



Integral Formation: The Four Dimensions of a Balanced Christian Life

An Overview of “Integral Formation”

The integral Christian is well formed in the four main areas of Christian living – spiritual life, human development, knowledge of the faith, and apostolic activity.

It’s all about Christ. It’s all about becoming more and more *like him*. It’s about *being his disciple*, in order to spread his Kingdom in the world.

Ultimately, Christ is the one who will “form” you. He wants to be your teacher, guide, and example. Gently and wisely, from the inside out, he will lead you along the path of *trans-formation into him*, so that you can reach your full human and Christian potential. If you cooperate responsibly with his efforts, the joy and enthusiasm that comes from being a mature apostle of the Kingdom will become your personal trademark, and your life will “bear fruit that will last.” (John 15:16)

The Movement strives to provide ample resources and opportunities to help you engage as actively as possible in this process of transformation into Christⁱ, but lasting progress can’t come from the outside. That requires a personal effort flowing out of a deep sense of mission and of love. Each member has to decide to take on the challenge of developing his complete Christian personality in partnership with the Holy Spirit, to go after it in spite of obstacles and difficulties, in order to become the mature and dynamic apostle that the Church needs.ⁱⁱ

We can insure a balanced and constant progress by keeping tabs on the four overlapping dimensions of our Christian life.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus we avoid the pitfall of doing only what we like, instead of what we need to do.^{iv} These areas are like the four wheels of a car: if one of them is flat, the whole vehicle has to inch along. Integral formation means doing our part to keep all four in top condition, so that God has free rein to do his part.

Spiritual Formation

The heart of our Christian life is friendship with Jesus Christ, established at baptism, lived out through the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and nourished by prayer and the sacraments. Just as the heart pumps lifeblood into every part of our body, our friendship with Christ infuses meaning and zest into every sector of our life. Developing this friendship constitutes our spiritual life.

Spiritual formation consists in learning how to develop that friendship. It involves understanding the Christian virtues, the Church's sacramental economy, the different methods of prayer, the role of Mary and the saints... The Movement offers retreats, conferences, spiritual direction, mini-courses and other activities to help members in their spiritual formation. By taking advantage of them, and by living out the Regnum Christi prayer commitments, your spiritual life stays fresh and vigorous, so that love for Christ and his Kingdom becomes the motor for all your endeavors.

Human Formation

Just as our bones give stability and structure to our bodies, basic human maturity gives solidity to our spiritual life. We cannot freely choose to follow the narrow and difficult (but incomparably rewarding) path of Christian discipleship if we have a weak will, a sleepy conscience, and no self-control. Grace builds on nature, it does not substitute it.

Human formation involves growth in the basic virtues common to every mature human person, not only Christians: honesty, self-discipline, responsibility, perseverance, kindness, good manners, loyalty, solidarity....

A lack of this basic human formation is often at the root of slow or stunted spiritual growth and apostolic sterility. Our culture trains us to depend too much on passing emotions and moods, to feel excessively sorry for ourselves when things are hard or don't go as we had planned, to expect brilliant results with minimum effort.

These false expectations can bring about confusion and frustration when the journey of Christian apostleship proves long and arduous – which, sooner or later, it will. Without human formation, therefore, we can easily be like the seed that fell on shallow soil, whose roots withered under the hot noonday sun.^v “They believed for a while, but in time of trial they gave up.” (Cf. Matthew 13:20-21) But when we form a strong, noble character, able to stay the course in spite of prolonged effort or opposition, we become apostles to be reckoned with.

Through spiritual direction and dialogue with your Team Leader, through guidance in carrying out apostolic activities, and through conferences and retreats that include sessions dedicated to this important issue, the Movement offers its members concrete ways to work on their human formation.

Intellectual Formation

A philosophical proverb reminds us “you cannot love what you do not know.” If we don’t know Christ, we cannot love him. If we don’t know the liberating truth of Church teaching, we cannot follow and spread it. The better we know Christ and his teaching, however, the deeper our Christian convictions will be. And the deeper our convictions are, the more joyful our lives will be. Regnum Christi apostles know that Christ is the only Savior, and so they constantly strive for a deeper knowledge of Church teaching, both so they can follow Christ better themselves, and so they can give Christ to those around them.

But Church doctrine doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It needs to be applied to current issues, made intelligible and attractive for different kinds of people, and enriched by human experience and reflection. Therefore, a Regnum Christi’s intellectual formation goes beyond just learning the Catechism; it includes keeping up to date on what’s happening in the world and in your own milieu, learning to think clearly and deeply, and developing the ability to express yourself effectively.

Apostolic Formation

Every Christian, according to an ancient saying in the Church, is “another Christ.” He “emptied himself” and “gave his life as a ransom for many.” And Christ was a man *wholly dedicated to others*. Each one of us is called by God to follow in Christ’s footsteps, to make our life into a gift of love to God through defending and extending Christ’s Kingdom in the world.

This is especially the case for a member of Regnum Christi. Our efforts at integral formation and our innate desire to make a difference in the world come together in our Regnum Christi vocation to be apostles of Christ’s Kingdom. That’s what he has created us for, and that’s where we’ll discover the meaning of our life.

Ongoing Formation

Integral formation is a journey full of challenges, joys, and surprises. It’s not simply a task we will eventually be able to cross off our to-do list (at least not during this lifetime). The Church and the Movement will guide us, and God will make sure that our efforts bear fruit for ourselves and for many others – but he will always need those efforts.

1. Spiritual Formation: A Christ-centered Spiritual Life

A deep relationship with Christ is the inner source of dynamism for every Regnum Christi apostle.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) [

To be a Christian is to believe this and to bank on it. To be a Christian is to discover in Christ our best and wisest friend – an altogether unique friend: the king and creator of the universe who deigns to come down to your level so as to raise you up to his level. The Church's mission (and, therefore, the Movement's mission) is to help as many people as possible make this discovery.

It's easy to forget that. It's easy to fall into the routine of thinking that being a Christian simply means saying some prayers, going to Mass, donating to the parish, and behaving more or less decently. It's easy to be superficially religious while forgetting about the relationship at the heart of religion: a unique, intimate friendship with Jesus Christ.

The Meaning of Christ-centeredness

The spirituality of the Regnum Christi Movement is built on this rock-solid foundation of an altogether unique friendship with Christ. We call it Christ-centeredness; it means making Jesus Christ and your friendship with him the center and motor of your life. Like all friendships, this one requires attention and loyalty in order to grow.

The Church teaches that Jesus' attention and loyalty will never fail; he is always thinking of you and will always be there for you.

But we are less dependable. We naturally tend towards self-centeredness instead of Christ-centeredness. We have to make a constant and sincere effort to grow in our friendship with Christ, to keep that friendship our first priority, no matter what.

The Method of Christ-centeredness: Three Ongoing Steps

The Movement's Christ-centered spirituality is summed up in every member's ongoing effort to:

- 1) Know Christ better
- 2) Love Christ better
- 3) Imitate Christ better

Know Christ

When new members incorporate into Regnum Christi, they receive a Bible, a crucifix, and a commitment card. Prayerful, reflective reading of the Gospels is the primary source for getting to know Christ, his teachings, his virtues, his loves. And the heart of the gospel story is Christ's ultimate revelation of God's love: his passion and death on the cross. The crucifix, then, sums up the Gospels. Contemplating it, day after day, in an atmosphere of prayer, reveals Christ's mind and heart.

This process of getting to know Jesus Christ goes beyond merely getting to know about him. Theoretical knowledge about Christ and his message is necessary, but only personal, experiential knowledge can transform your life. With the help of God's grace, therefore, Regnum Christi members strive to attain an ever-deeper experience of Christ in faith, to know him personally, not just in the abstract.

Essential to this effort is a profound Eucharistic life – frequent participation in Mass, reception of Holy Communion, visits to and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament... The Eucharist is the "source and summit"^{vi} of the Church's life, and so it should be the same for every Regnum Christi member. In the Eucharist Jesus himself is truly present, eagerly waiting to fill your heart with light and strength for the mission of serving him and the Church. He wants to be known and loved, and the gift of the Eucharist is the most tangible expression of this burning desire.

Love Christ

With the help of God's grace, knowing Christ leads to loving him. This love gives meaning and purpose to everything else. It is not a vague love, not a fuzzy-feeling kind of love. A Regnum Christi member's love for Christ bears four characteristic marks; it is passionate, personal, faithful, and real.

Your love is passionate when it involves every aspect of your personality – emotions, intelligence, desires, and hopes: when it fills your whole being with enthusiasm.

Your love for Christ is real when you let it touch in a concrete way every sector of your life: relationships, work, recreation, money – when you let Christ in everywhere, keeping nothing for yourself, trusting that his grace can give it all a deeper meaning. Real love for Christ actually changes your behavior and attitudes; it doesn't stop with daydreams and wishful longings.

Your love for Christ is faithful when you follow his will and his doctrine no matter what, even if it gets tough, really tough – when you follow him to Calvary because he went there first for you.

Your love for him is personal when you share everything with him, heart to heart, when you let him be not only your Lord and Savior, but also your wisest friend and constant companion.

Imitate Christ

When you love someone, you love what they love. Christ loves his Father. He loves Mary, his mother. He loves the Church. He loves every single human soul. Everything he did during his earthly life was an expression of that love: he taught the truths of salvation; he healed and comforted; he obeyed his Father's will; he gave his life for the Church.

Genuine love for Christ leads Regnum Christi members to do the same. Gradually, they strip off the "old man" as St Paul puts it, adopting Christ's way of thinking, his way of looking at the world and judging circumstances and events. This overflows into speaking and acting and using your time in a way that reflects Christ's priorities – in a way that builds up the Church and the Kingdom, always and everywhere.

Imitating Christ saves you from falling into a closed, narcissistic "Jesus and me" spirituality. Christ gave himself to others, out of love, for the glory of God. When you come to know him and grow to love him, you want to follow in his footsteps, giving yourself to the mission of spreading his Kingdom, no matter the cost.

Mary: The Path to Christ

No one knows Christ better than his mother, Mary. No one loves him more, and no one imitated him more closely: Mary's "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) perfectly parallels Christ's own "Father, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) Consequently, true devotion to Mary (childlike trust in her guidance and intercession and joyful imitation of her virtues) has always been a primary means the Church offers for growing closer to Christ.

Regnum Christi takes up this offer, giving Mary the place she deserves in its prayer commitments and apostolic endeavors. In this way, as you strive to live out your Christ-centered spirituality, you will experience Mary as "the exceptional woman that God has gifted to us to be our Advocate, Intercessor, Companion, Guide and, above all, our Mother in the difficult adventure of our Christian life."

You are Not Alone

When Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he encapsulated the spiritual life of every Regnum Christi member. They strive to know him better because he is the Truth; they strive to love him better because he is the Life; they strive to follow him better because he is the Way.

The best news of all is that they don't have to do it alone. Christ himself promised, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) He

is always taking the first step – through his Church, through the Movement, through your conscience; all you have to do is follow along.

“On the Love of Christ”

from a sermon by Saint Alphonsus Liguori, bishop and doctor of the Church
(Office of Readings, August 1)

All holiness and perfection of soul lies in our love for Jesus Christ our God, who is our Redeemer and our supreme good. It is part of the love of God to acquire and to nurture all the virtues which make a man perfect.

Has not God in fact won for himself a claim on all our love? From all eternity he has loved us. And it is in this vein that he speaks to us: "O man, consider carefully that I first loved you. You had not yet appeared in the light of day, nor did the world yet exist, but already I loved you. From all eternity I have loved you."

Since God knew that man is enticed by favors, he wished to bind him to his love by means of his gifts: "I want to catch men with the snares, those chains of love in which they allow themselves to be entrapped, so that they will love me." And all the gifts which he bestowed on man were given to this end. He gave him a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed with memory, intellect and will; he gave him a body equipped with the senses; it was for him that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all these things out of love for man, so that all creation might serve man, and man in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts.

But he did not wish to give us only beautiful creatures; the truth is that to win for himself our love, he went so far as to bestow upon us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. When he saw that we were all dead through sin and deprived of his grace, what did he do? Compelled, as the Apostle says, by the superabundance of his love for us, he sent his beloved Son to make reparation for us and to call us back to a sinless life.

By giving us his Son, whom he did not spare precisely so that he might spare us, he bestowed on us at once every good: grace, love and heaven; for all these goods are certainly inferior to the Son: He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for all of us; how could he fail to give us along with his Son all good things?

“Of Inward Conversation with Christ”

from Book II Chapter 1 of Thomas á Kempis' The Imitation of Christ

The kingdom of God is within you, says Christ, our Savior. Turn yourself, therefore, with all your heart to God, and forsake this wretched world, and you will soon find great inward rest. Learn to despise outward things, and give yourself to inward things, and you will see the kingdom of God come into your soul.

The kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, such as is not granted to wicked people. Our Lord Jesus Christ will come to you and will show you His consolations, if you will make ready for Him a dwelling place within. All that He desires in you is within yourself, and there it is His pleasure to be. There are between Almighty God and a devout soul many spiritual visitings, sweet inward conversations, great gifts of grace, many consolations, much heavenly peace, and wondrous familiarity of the blessed presence of God.

Therefore, faithful soul, prepare your heart for Christ your Spouse, that He may come to you and dwell in you, for He Himself says: Whoever loves me will keep My commandments, and My Father and I and the Holy Spirit will make in him Our dwelling place.

Give to Christ, therefore, free entrance into your heart, and keep out all things that withstand His entrance. When you have Him, you are rich enough, and He alone will be sufficient to you. Then He will be your provider and defender and your faithful helper in every necessity, so that you will not need to put your trust in any other save Him.

Man is soon changed, and easily falls away, but Christ abides forever, and stands strongly with His lover unto the end. No great trust is to be put in man, who is mortal and frail, though he be greatly profitable to you and much loved, nor is any great grief to be taken if he sometimes turns against you. Those who today may be with you, tomorrow may be against you; they often turn as the wind does.

Put your full trust, therefore, in God. Let Him be your love and fear above all things, and He will answer for you, and will do for you in all things as shall be most needful and most expedient for you. You have here no place of long abiding, for wherever you have come you are but a stranger and a pilgrim, and never will find perfect rest until you are fully joined to God. Why do you look to have rest here,

since this is not your resting place? Your full rest must be in heavenly things, and you must behold all earthly things as transitory and shortly passing away. And beware well not to cling to them overmuch, lest you be seized with love of them, and so perish in the end.

Let your thought always be upward toward God, and direct your prayers continually to Christ. If you cannot, because of your frailty, always occupy your mind in contemplation of the Godhead, yet be occupied with a remembrance of His Passion, and make for yourself a dwelling place in His blessed wounds. And if you flee devoutly to the wound in Christ's side, and to the marks of His Passion, you will feel great comfort in every trouble. You will give little heed, even though you are openly despised in the world, and whatever evil word is spoken against you, will grieve you little.

Our Master Christ was despised by men in the world, and in His greatest need was forsaken by His acquaintances and friends, and left amid shame and rebuke. He was content to suffer wrongs, and to be set at naught by the world, and we desire that no person do us wrong, or belittle our deeds. Christ had many adversaries and revilers, and we would have all to be our friends and lovers. How can your patience be crowned in heaven, if no adversity should befall you on earth? If you would suffer no adversity, how can you be the friend of Christ? It behooves you to suffer with Christ, and for Christ, if you would reign with Christ.

Truly, if you had once entered the bloody wounds of Jesus, and had there tasted a little of His love, you would care nothing for the liking or the disliking of the world, but would rather have great joy when wrongs and injuries were done you, for perfect love of God makes a man perfectly to disregard himself. The true inward love of God that is free from all inordinate affections may soon turn freely to God, and in spirit lift itself up into contemplation, and fruitfully rest in Christ.

On the Centrality of Christ for Man and for the Church

Gaudium et Spes #s 10 and 22
from the Documents of the Second Vatican Council

10. The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions he is constantly forced to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society. No doubt many whose lives are infected with a practical materialism are blinded against any sharp insight into this kind of dramatic situation; or else, weighed down by unhappiness they are prevented from giving the matter any thought. Thinking they have found serenity in an interpretation of reality everywhere proposed these days, many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort; they are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart. Nor are there lacking men who despair of any meaning to life and praise the boldness of those who think that human existence is devoid of any inherent significance and strive to confer a total meaning on it by their own ingenuity alone.

Nevertheless, in the face of the modern development of the world, the number constantly swells of the people who raise the most basic questions or recognize them with a new sharpness: what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress? What purpose have these victories purchased at so high a cost? What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life?

The Church firmly believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under the heaven been given to man by which it is fitting for him to be saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever. Hence under the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time...

22. The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of

the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

He who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23): "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father.

2. Human Formation: Grace builds on nature

The spiritual life (friendship with Christ lived out through prayer, the sacraments, and the Christian virtues) doesn't get tacked onto one's human personality like an extraneous accessory. It operates from within. It is a seed of grace planted in the heart, a seed that takes root and grows inside the natural human faculties. Grace builds on nature. So if those faculties are in bad shape, spiritual growth will be obstructed. Our Father Founder expresses this principle succinctly: "First the man, then the saint."

Therefore, human maturity – the harmonious development of all aspects of one's personality – is an integral part of your Christian and apostolic vocation as a Catholic and as a member of the Movement. And the first step to achieve it is to follow the advice given to Socrates by the Delphic Oracle: "Know thyself."

Dimensions and Purpose of the Human Person

The goal of human existence is to live in a personal relationship with God, to know him and to love him.^{vii} And since God is pure goodness, living that personal relationship with him requires using one's moral freedom to choose what is good and right.

That wouldn't be a problem, if people weren't such hybrids. But as it is, instincts and emotions tend to do their own thing, whether or not it happens to harmonize with God's goodness. Consequently, these faculties need to be educated, taught to obey the dictates of intelligence and freedom; otherwise they will hinder spiritual progress.

Plato Got it Right – Almost

Plato explained it like this: The human person is like a horse-drawn chariot. The charioteer is the intelligence, and the horses are the will (freedom, willpower), instincts (e.g. self-preservation), and emotions (moods, feelings...). The willpower will go wherever the charioteer directs it, but the emotions and instincts naturally tend to head off in whichever direction strikes their fancy. So if emotions and

instinct are stronger than willpower, intelligence won't be able to drive the chariot to its proper destination.

Original sin made things even more complicated. It darkened the intelligence and weakened the will. As a result, it's not always easy to find the right path, and even when you do, your willpower is not as strong as you'd like.

Human formation is the task of getting the whole chariot working in sync, to the maximum of its ability. It yields a mature person. This means making sure the intelligence *identifies the right roads* through forming a healthy conscience and the virtue of prudence; it means *educating the emotions and instincts* so that their natural force pulls in the direction of one's life-goal and not away from it; it means *strengthening the willpower* so that it can keep the whole chariot moving fast and steady.

Human formation is a task for everyone. Those who let themselves be ruled by instincts and emotions, or ignore and deaden their conscience, or let their willpower languish fall short of their potential. Their lives will lack direction, or they will not be free to follow the direction they choose; they will be slaves to the strongest horse.

It is not an easy task. It involves constant, determined, patient effort. Training horses is hard enough; training oneself is even harder.

Christ to the Rescue

In Christ, however, God's grace comes to our aid. It enlightens the mind and strengthens the will through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the infused virtues (faith, hope, love).

Even so, God's grace will not bear fruit independently of our efforts; he has chosen to redeem the human person from the inside out, making everyone a partner in his or her own growth in holiness. He will put up road signs, he will shine the light of grace on the right path, he will increase the potential pulling strength of your willpower, but unless you habitually take the reins and direct all your horses down

that path, cooperating with grace, making your choices despite the force of your emotions and instincts when they are reluctant, you simply can't make any lasting progress.

Every time you choose what is right over what is easy you are working with God's grace and strengthening your will, forming habits that make it more and more likely that all your actions will be in accord with what you know is most pleasing to God.

Human formation for the Christian, therefore, means making sure that God's grace has as much room to work as possible. By *exercising* your intelligence you discern the path of God's will, and by *exercising* your will you lead the chariot along it.

What's Love Got to do with it?

Everything. Your free will, your ability to make moral choices, is what makes it possible for you to love. In fact, God made you free (in his image – and he is love) precisely so you could love. Sometimes you may find yourself wishing that he would just override your freedom; life would be a lot easier that way. But he will never do that, because it would mean destroying your capacity for love, your ability to choose to be selfless instead of selfish.

Seen in this light, human formation for a Regnum Christi member cannot be overrated. Exercising your will to choose God's path means exercising your love, and your love in turn is what gives you the strength to exercise your will. The more you strengthen your will, the more freely you will be able to correspond to God's love by loving him in return.

Shortcuts?

There are no shortcuts in this journey; you simply have to work at it. Hollywood heroes may be able to go from wimp to world champion in two hours, but forming a mature Christian and apostolic personality takes a lifetime.

You strengthen your willpower only by exercising it in accordance with faith, by freely deciding – over and over again – to fulfill your commitments to Christ, to the Church, and to others, even when you don't feel like it, or when it's demanding.

You educate your instincts and emotions only by refusing – over and over again – to let them run your life, drawing on the grace available through prayer and the sacraments to resist their tantrums and put them in line with your Christian priorities.

The result of this constant effort is to overcome your bad habits and acquire new, good ones. Habits give stability to our human and Christian personality. Like a batter's swing, practiced over and over again until the perfect motion comes automatically, makes him a better player, so good habits make you a better person, a better Christian. God and your neighbor can depend on you more. You deliver more consistently.

You train your intelligence only by listening to your conscience and informing it through dedicated study of Catholic teaching and a demanding program of spiritual work.^{viii}

When you take on the challenge of human formation and follow through with it, the Holy Spirit can shift you into high gear and speed you along the fast lane of Christian fulfillment; but when you don't, it's stop and go all the way.

3. Intellectual Formation

Not-so-hidden Treasures

The Catholic Church is a treasure house of truth – the kind of truth that helps life make sense, and paves the way for peace and joy to have free rein in the soul. Not only does it have twenty centuries of experience in dealing with and shaping human hearts, human communities, and human affairs; not only does it have a more comprehensive and profound educational tradition than any other institution; not only does it have an active, indigenous, and permanent presence in every corner of the world in the midst of every culture; but above all, the Church has been entrusted with the fullness of God’s revelation and the charism of understanding and communicating it in all times and places.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that many Catholics ignore it; they walk away from the treasure house. Many Catholics buy into the prevailing view that the Church is way out of date, when the truth is that the Catholic Church, when it comes to understanding the human consequences of scientific, philosophical, and cultural advances, is always ahead of the times.^{ix}

Regnum Christi members should be like portable versions of this treasure house. Like bright torches in a gray and darkening world, they should let the light of Christ inform their lives and the lives of those around them. In that way, the truth that sets souls free^x will reach more souls, and if it reaches the right ones, they can take the torch and use it to light up entire societies, pushing back the darkness of selfishness and greed and ushering in the civilization of justice and love.

To become those torches takes work. Sometimes God infuses knowledge into the minds of his saints, but most of the time we need to study. As usual, the Holy Spirit will help and magnify your efforts, but you still have to give him some efforts to magnify.

Areas of Intellectual Work

An apostle of the Church and the Movement should first of all pursue excellence in his or her own area of expertise. Catholic doctors should be better doctors because they're Catholic; Catholic lawyers should be better lawyers because they're Catholic; Catholic forest rangers should be better forest rangers because they're Catholic. Not only do they have a moral duty to give their best to society and to their family, but fulfilling that duty is also an essential ingredient in an effective Christian and Catholic testimony. To neglect it is to give others the impression that a Christian's faith diminishes his or her commitment to others. Who's going to be attracted to the Church by that? ^{xi}

But secular expertise is not enough. Christians are ambassadors of Christ. Wherever they go, he calls on them to speak for him. The world needs his truth; human hearts are starving for it, and Christ is counting on you to deliver it. If you don't know that truth, you can't communicate it. If you don't know what his Church teaches, both about sin and salvation (i.e. the Catechism) and about the most pressing issues of the day – the issues and events that are on people's minds – you cannot feed those starving hearts. What good is a torch without any light?

Regnum Christi members who love Christ, love the Church, and love their neighbor, will overcome whatever obstacles arise and make sure that they are ready and able to spread the Church's teaching. ^{xii} Whatever it takes, it will be worth it – the salvation of souls depends on it.

On the other hand, this doesn't mean that you have to turn yourself into a theologian. You just need to follow St. Peter's call to "be ready to give reasons for the faith that is in you." (1 Peter 3:15) In your circle of influence, can you answer the moral and religious questions that come up? It won't take gargantuan efforts to get to the point where you can, but it will take some efforts.

Loving the Truth

Sports fans have something to teach us about intellectual formation. It's remarkable how much they know about their favorite sports and teams. Player profiles, club histories, seemingly endless litanies of statistics, piles of trivia, rules and regulations... And they learned it all joyfully, eagerly, complaining not about the time they had to spend picking it up, but about the time they had to "waste" doing other things. Why? Because they love the sport.

There's nothing wrong with that; sports are fine. But there is something wrong when Christians don't enthusiastically explore the treasure house of Catholic truth.^{xiii} It shows a lack of love; it is a sign of an immature apostle.

Regnum Christi members need to take personal responsibility for this aspect of their Christian and apostolic vocation as well for the other aspects. And when they do, it doesn't take much time for them to become avid fans of the Truth.

4. Apostolic Formation: The Regnum Christi Apostle as a Leader of Souls

What is a leader?

A leader is someone who influences other people, who moves others to action.^{xiv} Every Regnum Christi member is called to be a servant leader in the image of Christ. At the heart of the Movement's charism is the burning desire to influence as many people as possible to become Christ's disciples and apostles. God gives each member different talents and opportunities to exercise his or her leadership, and each is called to take advantage of them to the full. Only in that way can Regnum Christi render its unique service to the Church.

The Defining Characteristic of a Christian Leader

Christ's leadership "style" can be summed up in one simple – but demanding – concept: take the initiative. Christ didn't wait around for something to happen, he made things happen, and he got others to make things happen – he influenced people by proactively going out to them, by giving himself to them. Wherever there was a need, he stepped forward to meet it. Wherever there was an opportunity, he took advantage of it. Wherever there was a problem, he brought a solution. The gospel tells the story of Christ reaching out, winning people over, getting them committed to the urgent task of building his Kingdom – it's the story of how God took the initiative to save us from our sin.^{xv}

If you take the initiative for the Kingdom – at home, at school, at the office, in society – you can be a leader.^{xvi} If you do so with the four elements of Christian leadership, you can be a great servant leader.

The First Element: Vision of Faith

Ultimately, the Church's mission is to make saints, to bring as many souls as possible into deep friendship with God. Nothing will glorify God more and nothing will make people happier. You can show no greater love for God and neighbor than to put your life at the service of this mission. If you are convinced of this, you will be able to overcome your tendencies to selfishness and laziness and devote yourself heart and soul to achieving it – you will be able to take the initiative, striving to bring everyone around you closer to God and to build a society that encourages justice and truth (which is the best environment for developing a friendship with God).

But it takes faith to be convinced. You have to learn to look at the world through the clear lens of faith. Faith in Christ and his message enables us to see the transience of worldly glory and the value of eternal life; it tells us what we should strive for and dictates the means we use, since building the Kingdom is a work of the Spirit and not of man. Faith reveals the secrets of true happiness and exposes the lies of false, worldly prophets. Unless you cultivate a strong, vibrant faith, you may be able to influence others, but you won't be influencing them for Christ.^{xvii}

The Second Element: Organization

Organization involves setting the right goals^{xviii} and prioritizing the steps that will achieve those goals.^{xix} It is a human element at the service of grace in our cooperation with the vision our faith gives us.

Worthwhile projects often appear overwhelming. Organization breaks them down into manageable pieces. It allows your vision of faith to lead you forward step by step. It allows your initiative to reach maturity.

If you don't set the right intermediate goals you can easily lose sight of the overall goal. If you don't prioritize the steps that will take you to your goal, you can easily become frustrated or over-committed. Either scenario vitiates your leadership capacity – it makes you more concerned about yourself (and your out-of-control to-

do list) than about taking the initiative for the Kingdom. You may work very hard, and you may have a vibrant faith, but your sphere of influence will be unnecessarily (and unfortunately) curtailed.^{xx}

The Third Element: Determination

To make a lasting, positive impact takes sweat and determination. A vision of faith shows us what we should be striving for, organization shows us how we should strive for it, but we still have to strive; we have to roll up our sleeves and get to work, overcoming obstacles and achieving concrete results.^{xxi} The good seed brings forth fruit through perseverance. (Lk 8:15)

Determination means taking the initiative and then going the distance. It means not giving up in the face of obstacles. It means solving problems instead of complaining about them. It means approaching one's mission in life with supernatural optimism and a conquering spirit.

It is never easy to overcome the inertia of selfishness in order to find new and highly effective ways to imbue society with Christ's message. It is never easy to turn an inspired idea into a reality. It is never easy to put your reputation on the line by trying to win over more leaders for the cause of Christ's Kingdom. It is never easy – but when you back up your faith and organization with a spirit of conquest and determination, it is very possible.^{xxii}

For Christian leaders, determination applies both to one's personal formation (spiritual life, character development, knowledge of the faith) and to one's apostolic activity. The former assures that their influence can be deep and positive (because they will be Christ-centered); the latter assures that their influence will be as widespread as possible.

The Fourth Element: Teamwork

Jesus was not a lone ranger. He certainly stood out as a unique public figure (huge crowds gathered wherever he went), and though as Son of God he did not need our human help he nevertheless decided to use it. He gathered his twelve Apostles, trained them, and built his Church on them. Christian leaders should do the same: winning over others for the cause of Christ, forming them, and working with them to build the Kingdom.

Teamwork is more than just delegating things. It means sharing the joy that comes from your vision of faith. It means letting others be involved in the steps of organization, motivating them through the example of your determination^{xxiii}, making way for them (humility – we are not indispensable), and giving them the chance to work and make their own contribution. It is mutual support and enrichment. It means not facing problems alone.

Personal Leadership: Natural or Supernatural?

Some people are “born leaders”. Wherever they go, they influence others much more than others influence them. These are natural leaders because of their naturally magnetic personality – a precious gift that God is counting on them to use well.

Most people are not so gifted, but they are still called to become leaders. You don’t have to be born with the key elements of Christian leadership already in place; you can develop them. You can even develop a spiritually magnetic personality, that is, which is the fruit of fidelity. People who are faithful to their conscience, faithful to their friendship with Christ, faithful to their duties and commitments in life – such people gradually build up a moral magnetism, one that is even stronger than the naturally magnetic personality. This moral magnetism can be the difference between a good Christian leader and a great one.

When you add it to a vision of faith, organization, determination, and teamwork, you get an authentic servant of God and neighbor, an effective apostle, and a true Christian leader – you get a Regnum Christi member able and willing to take the initiative wherever and whenever in order to extend and defend the Kingdom.

^{vi} Catechism of the Catholic Church #1324: “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ ‘The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.’”

^{vii} The Catechism expresses this purpose of human life in various ways, e.g. “Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness” (#45); “God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise.” (#1721)

^{ix} On the other hand, some Catholics have simply never been educated in the faith; for no fault of their own they have not been given access to Christ’s truth. They don’t even know that the treasure house exists.

^x “Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, ‘If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” (John 8:31-32)

^{xii} It’s not enough just to have knowledge of the Church’s teaching. Members of the Movement also learn to think and express themselves clearly and logically so that they can apply and communicate that knowledge.

^{xiv}

^{xv} He took the initiative by his incarnation: he came into the world to save us. He took the initiative in his public life: “he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God...” (Luke 8:1) He took the initiative in his passion, death, and resurrection, “I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own...” (John 10:17-18) And his last words to the Apostles bequeathed that same leadership style to them: “Go and make disciples of all nations... As the Father sent me, I send you...” (Matthew 28:19; John 20:21)

^{xvi} Taking the initiative means taking action. It means finding solutions instead of complaining. It means doing something and not just talking about doing something. Is there no Catholic school in the area? Regnum Christi members will build one. Is there a shortage of vocations? Regnum Christi members will organize vocational promotion activities, parish Holy Hours to prayer for vocations, weekend trips to the seminary for young men in discernment...