer of the Proficient

1. The Nature of Affective Prayer – Affective prayer is that form of prayer in which the will takes precedence over the intellect. "Affective prayer devout affections predominate whereby we express to God our love and our desire of glorifying Him. . . . Beginners need to acquire convictions so they give more attention to reasoning rather than affections. In time, his affections will grow and his prayer life will start to transition" (Tanquerey, 461-462).

2. Means of Fostering Affections in Prayer – Exercise the virtue of charity will move us to admire the infinite beauty, goodness, and loving mercy of God. Meditate frequently on the great truths that recall to us what God has done for us.

3. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. How would you explain the difference between prayer in the purgative way and the life of prayer in the illuminative way to someone who has never heard of this distinction?

    b. Do you think there are aspects of affective prayer that a man may find off-putting or particularly challenging?

    c. What are some concrete ways you can foster affective prayer in your life?

IV. Episode #20 – The Moral Virtues

1. Virtues & Vices – Vices are bad dispositions that lead one to act in ways that do not perfect a person or help them acquire a state of well-being that a human being is capable of. Virtues, on the other hand, are abilities, tendencies, or capacities that enable one to act in ways that contribute to their flourishing or functioning to their advantage, thereby satisfying their needs. A virtue is an acquired habit or ability that enables a person to act well. In Catholic moral theology, there is a distinction between natural (acquired) and infused virtues.

2. The Cardinal Virtues – Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance

3. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. Do you think some virtues or vices are more natural to men as opposed to women and children?

    b. A man grows in virtue (or vice) through practice and repetition. What are some concrete ways you could practice prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance?

V. Episode #21 – The Theological Virtues

1. The Nature of the Theological Virtues – "A good habit of the mind or will, supernaturally infused into the soul, whose immediate object is God. The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity."[1]

2. The Role of the Theological Virtues – The role of the theological virtues "is to unite us to God through Jesus Christ, in order to make us sharers in the Divine life. They are, then, at once unifying and transforming virtues" (Tanquerey, 550).

3. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. For current or future fathers, whether domestic or ecclesial, what are you doing to exercise St. Paul's admonition to the head of the Christian household, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27)?

    b. How does one grow in faith, hope, and charity through the sacraments of the Church, particularly the Eucharist, confession, marriage, and holy orders?

VI. Episode #22 – The Counter-Attacks of the Enemy

1. Summary: The goal of the Illuminative Way is to follow Christ by the imitation of His virtues. The ideal we strive to realize day by day is to make Jesus the center of our thoughts, our affections, and our entire lives. Doubtless, in the course of our progress in the spiritual life, we are to expect counterattacks on the part of our enemies. The Seven Capital Vices seek more subtly to reassert themselves, and, if we are not on our guard against them, they will cause us to fall into a state of lukewarmness.

[1]Fr. John Hardon. *Catholic Dictionary*. (New York: An Image Book, 2013).

2. The Re-Awakening of the Capital Sins: The Inclination to Pride, Sensuality, and Spiritual Avarice

3. Lukewarmness

    a. "Lukewarmness consists in a sort of spiritual languor which saps the energies of the will, inspires one with a horror for effort and thus leads to the decline of the Christian life. . . . The special danger of this state consists in the gradual weakening of the soul's energies, a condition fraught with more danger than the commission of some isolated mortal sin" (Tanquerey, 592-596).

    b. The effects of lukewarmness include the blinding of conscience, a gradual weakening of the will that can reach the point where one loathes effort, and this can be difficult to repair because it occurs almost insensibly.

    c. The remedies of lukewarmness – Men need to be converted by going to confession often, returning to the fervent practice of the exercises of piety (ex. Prayer, examination of conscience, doing God's will), and start practicing the virtues and fulfilling the duties of one's state in life.

4. **Questions for Reflection**

    a. What is spiritual avarice, and why is it so damaging to the spiritual life?

    b. How often do you think a man should go to confession? What are some concrete ways to get your whole family to confession more often?

    c. What are the duties of your state in life, and why do you think it is so crucial that men diligently fulfill their responsibilities?