Spiritual Formation Community as the Matrix of Christian Spiritual Formation

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A holistic Christian spiritual formation community (SFC) matrix contains the components of practice, worship, and instruction in the context of a community. The goals of the spiritual formation community matrix paradigm are that members of the faith community (1) grow into Christ-likeness, (2) become a people of God, and (3) build the kingdom of God and heal the whole of creation (*shalom*). Its essential components are the spiritual formation elements interacting in a spiritual formation community (more on this later) that acts as a crucible for CSF in individuals and the community itself. The faith community is central in this paradigm. The success of the paradigm depends on the intentionality and commitment of the community's leaders and members to spiritual formation in their community and to focus all their efforts on it. Intentionality is essential because the leaders and members believe the need for spiritual formation so deeply that they want to do something about it. This intentionality will need to translate into commitment. They have to be committed to change their perceptions about spiritual formation approaches in their faith communities, initiate and sustain the spiritual formation elements, elicit the help of the Holy Spirit, and deal with the challenges that will arise during the process of spiritual formation. It may require the initiators of the paradigm to be personally changed first and then to initiate community changes through the spiritual formation elements. The paradigm affects changes both in individuals and in community ethos.

The SFC paradigm consists of a spiritual formation community and the interactions of the Holy Spirit, human response, and spiritual formation elements within that community. The interactions of the Holy Spirit and the human response (intentionality) together with the spiritual formation elements of growing into Christ-likeness, enhancing spiritual learning, growing community, building relationship, and being missional may be considered an infinite loop. The infinite loop signifies that spiritual formation is an ongoing process. This loop is situated in a spiritual formation community. This faith community has special attributes that enable it to be a crucible for spiritual formation and transformation.

- Bible Lands
- Conversations with my granddaughter
- Poems
- Prayers

Nurturing/ Teaching Courses

- Sermons
- Beginning Christian Life Studies
- The Apostles' Creed
- Child Health and Nutrition
- November Institute Bioethics
- Biomedical Ethics
- Spiritual Direction
- Spiritual Formation
- Spiritual formation communities
- Retreats

Special Interests

- Books and Reading
- A Writing Life
- Star Trek
- Science Fiction
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- Gaming
- The End is Near

Spiritual Formation Institute

My Notebook

- Favourite Quotes
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Christian educator Suzanne Johnson (1989) introduces a conceptual model for Christian education that is centred in the local SFC . Her understanding of the function of socialisation is similar to my idea of spiritual formation and forms the foundational basis of my paradigm. Before presenting her model, Johnson notes:

Where we find the church becoming itself, we find a community of lived faith where persons welcome strangers as bearing potential gifts; a community where diversity is celebrated and not looked upon as annoyance or threat; a community that nourishes individuality, avoiding both excess individualism and excess conformism; a community that provides equal access to leadership; a community that repents, prays, and praises together. This is the shape of life in the Realm of God! (86)

Johnson's model revolves around three dynamic processes—*praxis*, worship, and instruction—that build Christian character within a community (1989, 145).

- · *Praxis* involves a "total complex of action"[1] in the daily lives of believers. Johnson's notion of *praxis* bears some resemblance to the spiritual formation elements of building relationships, being missional, promoting intentionality, and developing community.

- · Worship is a "pervasive posture of life" through immersion in God's grace that is similar to the spiritual formation elements of growing into Christ-likeness, reinforcing intentionality, and depending on the Holy Spirit.

- · Instruction entails learning about and being involved in the Christian story. It includes theological reflection on Johnson's "total complex of action" in daily activities. It is similar to the spiritual formation elements of enhancing spiritual learning and cultivating intentionality.

Johnson's model emphasises the components of practice, worship, and instruction in the context of a community. The nature of a community is essential in either enhancing or inhibiting spiritual formation.

The SFC paradigm I propose will be clarified under the following rubrics:

1. The foundations of the paradigm,

2. The role of the spiritual formation community,

- Spiritual Formation
- Bioethics
- Medicine
- Study Notes

Links

My blogs

- Random Musings from a Doctor's Chair
- Random Sermons from a Doctor's Chair
- Random Writings from a Doctor's Chair
- Random Spirituality from a Doctor's Chair

Books Recommendation

- Spiritual Formation
- Euthanasia
- Abortion
- Bioethics

Bookstore

Medical notes

Medical Students /Paediatric notes

3. The role of the spiritual formation elements,

4. The role of the Holy Spirit and human intentionality.

1.   THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE PARADIGM

The foundations of the SFC paradigm will be discussed as follows:

a. Theological and biblical foundations

b. Psychosocial foundations

a. Theological and biblical foundations

The SFC paradigm is based on the biblical foundational concepts of restoring the *imago Dei*, communion with the triune God, and participation in the *missio Dei*. This paradigm equates with the spiritual formation[2] goals of (1) growing into Christ-likeness, (2) becoming a people of God, and (3) building the kingdom of God and healing the whole of creation (*shalom*) and uses the following formative strands to achieve these goals: (1) person-in-formation, (2) persons-in-community formation, and (3) persons-in-mission formation.

John Calvin's teaching on spiritual growth as a process of becoming is apt in the context of spiritual formation. This process is not of becoming something else but as a process of restoring what is already there. There are individual and corporate components to this restoration. These components are so interconnected that it is difficult to separate them. For discussion, it will be dealt with separately.

First, the individual component is personal but not individualistic. It is personal in that it helps the individual to change to become like Christ in character. This aspect of spiritual growth is not an individualistic exclusive personal relationship with the risen Christ but an inclusive relationship with Christ and other people. Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema's (1986) reference to God's redemptive work in an individual from "renewed image" to "perfected image" offers a framework to this component of the process.

Second, the corporate component is that of communion with God. Individuals are invited and enabled to join in and be part of the Triune Godhead through Christ. This brings them into God's household and makes them God's people, created in the *imitatios Trinitatis*.

Finally, the individual and corporate components come together to complete Christ's mission on earth – the establishment of the kingdom of

God. This is restoring shalom to the world and its peoples. This becoming is the eschatological restoration of the shalom of the new heaven and earth.

To summarise, the theological and biblical foundations of this paradigm are based on Calvin's theological concept of becoming which is a process of restoring the image of God, becoming a people of God, and as agents for *missio Deo*.

b. Psychosocial foundations

The SFC paradigm may also be considered a mind-heart approach to spiritual formation. While maintaining the Reformed emphasis on spiritual learning, it balances that emphasis with an equal emphasis on relationships and emotions. Human beings are complex creations. Faith formation occurs at different levels at any point in time. Most theories of faith formation focus on the cognitive level; few studies have focused on the affective level and even fewer on the subconscious level. I suggest that an integrated synthesis of Loder's (1989) "logic of transformation," Shults and Sandage's (2006) "intensification model of spiritual transformation," Willard's (2002) "biblical heart" concept, and systems theory may offer an insightful understanding of the foundations of SFC paradigm.

Loder (1989) starts with the four dimensions of self, world, void, and the Holy. The Reformed tradition that the flesh (sinful human nature), the world, and Satan oppose the work of God in the spiritual life of people closely approximates this concept. Normally, these dimensions are in a sort of equilibrium, but anything that challenges this equilibrium may lead to a cascade of events that Loder describes as the logic of transformation. This dynamic consists of five steps that end with a resolution, whereupon the person moves back into the "dwelling" phase. Otherwise, he or she ends up in a wandering cycle that may last for years.

If the search is successful, the person may end up with convictional knowing, which is transformative. I suspect that such knowing is similar to discovery of a new worldview that brings with it a new reality and its new way of looking at things. The person may then live with this new worldview for a time, finding a place of spiritual "dwelling" until something else disturbs the status quo and sets again into action the logic of transformation. This process may recur until the self is so close to the Holy that it has the character of Christ. The scanning and insight solution, however, may not always be positive and lead a person to the Holy. Negative influences from the world and the void can hijack the process and lead one astray.

The concepts of spiritual questing and spiritual "dwelling" are important in building an integrated framework to facilitate CSF. Spiritual "dwelling" may be a safe place for people to rest, process their experiences, deepen their understanding, and learn about the core content of their faith. While it

does not have to be a physical place, a spiritual "dwelling" is often a SFC . The SFC may be a place for both spiritual "dwelling" and spiritual seeking. Many formative processes may be embedded within a SFC in equipping a person for the scanning and constructive act-of-imagination phases of the transformational logic that leads to transformation. The enculturation of such formative processes may shorten the time of scanning and reduce the chances of poor theological choices. Having correct relationships with self, others, and God is an important aspect, as suggested by Shults and Sandage's (2006) relational intensity, intentionality, and intimacy leading to redemptive intimacy. Being in correct realtionships may enable a person-in-formation to be able to counter the negative influences of the world and the void. Furthermore, those who re-enter the place of spiritual "dwelling" after their experience of transformation may contribute by fine-tuning spiritually formative elements, thus helping others on the same journey.

Often, spiritual "dwelling" may be considered a context or container for faith formation. One metaphor used is a crucible,[3] which Sandage describes as a "container that can hold the intense heat that fires human 'jars of clay'," which are hard pressed from every side "for transformational shaping" (2002, 238). The "biblical heart" imbued with a strong sense of sin and a deep desire for communion with God is the prime motivator for faith formation. The sense of sin and the hunger for God come only from the Holy Spirit. They, in turn, lead back to Loder's (1989) logic of transformation and Willard's (2002) volitional intentionality.

The SFC becomes a matrix of formative influences in Shults and Sandage's (2006) model. However, systems theory seems to reveal a larger role for the SFC that is a learning organisation with its own faith formation and community ethos. Failure to grasp this community ethos may cause disruption in the logic of transformation, the result being that convictional knowing is not realised. Thus, the SFC as a place of spiritual "dwelling" can become dysfunctional, forcing everyone out to become seekers and, later, wanderers.

Spiritual formation is not efficient, calculable, predictable, or controllable. Spiritual growth is messy. As one progresses, one is always faced with difficult choices. Educator Suzanne Johnson correctly observes that spiritual formation is dynamic and always changing (1989, 111–17). The Reformed tradition maintains that CSF is a continual struggle of the inner self, with advances and backsliding, until one receives a glorified body. Most Reformed thinkers, such as Carl Ellis Nelson, James E. Loder, Craig Dykstra, and Richard Robert Osmer have problems with Fowler's stages-of-faith theory (Astley and Francis, 1992). Questioning Fowler's theory in making developmental stages normative, Loder and Fowler note that some issues arise because of Fowler's "failure to clarify the faith standpoint from which faith is being observed and partly with [his] making universalizing the normative goal for faith development" (Loder and Fowler 1982, 137).

The SFC matrix paradigm highlights two essential components in CSF: (1) the formative processes and (2) the formative community. Transformational logic, convictional knowing, spiritual seeking, and volitional development of the biblical heart are formative processes. These are the formative strands of person-in-formation, persons-in-community, and persons-in-mission. The organisational learning, spiritual "dwelling" places, and a setting for the interaction of these formative processes make up the formative community, implying a nurturing faith community that facilitates such interactions.

The Holy Spirit has a vital role in the transformation process. Though it does not appear in their diagram, Shults and Sandage acknowledge the importance of the Holy Spirit in stating that "our understanding of the creaturely *human* spirit will be shaped (whether consciously or not) by our understanding of the creative *divine* Spirit" (2006, 39). In the area of formation and transformation, the role of the Holy Spirit cannot be overemphasised.

To summarise, Loder's (1989) "logic of transformation" is a starting place for the processes of CSF. Convictional knowing comes at the end because it leads to a new spiritual "dwelling". The motivation for this journey, which is prompted by crisis, is a biblical heart that has a strong sense of sin and a great hunger for God. The SFC may shape the faith-formation process through its communal ethos. The key components are the formative processes and formative communities. Thus, there are sound theological, biblical, and psychosocial foundations for the SFC paradigm.

2. THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION COMMUNITY

Angela Reed's concept of "a call to one anothering" is a suitable definition of a spiritual formation community, though she uses it in the context of spiritual guidance. She notes "one anothering" includes "the invitation to encourage *one another* (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13), instruct *one another* (Rom. 15:14), speak to one another in psalms and hymns (Eph. 5:19), admonish *one another* (Col. 3:16), confess sins to *one another* (Jas. 5:16) and spur *one another* toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24)" (Reed 2010, 2011, 13–14; author's italics). Spiritual formation is not solely an individual process of development. A "one anothering" community is needed to foster spiritual growth.

A spiritual formation community is a "one anothering" community. I define it as a community that is a crucible for spiritual formation elements to act and interact in the process of spiritual formation. I build on Foster's (2006) concept of "spiritual formation-based congregations." The characteristics of a spiritual formation community which I have modified are:

> a. The community accepts that spiritual formation is foundational

    to the congregational life;

    b.   The community is a safe spiritual dwelling;

    c.   The community's leaders and members are fully committed to
         and participate in spiritual formation;

    d.   The community provides continuity and identity,

    e.   The community has a balanced mix of service and relational-
         orientation.

*a.   The community accepts that spiritual formation is foundational to the
     individual and congregational life.*

The community is fully aware of what spiritual formation is and is willing to
commit to this process as the foundations of the community. This
commitment implies that the community recognises that it exists to foster
spiritual formation as its main task or priority. The community should
recognise that spiritual formation involves intentional actions and offer
opportunities for its members to develop formative habits, and master
spiritual disciplines.

Table 5 shows some of the formative action plans essential for a spiritual
formation community. These suggested formative initiatives are helpful in
promoting spiritual formation when they are performed with the intention of
spiritual growth and not as a duty. Using these initiatives, the faith
communities can plan for formative activities that will help to fulfil the
desired outcomes.

Table 5. Formative action plans in a spiritual formation community

Spiritual formation	Formative action plans
Person-in-formation	· Helping members to develop a personal relationship with Christ
	· Helping members to understand the Bible in depth
	· Helping members to develop a prayer life
	· Helping members to know and practise the spiritual disciplines
	· Helping members in times of emotional, spiritual, and physical needs

	· Providing a clear pathway to guide spiritual growth
Persons-in-community formation	· Embedding the bible in community culture
	· Making learning an important part of community culture
	· Challenging members to grow spiritually
	· Empowering and training of church leaders
	· Empowering and equipping members to serve
	· Help members feel that they belong/ inspire a sense of church ownership
	· Have strong ministry programmes for children
	· Modelling to members on how to grow spiritually
	· Encouraging accountability
	· Providing compelling worship
	· Setting clear expectations on members' participation
	· Providing opportunities for members to minister to one another
	· Christian practices
Persons-in-mission formation	· Promoting a strong serving culture
	· Providing a chance to serve those in need
	· Promoting an outward looking missional community culture

Note: Some of these formative activities are modified based on the REVEAL report on "What Do People Want the Church to Do Better?" (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, 189).

b.   The community is a safe spiritual dwelling.

People need "safe spaces" for their spiritual journey. Educator Parker J.

Palmer notes that persons are able to grow in a holistic way only when they feel safe (2004, 25–29). As noted in the intensification model of spiritual transformation, people move back and forth between places of rest and seeking during their lifelong journeys. The model also emphasises a container or place for spiritual transformation to take place. The SFC may be a place for people to rest and reflect when they cease from their seeking. Even their seeking can take place within the SFC. The key to growing a nurturing community is to cultivate right relationships and love.

The community will have to develop a culture of tolerance and allow room for questions and doubts. Members of the community may have to learn not to be too critical of others while holding to their own core beliefs and values. This is the hospitality that welcomes strangers who may be different. Catholic spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen (1996) describes this hospitality;

> Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place…The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance to their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocation. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own (71-72)

The spiritual formation community is a safe place for people on spiritual quest and people to rest from their spiritual questing. It is a safe spiritual "dwelling."

c.   The community's leaders and members are fully committed to and participate in spiritual formation.

For the community to be successful as a crucible for the spiritual formation elements to act, the leaders and the laypeople of the community must be fully committed. Without this intentionality, it will not work. The leaders and the laypeople are to be *committed to* and are themselves *participating in* the spiritual formation elements. Their full commitments are essential for the community to function. This will imply that they recognise that spiritual formation is an ongoing process that takes time and not a programme.

The key change may not come only from the cognitive affirmation by the leaders that change is necessary but by the inner transformation of the

leaders. Pastor Mike Lueken, who with co-pastor Ken Carlson transformed their seeker megachurch into a spiritual formation-oriented church, identifies the key to the transformation:

We needed unhurried, luxurious time in solitude, doing nothing. We needed to experiment with simplicity. We needed to deal with our anger and lust. We needed to learn how to abandon the outcome of our work. We needed to slow down. We needed to learn how to be with God without an agenda. (Carlson and Lueken 2011, 41)

The key is in spiritual formation of the leaders so that they will seek after spiritual formation of their congregations rather than seeking after ministry success such as numbers, large church properties, and popular acclaim. Hence the vital need for pastors and leaders to be fully committed and participating in spiritual formation in a spiritual formation community.

d. The community provides continuity and identity

There appears to have been a unified sense of identity among the early Christian churches. New Testament theologian Ben Witherington, commenting on the early Church, says that "[h]ere again the ancient collectivist culture suggests that the group defines the identity of the individuals in it, not the other way around" (1998, 222). This has important implications for our understanding of spiritual relationships in an organic nurturing community. As Meeks elaborates:

The one God of the Christians, as of the Jews, is personal and active. His spirit or, alternately, the spirit of his Son, acts in, on, and with individual believers and the whole community. The social correlate is the intimacy of the local household. A high level of commitment is demanded, the degree of direct interpersonal engagement is strong, the authority structure is fluid (though not exclusively), and the internal boundaries are weak (but not troublesome). (1983, 190)

Such a community with the social intimacy of a household, high level of commitment, and good relationships is an appropriate matrix for spiritual formation in the ESPCMs. The identity of the individual is not lost but spiritually formed as the nurturing community itself is transformed into Christ-likeness. This goal prevents a Christian faith community from devolving into a cult.

The sense of continuity is also important for spiritual formation, for in this age, there is much movement of people who relocate frequently because of job opportunities or other reasons. Relocation often means beginning as strangers. It takes time to become part of a new community. In the meantime, the sense of linkage and belonging to the old community provide the continuity for spiritual formation.

e. The community is a balanced mix of service- and relational-orientation

In studying Paul's idea of community, Banks (1994) discovered that Paul uses two key metaphors. One describes the community as a loving family and the other as a service-oriented body. Expanding on the first, Banks writes:

The concrete actions that characterise this community of love may be described as acts of identification on the one hand, or substitution on the other. Identification, the solidarity of the members with one another, goes beyond mere sociality, for each is inextricably involved in the life of the other. Substitution, bearing one another's burdens in quite tangible ways, goes beyond mere helplessness or even compassion. Prayer made by one member of the community for another and especially suffering undergone by one member on behalf of another are just two examples of what is here in view. (54)

Paul's metaphor of a community as being a loving family closely resembles my understanding of a relational-oriented community. However, Paul also describes a service-oriented community (Banks 1994, 58–66). A spiritual formation community needs to be a balanced mixed of relational and service oriented community.

In summary, a spiritual formation community with spiritual formation and discipleship as foundational to the congregational life provides a safe spiritual "dwelling", whose leaders and members are fully committed to and participate in spiritual formation, providing continuity and identity. In addition, its having a balanced mix of service and relational-orientation is an ideal setting for a SFC paradigm.

3. THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION ELEMENTS

A biblical, theological, and literature survey of the nature and process of spiritual formation in revealed seven elements of spiritual formation essential to the formative strands of person-in-formation, persons-in-community formation, and persons-in-mission formation. These elements need to act together in a spiritual formation community to affect spiritual formation. The nuance of the phrase *spiritual formation elements* is a reminder that they are a means not an end in and of themselves.

In the crucible of a spiritual formation community, a synergy exists because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In this section, the following five elements will be discussed in the context of such synergy. The remaining two spiritual formation elements of intentionality and dependence on the Holy Spirit will be discussed as part of these five elements:

a. Growing into Christ-likeness,

        b. Building relationships,

        c. Being missional,

        d. Enhancing spiritual learning,

        e. Developing community.

a. Growing into Christ-likeness

Growing into Christ-likeness is the process of restoring the fallen *imago Dei*. It involves one's being continually aware of God's presence within the context of daily life. More specifically, it involves seeing God at work not only in the big things but also in the mundane routine of everyday existence. Living such a life includes taking the metanarrative of the Christian story seriously. Embracing this metanarrative as the overarching narrative of one's life means that one recognises God's abiding presence. Doing so enriches people's lives with new meaning and purpose. It also enables them to be transformed to become like Christ to carry on his mission of redemption, the *missio Dei*. The process of maturing spiritually into Christ-likeness will be considered under the following headings:

        i. Discipleship,

        ii. Assimilating Christian values,

        iii. Living the Christian story.

i. Discipleship

The New Testament refers to Jesus' followers as *disciples* (*mathētēs*) 262 times. However, the term was rare in the Old Testament and not used at all in the Epistles (Wilkins 1996). This fact indicates that there is a difference between being a disciple in the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in the Epistles. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were called to cultic temple worship. They were covenant-holders with Yahweh, not disciples. In the Gospels, on the other hand, the disciples were followers of Jesus Christ and were continually living in his presence. This situation was unique because it would never be repeated. In the Epistles, the followers of Jesus no longer had Christ with them in person, so they had to depend on the Gospels and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, they continued to follow his teachings and pattern their lives after his. Thus, while it is easy to define what is meant by *disciples*, it is harder to define *discipleship*.

The understanding of discipleship has changed since the middle of the twentieth century.[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer defines *discipleship* as "allegiance to the suffering Christ" (1959, 91). Offering a contemporary definition, Dallas Willard writes that "discipleship is a life of learning from Jesus Christ how to live in the Kingdom of God now, as he himself did" (2006, 62), adding that "spiritual formation in Christ is the *process* whereby the innermost being of the individual (the heart, will, or spirit)[5] takes on the quality or character of Jesus himself" (2006, 53). Willard indicates that, while discipleship and spiritual formation overlap, the latter is a more holistic term (process of character formation) of which discipleship (how to live in the Kingdom of God) forms a subset.

Discipleship, I maintain, involves following Christ by living a life in obedience to his teachings in everyday life. Here, I am not referring to contemporary discipleship but to a relationship that is similar to what Collinson (1994) suggests. It includes all the elements of spiritual formation: becoming Christ-like, building relationships, maturing in missional outreach, acting with intentionality, seeking spiritual learning, depending on the Holy Spirit, and developing community. Discipleship thus facilitates person-in-formation, persons-in-community formation, and persons-in-mission formation.

ii. Assimilating Christian values

The assimilation of Christian values[6] is an important aspect of growing into Christ-likeness. New and young Christians are required to learn these values if they are to grow into Christ-likeness, become part of the people of God, and establish the kingdom. In "How Learners Respond to the Teaching of Beliefs and Values," Hill (2008) identifies three dimensions of how students respond to the teaching of values: the cognitive, the emotional, and the volitional. He points out that the emotional dimension is more important than the cognitive because it influences the volitional in prioritising values. This observation is in agreement with the findings of Willard (2002) and Wilhoit (2008), reinforcing the popular maxim that "values are caught, not taught." The transmission of values is best done in a community. Socialisation, mentoring, and role modelling are appropriate ways to inculcate values, especially in spiritual formation.

iii. Living the Christian story

Some stories are metanarratives, offering large ideas, while others are merely parts of a metanarrative. Suzanne Johnson observes that Christians are "shaped by three basic texts of story: (1) life story, (2) cultural story, and (3) Christian Story" (1989, 90). The Bible contains the Christian story,[7] a metanarrative that tells of the love of God for humanity and His plan to redeem the whole of creation. Thus, instead of theology's being a study only of propositions, some scholars conceive of it as a study

of narratives (Hauerwas and Jones 1997). Brian McLaren calls this biblical account a "redemptive metanarrative" because, unlike others, it does not impose itself as the only one.[8] It allows other narratives to join it.

This metanarrative is an important part of Christians' journeys in spiritual formation. It helps them to develop an identity as adopted children of God. It also shows them where they are going.[9] An important step in becoming Christ-like is to discover one's identity through restoring the fallen *imago Dei*. The telling and retelling of the Exodus narrative—which recounts God's faithfulness, deliverance, protection, and guidance—is an example of using stories to educate in the Old Testament. H. Richard Niebuhr (1997) makes the important observation that the preaching of the early Church was not only about doctrine but also about the narratives of the Jesus story and the experiences of Christian communities.[10] Michael Root concurs, arguing that Christian soteriology derives its "structure and explanatory power" as a function of its narrative form (1997, 263). The process of becoming like Christ involves discovering one's own personal story, adapting to one's cultural heritage, and relating it to God's metanarrative.

In summary, for a person to grow into Christ-likeness involves becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, assimilating Christian values, and living the Christian story.

b. Building relationships

Building and maintaining human relationships affects spiritual formation on many levels. The relationships of spiritual formation involve knowing and loving God, knowing and loving ourselves, and knowing and loving our neighbours (Mk. 12:30-31). God is a self-revealing God, and one may get to know him by reading Scripture, imitating Christ, appreciating his creation, and following the Holy Spirit's guidance. Henri Nouwen (1989) likens spiritual formation to a process of slowly falling in love with God. It is a loving relationship based on the *perichoresis* of the triune God. The spiritual formation process of building relationship may be considered under the following:

> i. A life of relationships
>
> ii. A life of worship

i. A life of relationships

The basis of relationships in spiritual formation is Trinitarian in the call of God the Father, the finished work of Jesus Christ the Son, and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. Michael Downey comments, "From

the perspective of Trinity as interpersonal communion, human life in Christ by the Spirit is a call to loving communion with God, others and every living creature" (2005, 624). Human persons are invited to join in communion with the Triune godhead. The Trinity serves as the basis and model for human relationships. Puritan theologian John Owen, in his 1657 book *Communion with the Triune God*, described in detail the communion possible with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He noted, "Our communion then with God consists in [H]is communication of [H]imself unto us, with our return unto [H]im of that which [H]e requires and accepts, flowing from that union which in Jesus Christ we have with [H]im" (2007, 94).

Aside from communion with God, relationships in a faith community are enriched through developing relationships. Relationships in a spiritual formation community may involve spiritual friendship, discipling, mentoring, coaching, and leadership. Often the basis of these relationships is spiritual friendship. Aelred of Rievaulx, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk described spiritual friendship well:

> But what happiness, what security, what joy to have someone to whom you dare to speak on terms of equality as to another self; one to whom you need have no fear to confess your failings; one to whom you can unblushingly make known what progress you have made in the spiritual life; one to whom you can entrust all the secrets of your heart and before whom you can place all your plans! What, therefore, is more pleasant than so to unite to oneself the spirit of another and of two to form one, that no boasting is thereafter to be feared, no suspicion to be dreaded, no correction of one by the other to cause pain, no praise on the part of one to bring a charge of adulation from the other. "A friend," says the Wise Man, "is the medicine of life." (1977, 2:11–12)

Though he was describing spiritual friendship in a religious community, it may be equally applied in a spiritual formation community. Relationship within a spiritual formation community provides a sense of belonging, individual and communal identity, emotional and spiritual support, security, and acceptance, especially in times of spiritual seeking and counsel in ethical living.

ii. A life of worship

Worship is the human response to the Creator God who is both immanent and transcendent. This response may be awe and adoration. It may also be a heightened awareness of one's sinfulness and a stirring of the biblical heart. Worship is the response evoked by discovery of who the "I AM WHO I AM" (Gen. 3:14) really is. It may also involve a loving invitation to join in the *perichoresis* of the triune God.

Thus, worship may be understood as "pure adoration, the lifting up of the redeemed spirit towards God in contemplation of [H]is holy perfection"

(Harrison 1984, 1193). Worship in its broadest sense is service for God. Worship in a Sunday service encompasses rituals or liturgies, Scripture reading, preaching, fellowship, and the sacraments. Writing about public worship, Christian educator Kenneth O. Gangel (1994) suggests that it has three objectives for spiritual formation: (1) communication, (2) celebration, and (3) comprehension. Gangel likens communication in public worship to "practicing God's presence" (1994, 118). Celebration, he goes on to explain, is a response to God's work in the world, and comprehension occurs when people "learn theology as . . . a foundation for life change and transformation" (1994, 121). Adding to that observation, James C. Wilhoit notes that "[w]orship filled with prayer and praise and opportunities for confession, repentance, receiving the sacraments, hearing and giving testimonies of God's activity, and learning/challenge is the most important context of community formation" (2008, 86).

To summarise, building relationship involves the vertical and horizontal. The vertical is building relationship through worship, and the horizontal is building relationships with other people.

c. Being missional

Being missional derives from the biblical concept of *shalom* and God's plan of redemption for his creation. It involves living out the Trinitarian view of mission as espoused by missiologist Leslie Newbigin (1995) —proclaiming the kingdom of the Father (faith in action), sharing the life of the Son (love in action), and bearing witness of the Spirit (hope in action). All these mandates are encapsulated in the Christian story. Clarifying the role of mission and the nature of the church, theologian Ray S. Anderson (2006) writes,

If the mission of Christ through the presence and power of the Spirit determines the nature and ministry of the church, then we should expect that mission itself becomes the source of the renewed vision and life of the church. This is why mission, rather than ministry, expands God's kingdom and renews the spiritual life of the church. Ministry expends Spirit in programs and body building; mission breathes in Spirit and promotes body movement... For the church to be both incarnational and Pentecostal in its theology and praxis, it must recover the dynamic relationship between its nature and mission" (186–187)

The nature of the church is the continuing mission of God through Jesus. Christians are to be fully engaged with this world; otherwise, Jesus would not have prayed for his disciples' to fulfil the Great Commission (Jn. 17:15). This mission involves (1) living as a people of God, a people set aside for God's redemptive purpose; (2) living in the kingdom of God now while also anticipating its completion when Jesus comes again; and (3) living with the eschatological hope of the future when God recreates the

heavens and earth. To be missional, then, is to be engaged with the world outside the SFC s. Such engagement entails seeking justice for the oppressed, helping the sick and the poor, providing for orphans and widows, and bringing both "light" and "salt" to the world (Matt. 5:13–14).

Being missional also involves reconciliation. God has made possible the reconciliation of human beings with himself by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, believers have to bear witness to those who have not heard the Gospel and facilitate their reconciliation with God. "Evangelism is an essential part of spiritual formation," Wilhoit comments. "Evangelism, as people are called to faith in Christ, is the initial act of Christian formation. The act of evangelism is a powerful means of formation for the believer who reaches out of love to share the good news" (2008, 167).

Such missional activism involves moving into areas where people have not heard of the Christian story, instead of waiting for them to come to the faith community. Australian mission strategists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch emphasise this point by their use of the terms *attractional* and *incarnational* to describe two quite different SFC models. An attractional SFC invites people to "hear the [G]ospel in the holy confines of the church and its community." An incarnational SFC , in contrast, goes to where people are because it sees the world as a "web, a series of intersecting lines symbolizing the networks of relationships, friendships, and acquaintances of which church members are a part" (2003, 41–46). An incarnational SFC is a relationship-oriented community. Even in Presbyterian churches, given their strong belief in predestination, the command to bring in the "elect" still applies. This differentiation is also highlighted in Darrell L. Guder's (1998) collection *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.[11] In summary, being missional requires believers to engage with the world and share the Gospel by moving to where the people are (outside the SFCs).

d. Enhancing spiritual learning

Spiritual learning is the process of developing "convictional knowing." As discussed earlier, James E. Loder defines it as "the patterned process by which the Holy Spirit transforms all transformations of the human spirit" (1989, 93). It involves dealing with challenges through critical thinking and reflection. Spiritual learning is an ongoing process that includes a willingness to learn from the Holy Spirit and the Bible, as well as others in the SFCs. Spiritual learning has two important components:

> i. Bible-centredness

> ii. Critical thinking

i. Bible-centredness

Scripture is the major source of God's revelation. John Calvin had such a high view of Scripture that he gave the following title to Book 1, Chapter 6, of his *Institutes*: "Scripture is needed as a guide and teacher for anyone who would come to God the creator." To support this point, Calvin used three metaphors: (1) Scripture is like spectacles so that the visually challenged may see better; (2) Scripture is like a thread that may lead a person through a labyrinth; and (3) Scripture is like a teacher (1960, 69–73). Steve S. Kang, similarly, notes that "it is through such careful reading of the Bible, in the context of such a kingdom in the [C]hurch, that spiritual formation of believers must take place" (2002, 138).

The Reformed tradition takes the task of teaching Scripture seriously. John H. Leith points out that "[t]he focus of the Reformed emphasis on the [W]ord is preaching" (1981, 227). The sermon is the focal point of a Presbyterian worship service, as noted earlier. Aside from listening to the Word's being preached, the Reformed tradition has always emphasised learning. The catchphrase in early Reformism is "the life of the mind as the service of God." Calvin's teaching about "double knowledge"—knowledge of God and knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit in the self—is insightful in this regard (1960, 35–38). Leith further mentions that Calvin "made knowledge as well as personal commitment a condition for admission to the communion table" (1981, 80–81). Calvin was not being legalistic but believed that people should have some knowledge of God because their commitment should not be based on blind faith.

ii. Critical thinking

Another important aspect of spiritual learning is critical thinking and theological reflection. In concluding their survey of the history and philosophy of Christian education, educators Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson (2003) offer seven suggestions for reform in the twenty-first century. One is the need for Christians to develop critical-thinking skills.[12] American educator Stephen D. Brookfield, in his book *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, summarises the commonly accepted components of critical thinking as (1) identifying and challenging assumptions, (2) examining the context of a situation, (3) imagining and exploring alternatives, and (4) "reflective skepticism" (1987, 7–9).

Critical thinking starts with examining the assumptions that underlie ideas, values, actions, and beliefs that often are taken for granted. These assumptions are checked for accuracy and validity. If they are found to be false, new assumptions will have to be framed. Critical thinkers are aware that "context influences thoughts and actions" (Brookfield 1987, 8). Another feature of critical thinking is the ability to conceive of alternatives. Formulating alternatives to what once was merely assumed to be true makes for a reflective sceptic who examines everything. Critical thinking is an essential aspect of spiritual formation, especially in the ESPCMs,

because it enables a person to evaluate the insidious influences of religious polarisation, Islamisation, and globalisation. To summarise, spiritual learning is Bible-centric and involve critical thinking and reflection.

e. Developing community

Developing community involves time, effort, and commitment. It incorporates intentionality, loving relationships, and other spiritual formation elements. Most of Paul's epistles were written to communities rather than individuals. Though most are in response to certain crises within these communities, they also contain advice about relationships as well as collective behaviour, practices, and beliefs in the communities. For example, the "armour of God" in Ephesians 6:13–18 is often interpreted as though it were written for individuals. Paul, however, may have intended for the community of faith in Ephesus rather than individual Christians to put on the metaphorical armour. Paul wanted to convey the impression of a community in battle yet wants to make the engagement personal. Thus, Paul wanted the whole community to be involved without denying the importance of the individual within the community.

An example is the ancient Jewish community. Walter Brueggemann argues that the Torah is a non-negotiable "statement of community ethos." He goes on to say, "[I]t is clear that the community precedes the individual person, that the community begins by stating its parameters and the perceptual field in which the new person must live and grow" (1982, 12). The Jews during New Testament times saw themselves as God's chosen people and traced their lineage to Abraham. Gentile and Jewish Christians alike understood themselves to be a new creation, the Church.

Paul and the New Testament house churches[13] drew heavily from the spiritual formation practices of the Jews. There were four groups of communities during that period: (1) the household; (2) voluntary associations (sporting clubs and so on); (3) religious groups, such as the synagogues; and (4) schools teaching philosophy and rhetoric. It is important to know on which group the house church modelled itself because the origin will give some clues to the New Testament church's foundational pattern. It is too easy to assume that the New Testament house church was based on the synagogue, but recent scholarship seems to indicate that it was modelled after voluntary associations that met in homes (Gehring 2004, 17–27). The *oikos* or household was the local meeting place of Christians. The New Testament church, in other words, was never meant to be a school. This is a sad indictment of the SFC s' adoption of the schooling-instructional approach as its predominant pedagogy.

Both Foster (1994) and Westerhoff ([1976] 2000) recognise that powerful formative forces work in community. Furthermore, New Testament theologian James M. Howard (2007) points out that much scholarly

understanding of the Pauline theology of community is individualistic. He argues instead that the basis of Pauline theology is community based and that a community is essential for growth into Christ-likeness, both for members of the community and for the community itself. Thus, to summarise, there is an intentional need for believers to be proactive in building their faith communities so they can come together to support one another, stand together in spiritual warfare, and help one another to grow spiritually. The spiritual formation community is one such faith community.

4. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HUMAN INTENTIONALITY

The five spiritual formation elements of growing into Christ-likeness, enhancing spiritual learning, being missional, building relationships, and growing community are important contributing factors in the SFC paradigm – and they are all infused with the elements of the role of the Holy Spirit and human intentionality.

But these two elements also need to be treated separately.

The transformative role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the human response in a SFC paradigm needs to be emphasised. Dependence on the Holy Spirit and intentionality are crucial spiritual formation elements because both are volitional acts on the part of those who desire to be spiritually formed. The Holy Spirit acts not by coercion but by invitation (human intentionality).

The Holy Spirit is the agent of spiritual transformation. Gordon D. Fee (1994), a Pentecostal theologian, argues that there can be no spiritual growth without guidance by the Holy Spirit in the intentional and regular study of Scripture. James Loder (1989) believes that true spiritual growth cannot be planned but occurs during life crises called "transformative moments." Nevertheless, he advocates that, at ordinary times, spiritual formation may be an ongoing process and that Christians may not be idle until these critical moments appear. He too advocates the intentional study of Scripture. Educator Julie Gorman (1990) identifies these two different approaches as "spontaneous formation" and "deliberate formation." Spontaneous spiritual formation occurs when people respond positively to *kairos* moments when God intervenes in a person's life. Deliberate spiritual formation involves intentionally planned events to help believers develop spiritually.

Despite their differences, both Fee (1994) and Loder (1989) believe strongly in the transformative role of the Holy Spirit. They also recognise that Christians may pursue intentional activities that nurture spiritual growth so that, at the appropriate time, the Holy Spirit will be able to intervene to cause spiritual transformation. Gorman (1990) also recognises the Holy Spirit as the key element in spontaneous and deliberate spiritual formation. Thus, an essential part of CSF is learning

how to discern and engage with the Holy Spirit in all aspects of one's formation. For persons-in-mission formation, people and their community may make a decision to be involved in the *missio Dei*. However, decision and commitment are often not enough. Learning from the Holy Spirit is essential. Walter Brueggemann (2001) observes that the Holy Spirit will help the poor and the oppressed to see through the false claims of the rich and the powerful that keep them in a state of chronic poverty.

While it may take place without any conscious human effort, spiritual formation generally requires intentionality, in which the volitional will and a willingness to change come into play. Paul encourages the Philippians Christians to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to [H]is good purpose" (Phil. 2:12b–13). Willard (1998) and Wilhoit (2008) have highlighted the intentional dimension of spiritual formation by designing a "curriculum for Christ-likeness." According to Willard, such a curriculum has the twin goals of bringing Christians to the point where they love God and delight in Him and of reprogramming the "automatic" responses of their sinful nature so that they are free from their old "habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action." He proposes that this may be achieved by the practice of spiritual disciplines (1998, 321–22). Wilhoit describes his approach to Christ-likeness as one of imitating Christ and responding to his mandate to love both God and one another (2008, 38–51). Both scholars thus recognise that spiritual formation does not occur spontaneously but needs to be undertaken intentionally through reflective living and discipleship.

Intentionality for spiritual formation involves not only the individual believer but also a collaborative community. A focused curriculum for achieving Christ-likeness may be the SFC's primary task. All its activities may be designed to cultivate Christ-likeness and spiritual formation. They may include practicing the spiritual disciplines, making spiritual friends, being a mentor, giving and receiving spiritual direction, and taking part in Christian practices as a community. These activities do not occur by themselves naturally and effortlessly. Intentionality is the essential first step of spiritual formation.

The motivation for intentionality is awareness of a person's sinful nature that is the "distorted" image of God, as well as the awareness of a hunger for *shalom* with God. James C. Wilhoit notes that "[t]he fertile field for formation is a community genuinely aware of the depth of their sin and the reality of their spiritual trust. True formation requires that the community deeply understands that they cannot cure the sickness of their souls through willpower alone" (2008, 63). The individual and the community's sense of their sinfulness may be balanced by the hunger for God's *shalom*; else, they will descend to despair. A healthy balance will promote intentionality for spiritual formation.

Intentionality involves obedience and submission. Obedience is shown when Christians follow Jesus in living missionally and are involved in building relationships, participate actively in spiritual formation

communities, commit to ongoing spiritual learning, and are dedicated to growing in holiness or righteousness. Intentionality is demonstrated by living out their lives in submission to the teachings of the Bible, their church traditions, and their SFC s. The Holy Spirit is the generator that powers the elements of spiritual formation while human intentionality is the engine that drives it. Thus, a SFC paradigm requires both the Holy Spirit's ministration and the intentional commitment of individual SFC members. In summary, the SFC paradigm may be described as a spiritual formation community that acts as a crucible for the spiritual formation elements to act with the formative assent of individuals and transformative action of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

To summarise a spiritual formation community paradigm approach to Christian spiritual formation may be a more holistic approach to faith formation that the spiritual formation strategies employed in many Christian faith communities today.

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[1]. S. Johnson (2001) comments, "Christian practices and means of grace provide one important way to understand the normative content or curriculum of Christian spiritual formation in the local church context" (327).

[2] I define *Christian spiritual formation* as the intentional and ongoing process of inner transformation to become like Jesus Christ himself, to become with others a communal people of God, and to become an agent for God's redemptive purposes. In this paper, spiritual formation refers to Christian spiritual formation unless otherwise stated.

[3]. Sandage comments on this metaphor with reference to 2 Cor. 4:7–9 and to another related metaphor; "[a]lso note the preceding text on spiritual transformation into the image of Christ, which is described as relational intimacy, using the metaphor of 'unveiled faces' (2 Cor. 3:12–18)" (2002, 238n47).

[4]. Dallas Willard (2010b), in a survey of the evangelical influence on discipleship and Christian spiritual life, notes that during the post-World War II period, the emphasis on evangelism and discipleship was largely on making converts who would, in turn, make more converts. In the mid-to-late-twentieth century, the emphasis shifted to professing correct Christian belief. However, cognitive affirmation alone left many followers unsatisfied. This development led to "deeper life" teachings, which are largely devotional, and the emergence of Christian psychology to fill the void. Willard suggests that the emergence of the spiritual formation movement at the end of the twentieth century is another evangelical attempt to fill the "felt needs of many for *a spiritual life*, in addition to correct beliefs and outward practices."

[5]. Willard asserts the heart, spirit, and will are one and the same (2006, 53).

[6]. Values are also known as *virtues*. In a non-Christian context, these are moral virtues. The New Testament offers several summations of Christian virtues in 1 Cor. 13, Gal. 5:22–23, Phil. 4:8, and Col. 3:12–16.

[7]. Theologian Gabriel Fackre sees the Christian Story as divided into "Creation, Fall, Covenant, Jesus Christ, Church, Salvation, Consummation, with their Prologue and Epilogue, God" (1996, 5).

[8]. This point derives from a talk given by McLaren on "Gospel" during a conference held in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, on 3–4 March 2007.

[9]. Theologian Loren T. Stuckenbruck proposes that the Gospel of Mark was written specially for early believers' spiritual formation because "it draws the [C]hurch into an experience of trust in God who is very much alive" (2002, 90).

[10]. The power of the narrative is evident when it involves our own story. Niebuhr writes, "Whatever it was the [C]hurch meant to say, whatever was revealed or manifested to it, could be indicated only in connection with an historical person and events in the life of his community" (1997, 21).

[11]. This seminal book presents six researchers' reviews of the literature on the state of churches in North America in light of a "missional ecclesiology." It is deeply influenced by missiologist and theologian Leslie Newbigin. One of its important emphases is that members of churches may go to where needy people are (missional churches) rather than wait for needy people to come to them (attractional churches). The book is an important stimulus for the emerging church movement but beyond the

scope of this dissertation to cover. In addition to the writings of Newbigin (1986, 1989, 1995), Ray S. Anderson presents a theological framework for the movement (2006). In addition, biblical theologian D. A. Carson offers a critique of the theology and key proponents of the movement (2005).

[12]. In their epilogue "Cumulative Lessons from the Past for Twenty-First-Century Christian Education," Anthony and Benson (2003) suggest the following: (1) the family is a high priority; (2) ministry leaders may lead the way in demonstrating servant leadership; (3) God's Word is pre-eminent; (4) lay leaders are the foundation of long-term ministry efforts; (5) learn how to explain contemporary culture; (6) critical thinking is a characteristic of spiritual maturity; and (7) change is necessary (419–29).

[13]. The early Christians met in houses for nearly 300 years after Christ's death until Emperor Constantine began building basilicas and formal places of worship. The communities of early Christians meeting in homes were called *house churches* (Gehring 2004, 1).

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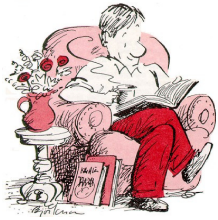
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Interview: Richard Foster on Spiritual Formation (Christianity Today Sept 2008)

Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest (Dorothy Bass, January 2005, Interpretation)

Rediscovering Centeredness

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M. Scott Rogers discovered his centredness when reading Henri Nouwen's *The Genesee Diary*.

I started a journal to pair with reading this book. It's the first such journal I have consistently written in. What strikes me, is the fact that journaling is too a lost practice among many Christians. Which has prompted me to find the reason for disappearance of these disciplines. The only answer I can find is the trend to become more free-spirited in our religious pursuits, trading what benefits us for what feels better, what is more enticing. The idea of prolong stretches of silence in a church service equates to the unexpected interruption of a blockbuster movie at the theater. We leave, we check out.

Moments of silence, of stillness offer us the opportunity to reflect, to consider, to digest what we've seen, heard, and emotionally felt. Instead we tend towards the side of annoyance, disparaged by the halt in "entertainment" which what so many evangelical churches have become. I know they, the pastors and church staff, mean well. Still, how can I really implement anything they teach if I don't quiet myself long enough to hear the expressed and implied meaning of the message?

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Evangelical Anxieties over Spiritual Formation

In the recent issue of *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care, 2008, Vol. 1, No. 2, 129–148*, there is this interesting article.

Sanctification in a New Key:
Relieving Evangelical Anxieties Over Spiritual Formation
by Steve L. Porter
Rosemead School of Psychology and
Talbot School of Theology (Biola University)

Abstract: This article is meant to be an apologetic for spiritual formation to those within the evangelical tradition who find themselves concerned about its emphases. Eight common objections to spiritual formation are presented with the twofold aim of recognizing any needed corrective and defusing the objection. While more must be said in response to each of these objections, it is hoped that enough will be said here to relieve much of the anxiety surrounding spiritual formation.

The eight general objections to spiritual formation from evangelicals are:
(1) Spiritual formation is just a fad
(2) Spiritual formation is Catholic
(3) Spiritual formation is New Age
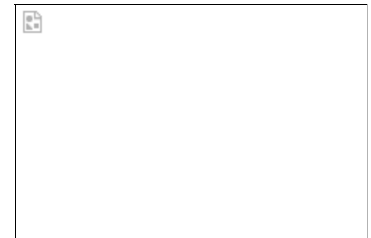
(4) Spiritual formation is contrary to the sufficiency of Scripture

(5) What ever happened to old-fashioned obedience?

(6) Spiritual formation encourages works righteousness

(7) Spiritual formation is overly experiential

(8) Spiritual formation neglects mission/evangelism

Steve Porter addresses each one of these objections systematically, showing that Christians especially Evangelicals have nothing to fear from spiritual formation. In fact, spiritual formation as sanctification is very biblical. I am glad that someone has finally written an apologetic for spiritual formation.

In my teaching and researching of spiritual formation, I continually meet the same objections from some pastors and church leaders. Even today, I am on the blacklist of certain pastors and church leaders because of my association with spiritual formation.

Download the article here

Blind Spot of the Spiritual Formation Movement

The Blind Spot of the Spiritual Formation Movement
Listening to a sermon is a spiritual discipline that needs to be learned.
Craig Brian Larson

Craig Brian Larson is editor of PreachingToday.com and pastor of Lake Shore Church in Chicago. He is co-author and co-general editor of The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching (Zondervan, 2006).

Craig Larson identifies the spiritual discipline of listening to sermons as a blind spot of the spiritual formation movement. Read more

I want to say that sound biblical preaching does the following nine things that individual Bible reading, memorization, and meditation does not:

(1)Good preaching rescues us from our self-deceptions and blind spots, for left to ourselves we tend to ignore the very things in God's Word that we most need to see. Preaching is done in community, covering texts and topics outside of our control.

(2)Preaching brings us before God's Word in the special presence of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the gathered church.

(3)Good preaching challenges us to do things we otherwise would not and gives us the will to do them. God has put within human nature a remarkable power to spur others to take action.

(4)Good preaching brings us into the place of corporate obedience rather than merely individual obedience. This is a uniquely corporate discipline that the church does together as a community, building up individuals and the community at the same time. We are not just an individual follower of Christ; we are a member of his church and are called to obey the call of God together with others hearing the same Word.

(5)Good preaching contributes to spiritual humility by disciplining us to sit under the teaching, correction, and exhortation of another human. Relying on ourselves alone for food from the Word can lead to a spirit of arrogance and spiritual independence.

(6)Good preaching gives a place for a spiritually qualified person to protect believers from dangerous error. The apostles repeatedly warned that untrained and unstable Christians—as well as mature believers—are frequently led astray by false doctrines. Christians are sheep; false teachers are wolves; preachers are guardian shepherds. A preacher is a person called and gifted by God with spiritual authority for the care of souls in the context of God's church.

(7)Preaching and listening is a uniquely embodied, physical act. It literally puts us into the habit of having "ears that

hear." There is something to be said for this physical act of listening and heeding. Good preaching is truth incarnated, truth mediated through a person from its ancient setting to today, truth we can feel through another person's heart, truth conveyed through an embodied person, truth we receive sitting shoulder to shoulder with other embodied Christians.

(8)Good preaching does what most Christians are not gifted, trained, or time-endowed to do: interpret a text in context, distill the theological truths that are universally true, and apply those truths in a particular time and place to particular people in a particular church—all this with the help of resources informed by 2,000 years of the Church's study that average Christians do not own. This is a challenging task for well-trained preachers; how much more so for those untrained?

(9)Listening to preaching has a much lower threshold of difficulty for almost all people. While many spiritual disciplines sound like exercises for the spiritually elite, both young and old, educated and uneducated, disciplined and undisciplined can at least listen to a sermon. It is God's equal-opportunity discipline. Preaching and listening is everywhere in the Bible because it is doable by the masses.

Christianity Today, January, 2009
Spiritual Formation Agenda
Three priorities for the next 30 years.
**Richard Foster** | posted 2/04/2009 08:48AM

Thirty years ago, when *Celebration of Discipline* was first penned, we were faced with two huge tasks: First, we needed to revive the great conversation about the formation of the soul; and second, we needed to incarnate this reality into the daily experience of individual, congregational, and cultural life. Frankly, we have had much greater success with the first task. Christians of all sorts now know about the need for spiritual formation, and look to saints Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant for guidance.

It's the second task that needs to consume the bulk of our energies for the next 30 years. If we do not make real progress on these fronts, all our efforts will dry up and blow away.

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Eugene Peterson on Spiritual Theology

I always regard Eugene Peterson as one of the modern masters of spiritual theology. I am sure he does not think of himself that way. He was one of the few early Evangelicals who was into spiritual theology before it became popular. He is the Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology of Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. His earlier books are still worth reading. These five books of a conversation on spiritual theology together are Eugene Peterson's magnum opus on the subject.
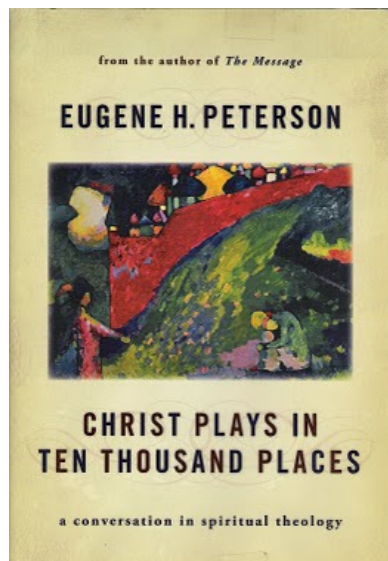
2005

Jesus is God incarnate, a God who is immanent and transcendent. In this book, Peterson shows an immanent Christ that is present in us all and in creation. This forms the framework for the rest of the books on spiritual theology
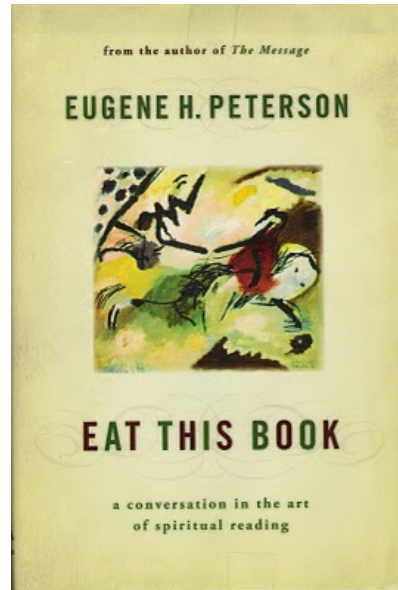

2006

The book is about the Bible and how we as Christians are to understand the truths that are in it. Peterson, the author of The Message which is a modern paraphrase and translation of the Bible is in a unique position to show us what teaching and learning from the Word of God is about. He challenges us from mere cognitive understanding to propositional truths to assimilating and living it out the Bible - hence eat the book.
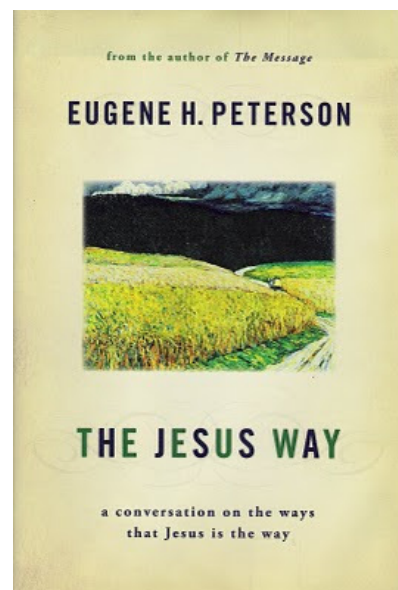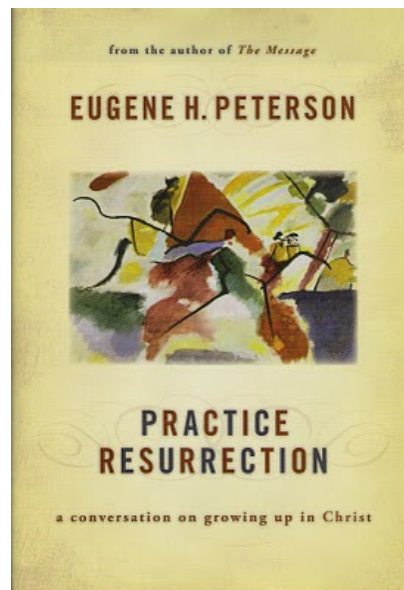
2007

How we do as disciples of Jesus Christ behave and live in this world is the subject of this book.
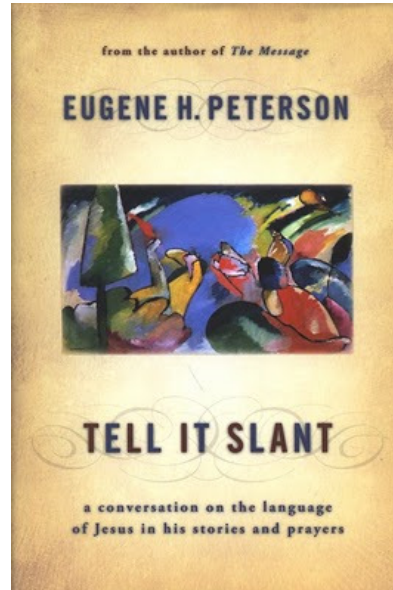
2008

Languages are important media of communications. In this book, Peterson takes on the way we understand truth and how our culture limits our understanding. Peterson shows us the way Jesus uses languages to teach his disciples.

2010

This is the final book in the series. Peterson wraps up his discourse on spiritual theology by exploring what spiritual growth or spiritual formation involves.


The Jesus Prayer (Frederica Matheves-Green, Kyria 2010)

Dallas Willard's Sense of Ministry

I find this comment by Dallas Willard on his homepage of his website very relevant.

> My sense of ministry is to judge the lay of the land for your times and shoot where the enemy is. The enemy in our time is not human capacity, or over activism, but the enemy is passivity - the idea that God has done everything and you are essentially left to be a consumer of the grace of God, so the only thing you have to do is find out how to do that and do it regularly. I think this is a terrible mistake and accounts for the withdrawal of active Christians from so many areas of life where they should be present. It also accounts for the lack of spiritual growth, for you can be sure that if you do not act in an advised fashion consistently and resolutely you will not grow spiritually.

There is a great collection of his articles and recordings on Dallas Willard's website and on spiritual formation

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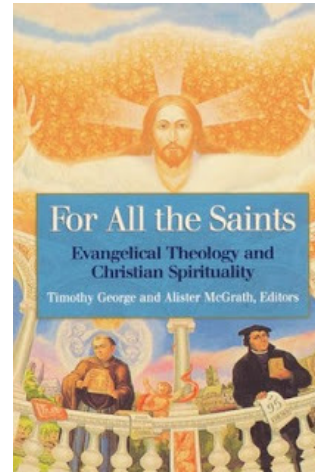
evangelical piety turns upside down the medieval paradigm of a pathway to God. There the journey of faith began with purgation, moved to illumination, and finally, ended in unification, that is, union with God. In the evangelical understanding, we begin with union with Christ (the new birth) and move through Word and Spirit to illumination and the process of sanctification until, at last, in heaven we see Christ face to face

"spiritual form

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Timothy George *For All The Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality,* p.4

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Spiritual formation

Spiritual formation is the growth and development of the whole person by an intentional focus on one's

- Spiritual and interior life
- Interactions with others in ordinary life
- The spiritual practices (prayer, the study of scripture, fasting, simplicity, solitude, confession, worship, etc.).

In *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit,* Gerald G. May has written, "Spiritual formation is a rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instruction, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth process of spiritual direction."[1]

Introduction

Dallas Willard writes about the spiritual formation that "it is a process that happens to everyone…. Terrorists as well as saints are the outcome of spiritual formation. Their spirits or hearts have been formed." [2] A study of various world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and others would enable one to understand specifically how each religion views spiritual formation or spiritual growth within its unique belief system.

Christianity

In Christian Spiritual Formation the focus is on Jesus. It is a lifelong process as a believer desires to become a disciple of Jesus and become more like him. This would be possible because of the divine grace of the Gospel and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Dallas Willard writes that "spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself."[3]

Approaches

Formal Study

- Theological Training
- Certificate Programs in Spiritual Direction
- BA and MA Programs accredited by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Informal study

- Bible Studies
- Retreats
- Conferences
- Independent study/reading the classics from Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Community/church involvement

- Corporate worship
- Volunteer service

Practice of spiritual disciplines

- prayer
- the study of scripture
- fasting
- simplicity
- solitude
- confession
- worship
- submission
- service
- others
- guidance
- study of scriptures
- services

Ordinary experiences of everyday life

- Work and play
- Family life

Leadership

More and more people are coming to see the importance of seeing leadership development as a process of spiritual formation. Building on the emphasis of Christian Spiritual Formation in leaders, leadership expert Timothy H. Warneka has written,

> Today's world cries out for people who can lead with a global perspective. We need leaders who lead from the heart as well as the mind, leaders who understand that decisions made about even the smallest of organizations affect the entire global community. We need leaders who can act ethically, intentionally, and with respect for existing citizenry as well as for future generations. We need leaders who can address problems from an integrated, holistic perspective—the only place that solutions for today's most pressing problems will be found. Most of all, we need leaders who understand that the primary function of a leader is to serve, not to be served.[4]

Biblical references

- Isaiah 43:1 (New International Version)

But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

- Ephesians 4:11-13 (The Message)

He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

- Romans 8:29 (New International Version)

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- Romans 12:2 (New International Version)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- 2 Corinthians 3:18 (New International Version)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Facets

Christian Spiritual Formation involves the growth of the whole person: the mind, body, heart, and will. Over time a believer may work with different pathways or facets of spirituality in the process of spiritual growth. In *Conformed to His Image*, Ken Boa explores 12 ways of approaching or studying Christian spirituality and spiritual formation. They are:

1. Relational Spirituality: Loving God Completely, Ourselves Correctly, and Others Compassionately
2. Paradigm Spirituality: Cultivating an Eternal versus a Temporal Perspective
3. Disciplined Spirituality: Engaging in the Historical Disciplines
4. Exchanged Life Spirituality: Grasping Our True Identity in Christ
5. Motivated Spirituality: A Set of Biblical Incentives
6. Devotional Spirituality: Falling in Love with God
7. Holistic Spirituality: Every Component of Life under the Lordship of Christ
8. Process Spirituality: Process versus Product, Being versus Doing
9. Spirit-Filled Spirituality: Walking in the Power of the Spirit
10. Warfare Spirituality: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil
11. Nurturing Spirituality: A Lifestyles of Evangelism and Discipleship
12. Corporate Spirituality: Encouragement, Accountability, and Worship.[5]

Disciplines

Some authors and speakers concerned with spiritual formation can eventually agree that believers can attain spiritual growth through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are exercises aimed to usher one into God's presence, where his life has the opportunity to transform our lives. Dallas Willard writes:

> We meet and dwell with Jesus and his Father in the disciplines for the spiritual life.[6]

Spiritual disciplines, as a strategy towards spiritual formation, have risen and fallen in popularity over the centuries. Christianity asserts two things: first, transformation of the heart is a work only God can accomplish, and second, we are saved not by our works or efforts, but by God's grace, that is, his unmerited favor, the church has often been tempted to marginalize the usefulness of these disciplines so as not be confused with preaching "justification by works."

However other scholar respond by saying that, it is not salvation that is at stake, but rather the need to develop people of genuine Christ-like character to live in the world and confront its values.

Richard Foster, in his book Celebration of Disciplines[7] includes several internal, external, and corporate disciplines one should engage in through their Christian life. These include the following internal disciplines: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, and Study. External disciplines include: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, and Service. Finally, corporate disciplines, those that are completed within the body of the church are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

Writers

- Dallas Willard
- Richard Foster
- Larry Crabb
- Henri Nouwen
- Eugene Peterson
- Ignatius of Loyola
- Richard Krejcir

Organizations

- Inspire [8]
- Renovaré
- The Upper Room (United Methodist Church)
- Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation

- Biblical inspiration
- Mental prayer
- Spiritual direction
- Spiritual experience
- List of evangelical seminaries and theological colleges

References

[1] May, Gerald G. *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction.* 1st HarperCollins paperback ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, p. 6.

[2] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ.* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002) p. 19.

[3] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ.* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002) p. 22.

[4] Warneka, T. (2008). *Black Belt Leader, Peaceful Leader: An Introduction to Catholic Servant Leadership.*|

[5] Ken Boa. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 21-23.

[6] Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). pg xi

[7] Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline: A Path to Spiritual Growth. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998). pg v

[8] http://www.inspire-network.org.uk/

Further reading

- Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002).
- Dallas Willard. The Spirit of the Disciplines. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).
- Ken Boa. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).
- Gerald G. May. *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1982).
- Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978).
- David Benner. *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

External links

- (http://www.thefoundationstone.org/): The Foundation Stone.org - For Your Spiritual Growth
- Spiritual Formation (http://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/formation): Extensive online resources for Spiritual Formation (Tyndale Seminary)
- Metamorpha: An Online Community for Spiritual Formation (http://www.Metamorpha.com)
- Kairos Spiritual Formation Ministries (http://www.kairos2.com)
- Kairos: A Center for Spiritual Formation (http://www.Kairosspirit.com)
- Discipleship Tools, a resource for Spiritual Formation (http://www.discipleshiptools.org/pages. asp?pageid=64119)
- Spiritual Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough & Transformation (http://www.fitnessthroughfasting.com/ spiritualfasting.html)

Renovaré

Renovaré (from the Latin "*to renew*" or "*to restore*") is a Christian non-profit organization dedicated to helping individuals and churches to grow in Christlikeness by engaging in intentional Christian spiritual formation. Renovaré encourages people to develop a **balanced vision** of Christian faith and witness which draws on the experience of the whole church - across all denominations, and throughout Christian history - and to develop that into a **practical strategy** for spiritual growth drawing on the classical spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible reading, worship, meditation, fasting, and silence. The ministry is international in scope (with expressions in the USA, Britain and Ireland, Korea, and Brazil) and ecumenical in character; Renovaré's Ministry Team draws together members of a wide variety of Christian denominations, including Anglican, Baptist, Church of God, Lutheran, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and Quaker.

Purpose statement

Renovaré is a nonprofit Christian organization headquartered in Englewood, Colorado, and active worldwide. We seek to resource, fuel, model, and advocate more intentional living and spiritual formation among Christians and those wanting a deeper connection with God. A foundational presence in the spiritual formation movement for over 20 years, Renovaré is Christian in commitment, ecumenical in breadth, and international in scope.[1]

History

Renovaré was founded by Quaker theologian Richard J. Foster in 1988. After publishing *Celebration of Discipline* (ISBN 0060628391) in 1978, Foster was invited to a number of churches and conferences to speak on Christian spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines. He was encouraged by people's interest in the subject, but concerned at an apparent lack of substantive teaching in the area (particularly in Evangelical churches in the USA). In the Fall of 1986 he withdrew from public ministry to explore how a more systematic and intentional renewal movement might be formed. This led to the foundation of Renovaré in November 1988.

Over the following years, Renovaré held a number of conferences about spiritual formation around the United States. In 1994 the ministry relocated its offices from Friends University in Wichita, Kansas (where Richard had been teaching) to Denver, Colorado. International expressions began to emerge in 2002, with the founding of Renovaré Britain and Ireland; this was followed in with the establishment of Renovaré Korea in 2004, and Renovaré Brazil in 2008. In the summer of 2008, Richard Foster retired as President of Renovaré (although remaining a member of the Board and Ministry Team), and Christopher Webb (an Anglican Franciscan, and member of the Board of Renovaré Britain & Ireland) was appointed to take up the role.

In early 2012 the Renovaré Board "approved the restructuring of the leadership" which resulted in the appointment of Rachel Quan as Executive Director and the termination of the position of President.[2] Christopher Webb returned to Britain and the Board appointed Nathan Foster, Richard's son, as Director of Teaching Ministries.[3]

International Conferences

In addition to hundreds of local and regional conferences around the USA, Renovaré has held a series of International Conferences, attended by delegates from around the world:

- 1991: Lake Avenue Congregational Church, Pasadena, CA
- 1999: George Brown Convention Center, Houston, TX (focusing on Dallas Willard's book *The Divine Conspiracy* [ISBN 0060693339])
- 2005: Adams Mark Hotel, Denver, CO (focusing on the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* [ISBN 0060671076])
- 2009: Municipal Auditorium in San Antonio, TX. The conference focused on Eugene Peterson's book *The Jesus Way* (ISBN 080282949X).

References

[1] http://www.renovare.us/WHOWEARE/WhatisRenovar%C3%A9/tabid/2475/Default.aspx, retrieved October 2011

[2] http://www.renovare.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vozJ_Tgxq-Y%3d&tabid=2780

[3] http://www.renovare.us/WHOWEARE/PressRoom/tabid/2780/Default.aspx

External links

- Renovaré USA official site (http://www.renovare.us)
- Renovaré Britain & Ireland official site (http://www.renovarelife.org/)
- Renovaré Korea official site (http://www.renovarekorea.org)
- Renovaré Brazil official site (http://www.renovare.org.br)
- *Christianity Today* interview with Richard Foster and Dallas Willard: Part 1 - Renovaré and Discipleship (http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/october/9.42.html)
- *Christianity Today* interview with Richard Foster and Dallas Willard: Part 2 - The Renovaré Study Bible (http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/septemberweb-only/137-52.0.html)
- Video presentation by Richard Foster on the spiritual disciplines (http://metamorpha.com/Voices/Videos/tabid/71/ctl/Detail/mid/416/xmid/120/xmfid/7/Default.aspx)
- GotQuestions.org Article (http://www.gotquestions.org/renovare-Bible.html), retrieved June 2011.
- Renovaré Teachings and Practices that Contradict Scripture (http://whateverispure.org/app/download/7237836748/RenovareVersusScripture_2ndEdition.pdf) (PDF), Davis and Davis, 2nd Edition, Feb 2014, posted at whateverispure.org (http://whateverispure.org), retrieved Apr 2014.

Spiritual direction

Spiritual direction is the practice of being with people as they attempt to deepen their relationship with the divine, or to learn and grow in their own personal spirituality. The person seeking direction shares stories of his or her encounters of the divine, or how he or she is experiencing spiritual issues. The director listens and asks questions to assist the directee in his or her process of reflection and spiritual growth. Spiritual direction develops a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. It is not psychotherapy, counseling, or financial planning.

Forms

While there is some degree of variability, there are primarily two forms of spiritual direction: regular direction and retreat direction. They differ largely in the frequency of meeting and in the intensity of reflection.

Regular direction can involve a one to two hour meeting every four to eight weeks, and thus is slightly less intense than retreat direction, although spiritual exercises and disciplines are often given for the directee to attempt between meetings.

If the directee is on a retreat (lasting a weekend, a week or even 40 days), he or she will generally meet with their director on a daily basis for one hour. During these daily meetings, exercises or spiritual disciplines such as lectio divina are given to the directee as fodder to continue his or her spiritual growth. Alternatively, retreat centres often offer direction or companionship to persons visiting the centre alone.[1]

The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola are a popular example of guidelines used for spiritual direction.

Historical Traditions

Western Christianity

Within Christianity, spiritual direction has its roots in the Early Christianity. The gospels describe Jesus serving as a mentor to his disciples. Additionally, Acts of the Apostles Chapter 9 describes Ananias helping Paul of Tarsus to grow in his newfound experience of Christianity. Likewise, several of the Pauline epistles describe Paul mentoring both Timothy and Titus among others. Tradition tells that John the Evangelist tutored Polycarp, the 2nd-century bishop of Smyrna.

John Cassian who lived in the 4th century provided some of the earliest recorded guidelines on the Christian practice of spiritual direction. He introduced mentoring in the monasteries. Each novice was put under the care of an older monk. Benedict of Nursia integrated Cassian's guidelines into what is now known as the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Eastern Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy comes from the same pre-schism traditions, but the role of a "spiritual director" or "elder" in Orthodoxy has maintained its important role. The original Greek term geron (meaning "elder", as in gerontology) was rendered by the Russian word starets, from Old Church Slavonic starĭtsĭ, "elder", derived from starŭ, "old". The Greek tradition has a long unbroken history of elders and disciples, such as Sophronius and John Moschos in the seventh century, Symeon the Elder and Symeon the New Theologian in the eleventh century, and contemporary charismatic gerontes such as Porphyrios and Paisios. Sergius of Radonezh and Nil Sorsky were two most venerated startsy of Old Muscovy. The revival of elders in the Slavic world is associated with the name of Paisius Velichkovsky (1722–94), who produced the Russian translation of the Philokalia. The most famous Russian starets of the early 19th century was Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), who went on to become one of the most revered Orthodox saints. The Optina Pustyn near Kozelsk used to be celebrated for its startsy (Schema-Archimandrite Moses, Schema-Hegumen Anthony, Hieroschemamonk Leonid, Hieroschemamonk Macarius, Hieroschemamonk Hilarion, Hieroschemamonk Ambrose, Hieroschemamonk Anatole (Zertsalov)).[1] Such writers as Nikolay Gogol,

Aleksey Khomyakov, Leo Tolstoy and Konstantin Leontyev sought advice from the elders of this monastery. They also inspired the figure of Zosima in Dostoyevsky's novel The Brothers Karamazov. A more modern example of a starets is Archimandrite John Krestiankin (1910-2006) of the Pskov Monastery of the Caves who was popularly recognized as such by many Orthodox living in Russia.

Judaism

In Judaism, the Hebrew term for spiritual director differs among traditional communities. The verb *Hashpa'ah* is common in some communities though not all; the spiritual director called a *mashpi'a* occurs in the Habad-Lubavitch community and also in the Jewish Renewal community. A *mashgiakh ruchani* is the equivalent role among mitnagedim (adherents of the *mussar* tradition). The purpose of hashpa'ah is to support the directee in her or his personal relationship with God, and to deepen that person's ability to find God's presence in ordinary life. Amongst Lubavitchers this draws on the literature and praxis of Hasidism as it is practiced according to Habad standards, and to Jewish mystical tradition generally. Spiritual mentorship is customary in the Hasidic world, but not necessarily in the same way.

Notes

[1] http://www.rivendellretreat.org/personal.html

References

- Catholic Encyclopedia on Spiritual Direction (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05024a.htm)
- Ho'oponopono

External links

- Spiritual Directors International (http://www.sdiworld.org/)
- Spiritual Direction in Alberta (http://www.frombeginningtoend.org/)
- Spiritual Direction in Calgary (http://anamcharacentre.ca/)
- Spiritual Direction in Manitoba (http://www.spiritualdirection.ca/)
- Spiritual Directors in British Columbia (http://soulstream.org/)
- Tyndale Association of Spiritual Directors (http://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/tasd), Toronto, Ontario
- Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (http://www.ecswisdom.org/index.php/esda)
- The Retreat Association (http://www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection.html), an organisation facilitating Christian spiritual directors in the United Kingdom

Article Sources and Contributors

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