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Conforming to the Image of Christ: Structuring a Spiritual Growth Paradigm for Churches of the Stone - Campbell Movement

Jerry J. Dean

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***CONFORMING TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST:
STRUCTURING A SPIRITUAL GROWTH PARADIGM
FOR CHURCHES OF THE STONE—CAMPBELL MOVEMENT***

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
AT
GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY
PORTLAND, OREGON

BY
JERRY J. DEAN

APRIL, 2007

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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

JERRY J. DEAN

DATE: MARCH 7, 2007

TITLE:

CONFORMING TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST:
STRUCTURING A SPIRITUAL GROWTH PARADIGM
FOR CHURCHES OF THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT

WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION DEGREE

Kurt Z
SIGNATURE

3/8/07
DATE

P. Lang
SIGNATURE

3/8/07
DATE



GEORGE FOX
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Abstract

Conforming to the Image of Christ: Structuring a Spiritual Growth Paradigm for Churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement

Problem: There is a general need for churches of the Stone—Campbell movement to reach beyond reading for the gathering of knowledge for doctrinal purposes. It becomes necessary to balance the desire for biblical truth with a pursuit of spiritual growth. This is referred to as finding a balance. This balance is achieved through a process of spiritual development and maturity. The central claim for this thesis is that Restoration churches of today, given to a rational, empirical form of hermeneutics, need to allow spiritual growth practices to run parallel with rational thinking.

Thesis: This project sets out to develop a model for churches that will promote spiritual maturity by way of developing balance in the church and a rhythm in life.

Chapter One. In this chapter we develop an appreciation for spiritual formation and examine how it benefits those desiring to grow spiritually. This chapter explains why spiritual formation is so vital for churches in the Restoration Movement.

Chapter Two. In this chapter we look at the philosophy and theology of the Stone—Campbell Movement (Christian Church/Church of Christ). We examine how the movement's theology evolved out of a rational paradigm of the fathers of the Restoration

Movement. A brief review on the history of the early days of the movement shows how Campbell's rationalism overpowered the more emotive hermeneutic of Barton W. Stone.

Chapter Three. In this chapter we examine an early practice of spiritual maturity called *lectio divina*. This historical practice is a process of reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating. While an ancient practice, it has once again gained popularity. For churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement *lectio* offers an excellent, historical paradigm for realizing spiritual growth.

Chapter Four. In this chapter we look at Ephesians 4:1-24 for an underpinning to the idea of spiritual formation. Ephesians is a letter presenting Paul's reflection on Christian living.

Chapter Five. This chapter examines four contemporary books in the search for an appreciation and understanding of what spiritual formation means today.

Chapter Six. This final chapter presents a paradigm of seven disciplines to assist churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement to promote spiritual growth among members in those churches. These disciplines are elaborated upon and shown how they will assist the practitioner in growing spiritually. A practice is presented with each discipline to illustrate how to make the disciplines relevant.

To my wife, Patty, for tireless support during this dissertation and
Genny Dean who offered a mother's continual encouragement.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFYING WHY SPIRITUAL FORMATION IS SO ESSENTIAL FOR CHURCHES OF THE STONE—CAMPBELL MOVEMENT

For a disciple of Jesus the process of spiritual growth is a gradual repudiation of the unreal image of God, an increasing openness to the true and living God.¹

Churches of the American Restoration Movement² accept the Bible as the Word of God and, based on this belief, accept the Bible as authoritative for those trusting in God through faith and baptism. They believe that the Bible can be understood by anyone capable of utilizing common sense. Just as God created a world that can be understood and explained by means of empirical observation and logic, so also the Bible can be understood through this same employment of reason and logic. Therefore, because of a heavy dependence on reason there is little patience for emotionalism—a reliance on the Holy Spirit. It is because of this distrust toward any expression of emotion that this heritage brings with it problems and issues when trying to appreciate and apply the practice of spiritual formation. In this dissertation we will look at the issues that are raised when trying to incorporate spiritual formation disciplines into a tradition that basically mistrusts any reading of Scripture that does not depend on a rational

¹Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1986), 14.

²Throughout this dissertation the American Restoration Movement is also referred to as the Stone—Campbell Movement.

philosophical method. In an attempt to work through this issue, I am proposing utilizing two fundamental elements intrinsic to our human nature. I am suggesting that by incorporating balance and rhythm into our Christian life we will be better able to achieve our targeted objective of introducing spiritual formation into churches established in the Stone—Campbell movement. We need first to understand what is meant by “spiritual formation.” Then we will explain what is meant by “balance” and “rhythm.”

There are two well-known passages that speak to the issue of spiritual formation; both of these passages are in the Gospel of Matthew. The first passage reads: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). This verse illustrates that the Christian’s first love is directed to God. He is primary in the minds and hearts of Christians. Having a heart grounded in a love for God is paramount for spiritual growth.³

The second important passage reads: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). This verse, a normative text for Restoration churches, reveals that Jesus expected his disciples to make new disciples. In this passage Jesus presents two characteristics of a disciple: to *baptize* and to *instruct* on the teachings of Jesus.⁴ Churches in the Stone—Campbell Movement, based on Alexander Campbell’s own emphasis on baptism, adhere strongly to the first characteristic of a disciple. The second element of discipleship, giving instructions to new disciples on the teachings of Jesus, however, receives less emphasis.

³Spiritual formation and spiritual growth are used synonymously throughout this dissertation.

⁴For more on this see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary vol.8, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1984), 595-597; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), 89.

Many Restoration churches are quick to apply the first part of this passage, but they either miss entirely, or weakly apply, the second. Dallas Willard, addressing this as being a problem among many churches in America, writes,

Spiritual formation in Christ is oriented toward explicit obedience to Christ. The language of the Great Commission, in Matthew 28, makes it clear that our aim, our job description as Christ's people, is to bring disciples to the point of obedience to 'all things whatsoever I have commanded.'

Much of the current distress on the part of Western Christianity over how to conduct our calling as the people of Christ derives from the fact that the goals and measure of Christian spiritual formation, as described previously, are not accepted and implemented. . . . I know of no current denomination or local congregation that has a concrete plan and practice for teaching people to do 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' . . . As we depart from the mark set by the Great Commission, we increasingly find it harder to differentiate ourselves *in life* from those who are non- or even anti-Christians.⁵

Matthew 28:19-20 needs to be equally applied, as Willard advocates, to ensure new Christians learn what being a Christian entails, and learn to live as Christ instructed his earlier disciples. When churches fail to pass on the teaching of Jesus, they also fail to teach principles essential for spiritual formation.

The following story illustrates Willard's concern. It is about a minister, Jerome, who struggles to help his congregation implement the injunction to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." While the characters are fictional, the events are true and reveal how difficult it can be for churches in the Restoration Movement to acquire a sense of spiritual urgency while dealing with a rationalistic-nurtured theology.

Jerome is a middle-aged minister frustrated with his congregation for what appears to be a lack of interest in doing outreach. One Sunday, following morning services, Jerome suggests to Guy, an elder of the congregation, that they might consider "spiritual formation" as a way of getting the congregation more involved. The elder

⁵Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It is and How It Might Be Done," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, No. 4 (2000): 254-255.

questions the idea, mostly because he is unfamiliar with the idea of spiritual formation. As this conversation continues, Jerome soon recognizes a void in his own understanding.

Jerome and Guy go for coffee on Monday morning and begin reflecting on just what spiritual formation implies and what it might mean for their congregation. Jerome, himself, admits that though he heard of spiritual formation, he now realizes he does not fully grasp its full significance. So Jerome and his elder friend begin to study various authors on spiritual formation including: Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, John Ortberg, and Dallas Willard. Slowly it begins to dawn on Jerome that neither his education nor the tradition of their church provide much guidance for spiritual formation to occur on its own. In fact, traditionally, their church would, more likely than not, intentionally avoid the practice of spiritual formation. For most in their church tradition, doctrine is the important issue, not some “mystical” practice of spiritual exercise. Jerome explains to Guy that this is, in fact, a common issue with many evangelical churches as well. Since spiritual formation is not part of their tradition, churches do not recognize it as a viable church activity, perhaps even being deemed by some as unworthy of any consideration. Jerome realizes that this is certainly true of their tradition and of the mind-set of some in their congregation.

This story brings to light two issues troubling Jerome. The first is a personal issue. He always believed that hard work produces its desired goal. This idea is certainly prevalent in the northwest where from the time settlers began moving west it was believed that one had to “pick themselves up by their own bootstraps,” a proverb Jerome heard many times growing up. The basic principle Jerome fails to realize, however, is that he is more concerned about “doing” than about “being.” This means that Jerome’s

ministry is more about working for the Lord than about taking the time to become the Christian the Lord wants of him and his congregants. This is one example of being out of rhythm, a concept discussed later in this chapter.

Jerome's second problem is ministering for a congregation that believes a tradition says, "We must work (serve) our way to heaven." Generally, work has come to be seen, from a biblical perspective, as more important than spiritual issues. Thus, Christians generally begin working for the Lord before they are prepared to do the work they set out to accomplish. Now Jerome ministers for a church where some members are concerned more about doctrine (and work) than about lifestyle. Much of what Jerome is experiencing is also experienced by other ministers and elders in other Restoration churches. Many of these churches truly believe that their convictions concerning doctrine are more critical than the lifestyle they live.

Jerome preaches for a small congregation in a rural community composed mostly of retired Christians. Though this town in the northwest had five mills in the 1960's, most of the mills have closed down and the area is fast becoming a retirement destination site. Many in the congregation moved into the county within the past ten years, most coming from large congregations. In the past they were active in congregational programs, but since retirement they seem to be less concerned about Christian living. Their earlier years were full of Christian activities. No one would have accused them of being inactive Christians. But now in their senior years they appear to be too tired or maybe uninterested to be active. They appear reluctant to get involved in church programs that promote missional outreach or spiritual growth. Are they just not interested in serving the Lord, wonders Jerome, or is there a more deeply rooted issue?

This question is actually twofold: first, why do congregations hesitate to embrace spiritual formation as a viable program for spiritual growth; second, how does one help churches realize the advantages of adopting spiritual formation as a viable church program? Jerome decides that just as the problem begins with him, so, too, does the solution. He knows how to interpret the text, how to work and rework theological concepts. He is deeply engrained in his own tradition. The founders of the Restoration Movement were steeped in the rationalistic mindset of Francis Bacon, John Locke, and the Scottish Common Sense. This was not unique to them. Many in early America were operating out of these same paradigms, including the signers of the Declaration of Independence. However, in the case of Restoration churches, these systems for rational thinking were dutifully applied to scripture and used as the basis of their hermeneutics.

Jerome begins to realize that while he is quite familiar with the words of the biblical text, he never really *engaged* the text. As an example of this, over the years Jerome read books about praying, journaling, and meditating. He is familiar with what Paul said in Ephesians 4:16 about “growing up in the Lord.” But never had he stopped to ask himself, “How might this happen?” “*How* does one grow up in the Lord?” “What does ‘growing up in the Lord’ look like in real life?” and, just as important, “How do we help others grow in the Lord?” He explains to Guy that they and the rest of the church need to study some very ancient practices of spiritual growth.

So a new journey begins for Jerome, Guy, and their congregation. In fact, they have two journeys before them. The first journey is moving the congregation from a misconceived notion of “doing” work for God in order to allow time for “being” a Christian. This is not a simple task, as it requires breaking down traditions and opinions

that shaped their Church over many decades. Congregations need to know that tradition in doctrine, worship practice, or a belief statement cannot lead one to salvation.

Salvation only happens through faith in a crucified Christ raised from the dead. For Jerome this means a reexamination of what, for him, constitutes faith or opinion.⁶

Their second journey is the spiritual journey of “conforming to the image of Christ.” This means understanding the difference between justification and sanctification. The former is the moment salvation occurs. For those in the Restoration Movement, this is when a new relationship with God is experienced through baptism. The latter is what happens through the rest of life. This is the element of progression, referred to as the Christian journey. This takes place when Christians devote their life to conforming to the image of Christ. It is on this principle of sanctification⁷ that this dissertation will focus. It is about helping churches of the Stone—Campbell tradition to understand and incorporate spiritual formation as a viable program. It is after they experience growth from spiritual formation that they will then become more efficient workers in outreach programs.

Unfortunately, most churches fail to appreciate the need for achieving the sanctified element of the Christian life. This is the problem Jerome is having with his congregation. They know when they were saved. They are now in the sanctification stage of their Christian life, but fail to realize that they need to work at conforming to the image of Christ. What Jerome needs to do now is help his congregation work around

⁶To understand how important this principle is for churches see Robert Richardson, *Principles of the Reformation* intro. and ed. Carson E. Reed (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2002), 29-31.

⁷David Peterson, while accepting the idea that sanctification occurs in the life of a Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit, suggests that sanctification occurs at the same time as justification, not at some later time. He prefers to speak of the transformation process as holiness. “The Spirit moves us and enables us to express the holiness which is required of those who have been sanctified in Christ.” David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Testament Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 133.

their perceived need of rationalistic-based traditions and doctrinal accuracy. Before they can get involved in community service, they first must understand how dependent they really are on God for their spiritual well-being. Like Mary, in Luke 10, they will need to spend more time quietly sitting at the feet of Jesus reflecting on his words. Then they will be prepared to serve like Martha.

Why the Need for Spiritual Living Today

How does the Stone—Campbell Movement today understand the importance of spiritual living? If spiritual formation assists in our becoming spiritually mature, where do our congregations stand today? Jeff Imbach wrote that an estimated 3 million people in the United States who call themselves Evangelical Christians no longer go to church;⁸ the problem being that they were not able to find what was lacking in them at church. One cannot help but wonder how many attending churches of the Restoration Movement today feel just as unfulfilled and disillusioned with their attempts to live the Christian life. Do they also feel spiritually empty? In Isaiah, God addressed Israel's woes when he said, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10). A few verses later he added, "I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs" (v. 18). Seeing the struggles many Christians are in today, we are tempted to ask, "Where is God's promise of strength, the promised water for a parched land?" Many Christians struggle to live the Christian life. What many fail to realize is

⁸Jeff Imbach, *The River Within: Loving God, Living Passionately* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1998), 38. He refers to a survey for which he does not cite a reference.

that it is in those times of struggle they encounter God. Barbara Bowe likens this struggle to the image of Jacob wrestling with the stranger in the night.

It seems to me that the story of Jacob's nocturnal wrestling with the nocturnal figure at the Jabbok River is an apt paradigm for our struggle to live an authentically God-centered life today. We struggle to find and to know God in the midst of our complex and fast-paced lives . . . we do not always know how to *recognize* and *name* this divine presence in our midst today or how to *live faithfully* in response to this mystery.⁹

We need to understand that God allows, even utilizes suffering, because suffering is the arena where God interacts with people. Spiritual maturity happens through struggles of apparent spiritual weaknesses and shortcomings. This is what St. John of the Cross called “the dark night of the soul.” The problem is that too often God's presence is not seen in life's struggles.¹⁰ These struggles might be sadness, loneliness, depression, despair, confusion, or sin. Ignoring these feelings, hoping they will go away while staying busy, is one solution. But until we learn to trust in God, allowing him to assist us through these struggles, spiritual growth will be nearly impossible to achieve. When we are in a situation in which, by all appearances, God is no longer involved, these are the times when we enter the wilderness of parched land. God promised that he would provide what we need in times like these.

A Christian Perspective of Spiritual Formation

Because of our culture's free use of the term “spirituality,” it is necessary to make clear just what is meant by spiritual formation. Many today use the word “spiritual” with no thought of it being Christian. There are a number of examples of this. Some feel

⁹Barbara E. Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2003), 9-10. Italics are hers.

¹⁰This is a common theme in writings of the Old Testament. Psalm 10:1; 22:1; 77:1-8; 88, and Habakkuk 1:1-2. Some see this with Jesus as he quotes from Psalm 22. He most likely was referring to the Psalm as a whole which ends with God's involvement in the psalmist's life.

spiritual when they are one with nature. Others feel spiritual when they practice eastern meditation and discover their “inner peace.” There are probably some who feel spiritual when they walk their dog. Then there is the spiritual aspect to Buddhism, the Native American Indian beliefs, and the New Age movement. However, from a Christian perspective, spiritual means something entirely different. We get help from Kenneth Boa in our understanding of what spiritual means for the Christian. Boa describes spiritual as “a Christ-centered orientation to every component of life through the mediating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.”¹¹ Thus, in a Christian context, in some ways our spirituality has little to do with us. It is more about allowing Christ and the Holy Spirit to hold influence over our lives. In describing how she understands spiritual, Marjorie Thompson wrote,

Scripturally speaking, the spiritual life is simply the increasing vitality and sway of God’s spirit in us. It is a magnificent choreography of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit, moving us toward communion with both Creator and creation. The spiritual life is thus grounded in relationship.¹²

So we understand that spiritual in the Christian tradition is God working in us through his Spirit; when we give way to the Spirit and we live as God desires us to live. Thus, to be spiritual means having the Holy Spirit working in our life.

When we study the word “formation,” we find that the word has a biblical foundation and is, in fact, found to be an important thought in Paul’s writings as he instructs churches to live the Christian lifestyle. Formation comes from the Latin word *forma* meaning to shape or fashion. Related to formation are such words as: conform, transform, and reform. Paul used these words in his letters as he wrote encouraging

¹¹Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 21.

¹²Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 6.

Christians to change their lifestyle. In Romans 12:2 Paul told the Romans, “Do not *conform* any longer to the pattern of this world, but *be transformed* by the renewing of your mind.” Then in Galatians, Paul wrote: “I am in pain of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you.” These two passages illustrate the idea of being formed or transformed. They illustrate that life after baptism¹³ is a never-ending pilgrimage toward the sanctified life.

So, then, what do we mean by spiritual formation? In describing it Willard states, “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.”¹⁴ This occurs when life is being directed by the Spirit of God in such a way that the person’s inner self is transformed to be what God desires. In her description of spiritual formation Ruth Barton concludes her thought on formation by saying:

In the end, this is the most hopeful thing any of us can say about spiritual formation: *I cannot transform myself*, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.¹⁵

The key to understanding spiritual formation is that it does not happen because of something we do. We do not have the ability to transform ourselves. We must depend on God and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Barton, in this quote speaks of

¹³In both of these letters, Paul works from the assumption that his readers have experienced baptism; Rom. 6:3-9, and Gal. 3:26-27.

¹⁴Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 22.

¹⁵Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 12.

rhythm. This is an important element of spiritual formation to be discussed in detail later in this chapter. But first, we need to address the issue of balance.

Finding the Critical Balance: Orthodoxy, Orthopathy, Orthopraxy

Let us return to Jerome's dilemma for a moment. His problem actually involves two issues: (1) finding what hinders churches from embracing spiritual formation as a viable program to help Christians grow; (2) helping churches see the advantages of spiritual formation as a viable church program.

While knowing that Paul encouraged his readers to be "growing up in the Lord," Jerome never considered asking, "How does this growing apply to me and others?" "What am I to understand from reading this passage?" He realized that he never took the time to ask these or other reflective and contemplative questions of scripture.

What we come to realize is that "spiritual formation is an ancient ministry of the church, concerning the 'forming' or 'shaping' of a believer's character and action into the likeness of Christ. The goals of this practice are such things as godliness, holiness, compassion, faithfulness, and obedience."¹⁶ Later, in chapter three, we will examine *lectio divina* as an ancient practice for spiritual growth.

In later chapters, we will discuss how churches need to realize that it was never God's plan for Christians to grow spiritual or live their Christian life apart from God and fellow Christians. Christians were not expected to grow spiritually on their own accord. To live the Christian life and grow spiritual without the involvement of God and community was never God's intent. Paul, in Ephesians four, stressed how the church was to work together as they grew spiritual. Demarest addressed this same thought when he wrote, "The church's role in the individual's life was a very active one, in which the

¹⁶Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1999), 23-24.

believer was taught not only orthodox doctrine, but many practices that opened him or her to the presence and direction of God and nurtured the character traits of Christ into fruition.”¹⁷ To have spiritual growth, it becomes essential that the entire Christian community becomes involved in the lives of every Christian. “In the spirituality of the ancients, it was understood that the closer we draw to one another in community, the closer we come to Christ.”¹⁸ The church is to be active in the lives of Christians, helping one another to nurture the image of Christ in each person’s life. Thus, an essential element for this dissertation to be successful is to find ways for churches to cultivate a stronger sense of community.

Many churches and denominations place significant emphasis on orthodoxy (having the right belief or truth). However, when salvation rests solely on the shoulders of being correct or accurate in doctrine, it then becomes imperative to study scripture for the express purpose of discovering the truth and teaching it to others. This, then, places the responsibility of “being saved” on a person’s ability to discover the truth, rather than on God’s grace. Demarest suggests creating a balance between three elements: orthodoxy (right belief), orthopathy (right affections), and orthopraxy (right actions).¹⁹ The key is to find a proper balance and to maintain that balance. While not denying the importance of having an accurate doctrine, Demarest warns that doctrine should not be seen as more important than a proper relationship with God. Ideally, these two are working in concert, incorporating both the mind and the heart in becoming Christ-like. Then, finally, orthopraxy comes into play as Christians react to what they read in scripture. What generally happens, however, is that one (usually orthodoxy) is set apart

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 33.

¹⁹Ibid., 29.

as more vital than the other two and the Christian life orbits out of control. We need to discover a way to maintain a spiritual balance in life. We can understand these three—orthodoxy, orthopathy, and orthopraxy—as legs of a stool. Each works with the other to facilitate spiritual growth. A change in the mind and heart of the believer will foster change in outward action. Thus, a proper balance between doctrine and emotions helps maintain a proper lifestyle. If churches can harmonize these three, they will then be able to promote spiritual growth.

Unfortunately, discussion regarding spiritual formation in some churches of the Restoration Movement will be vague and shallow. The problem is that one of the legs of our stool is missing and balance is lost. For example, there are ministers who study the biblical text and are busy working for the Lord; e.g., Bible studies, hospital visits, and door-knocking. This, then, produces similar practices in many of the church members. Thus, in many restoration churches we find a strong sense of orthodoxy (belief) mixed with some form of orthopraxy (action). Generally, what we find lacking is orthopathy (affections). To rephrase this, many churches emphasize a correct doctrine and the need to work (or serve), but fail to understand how the Holy Spirit works in their lives. If one were to talk about meditation (communion with God), the probability is pretty high that they would draw looks of uneasiness from those who believe that Christians need to stay busy. One of the concerns is that if people spend time meditating they are not serving God. Therefore, many today function under the illusion that Christianity means staying busy. There is even a proof text that reinforces this idea: “A person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). No thought is given to slowing down in order to reflect or meditate on what God says in the Bible. We simply do not take the time to hear

what the text is saying to us. For a church actively “practicing” its Christianity, an action such as reflection could be misunderstood as wasting time. A good illustration of this, seen on a grander scale, is the difference between two nations. The following is from Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts*.

‘The Serbs and the Croats were, as regards race and language, originally one people, two names having merely geographical signification’ . . . Were it not originally for religion, there would be little basis for Serb-Croat enmity. . . . Religion in this case is no mean thing. Because Catholicism arose in the West and Orthodoxy in the East, the difference between them is greater than that between, say Catholicism and Protestantism. . . . While Western religions emphasize ideas and deeds, Eastern religions emphasize beauty and magic. The Eastern church service is almost a physical re-creation of heaven on earth. Even Catholicism . . . is, by the standards of Eastern Orthodoxy, austere and intellectual. Catholic monks . . . live industriously, participating in such worldly endeavors as teaching, writing, and community work. In contrast, Orthodox monks tend to be contemplatives, for whom work is almost a distraction, since it keeps them from the worship of heavenly beauty.²⁰

When one believes Christians need to “work” in order to please the Lord, they tend to perceive those who meditate as being lazy. So it is with many congregations. Those who identify the spiritual life as being fulfilled through work, need to recast their beliefs in order to appreciate what meditation can mean for those who take time to practice the various disciplines. Much of what is understood as spiritual disciplines functions within the realm of orthopathy, the inner self. Thus, if this is where a church is most deficient, spiritual formation will not be of high priority for them. One way to overcome this is to teach that in the New Testament, the importance of the Holy Spirit is well documented.

Establishing the Rhythm of Life

We now come to the second element important to spiritual growth, rhythm. Many writers of spiritual formation or spiritual growth mention the importance of rhythm in

²⁰Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 25.

Clarity of Spiritual Formation

Now we need to clearly define just what is meant by spiritual formation. We begin by looking at spiritual formation as understood by Mulholland and Foster. Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”²⁴ This definition provides four aspects that are essential for healthy spiritual growth. The first is that spiritual formation is a *process*. This suggests an ongoing action or movement. Christianity does not end with justification, believing that the goal has been achieved once we have been saved. The idea is to continue making our life holy. Maturity in Christ is not instantaneous. In actuality, it is never wholly attained until the return of Christ. We are in a constant progression toward maturity, toward becoming Christ-like.

The second aspect is *being conformed*. One simple fact is that people are constantly changing. If they are changing for good, then they are becoming what God wants. If they are changing for bad, they are becoming what God despises. The key is relying on God to make these changes to become the kind of people he desires. Notice that this is a passive process. Paul wrote that Christians should “*be transformed* by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Being conformed to the image of Christ happens to Christians only when they submit to God. Otherwise, they simply become their own design of Christian.

The third aspect of Mulholland’s definition is conforming to the *image of Christ*. Genesis 1 states that humanity was created in the image of God. But, due to the sin, humanity has tarnished that image. Now, as a result of the sacrifice of Christ, humanity

²⁴M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 12.

is once again able to attain an image of God, this time through Christ. Spiritual formation helps to ensure that growing to become more Christ-like is what really happens.

The last part of Mulholland's definition is transformation *for the good of others*.

Christians are to live as a community where what they do and say should be for the benefit of others, whether they are fellow believers or those outside the faith. The desire is to be the best one can be for the sake of others. This is a reflection of *On Loving God*²⁵, where Bernard of Clairvaux writes of the "Four Degrees of Love." The last love he wrote about concerns loving ourselves for God's sake. His belief is that believers become the best they can be in order to serve God as well as humanly possible. They then also become better at serving others.

A second definition of spiritual formation, proffered by Richard Foster, is found in the introduction to *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*. There he defines spiritual formation as "an intentionally directed action by which we do what we can in order to receive from God the ability (or power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort."²⁶ Christians prepare their hearts so that God can form them into the image of Christ. Conforming to the image of Christ is part of what Foster means when he speaks of God doing what "they cannot do by their direct effort." If we keep to our idea that a proper balance must be maintained and that we stay in rhythm, we will be more open and receptive to God molding us. We cannot transform ourselves, but by keeping our rhythm and balance, we keep ourselves open to God. "Spiritual practices . . . put us in a place

²⁵Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, intro. by Jean Leclercq, trans. by G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 192-197.

²⁶Richard J. Foster, A General Introduction to *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Pub., 2005), xxxiv.

where we can begin to notice God and respond to his word to us.”²⁷ They open us up to God and bring us into a unhindered relationship with him.

The disciplines are tools that condition our spirit to receive God’s transforming power to move toward a Christ-like attitude. We might liken spiritual transformation to a reshaping of the soul. Paul, in Ephesians, uses the metaphor of being created in Christ.²⁸ We understand this reshaping or creating as the “basic meaning of spiritual formation in the Christian tradition.”²⁹ It is by the leadings of the Holy Spirit that we are able to be reshaped. As we will see in our study of Ephesians 4:1-24, spiritual growth is a process of “being made new.”

It is important to remember that spiritual formation is something that will never be fully achieved in our lifetime. Gregory of Nyssa, from the fourth century, is explicit about this when he writes of the Holy Spirit as being a never-ending dynamic life of giving and receiving. That is part of the nature of God and his perfection. By referring to God’s perfection as never-ending, Gregory understands that humanity’s increase in goodness and excellence is never-ending; it is a process that is never static.

The perfection of everything which can be measured by the senses is marked off by certain definite boundaries. . . . But in the case of virtue we have learned from the Apostle that its one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit . . . No good has a limit in its own nature but is limited by the presence of its opposite . . . It is . . . impossible to attain perfection, since, I have said, perfection is not marked off by limits: the one limit of virtue is the absence of a limit.³⁰

Thus, the attempt to be perfect in holiness has no boundaries. Spiritual growth then is a never-ending process of becoming more in line with the image of God in Christ through

²⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.

²⁸ Eph. 2:10, 15, and 4:24.

²⁹ Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 7.

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 30-31.

the work of the Spirit. Paul writes of this in his Galatian letter. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). We are not trying to live as we like, but as the Spirit directs.

Whose Initiative: God’s or Ours?

While we may speak of practicing the disciplines or choosing to follow God, we need to be very clear that spiritual formation is something that “begins with God, depends on God, and ends with God.”³¹ This means that God decides when and how to reveal himself to us. We cannot manipulate God to work for us. We must rely on God and allow him to work through us as he wills. Our practice of spiritual disciplines simply prepares us to be shaped by him.

Sometimes we hear people say that since Christ died on the cross for us, we must now come to God on our own initiative. God did his part; now the rest is up to us. This is a backwards approach to grace. Eugene Peterson spoke of this when he wrote about how a pastor is often asked to get things started with a word of prayer. In refuting this Peterson writes: “Prayer is *answer* speech. The first word is God’s word. Prayer is a human word and is never the first word, never the primary word, never the initiating and shaping word simply because we are never first, never primary.”³² Still, Christians feel that they must get things started. Today, ministers might feel that sermons are the “shaping word.” We think this way because we have lost—if we ever had—the ability to walk with God. Without learning how to be transformed by God and scripture, Christians become shallow, lacking the means to affect their culture. Many mistakenly imagine that

³¹Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 8.

³²Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 47.

they are capable of shaping their life, or worse, the lives of others. This, only God can do.

Identifying the Problem in Trying to Establish Spiritual Formation in Churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement.

As we examine the history of the Restoration Movement in the next chapter, it becomes evident that little opportunity or allowance for spiritual formation is made. What has been described thus far as spiritual formation and its value to Christians was not an essential element for this movement. In some places, it is still viewed as nonessential.

The need for churches in the American Restoration Movement is to create a balance between biblical knowledge, Christian service, and striving for spiritual maturity. This will be a delicate task because of the strong tradition within the Stone—Campbell Movement for a minimum of reliance on the Spirit, often misunderstood as misplaced emotions. As we will see, this is a tradition established on a hermeneutical system contingent upon the philosophy of Francis Bacon and John Locke and supported by the Scottish Common Sense. There was virtually no trust in inspirations and intuitions that might come from the Holy Spirit. The early fathers of the movement viewed this as putting trust in emotions against relying only on the scriptures. There are still strong apprehensions concerning the trust of emotions when dealing with salvation and the biblical text. As a personal example, I was told by an older gentleman during one Sunday morning Bible class that “we should not use emotion when interpreting the Bible. We must rely on reason to interpret scripture. Our emotions need to be controlled.” Even when discussing the influence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, there is mistrust since it is believed that the Spirit would never tell someone anything that is contrary to what is in

the Bible. Thus, the question often asked is, “Why would the Spirit need to speak to someone? We have the scriptures to guide us.”

The challenge for churches in the Stone—Campbell Movement is finding balance between biblical knowledge and spiritual formation. There needs to be room for orthopathy to be part of the balance. Chapter two will disclose in greater detail how this hermeneutic system came about. It is the goal of this dissertation to help churches steeped in a tradition of logical and common sense to find ways to grow spiritually. Our problem is *to find a way for churches that employ a rational thinking process to realize that spiritual formation, as an aid for Christians, comes through the use of spiritual disciplines in order to become like Christ and is done in conjunction with the Holy Spirit.*

Churches must recognize the need for balance between the heart, head, and action. By establishing this balance and recognizing a proper rhythm in life, we are better able to experience spiritual growth. The Restoration Movement’s emphasis on doctrine and action diminishes the ability to grow spiritually. Some even suggest that if we are serving God we are in fact being spiritual. To state this in another way, to over-emphasize justification is to diminish an appreciation for sanctification. The need is to create a proper balance in our churches and rhythm in our inner life.

A Preview of Chapters Two Through Six

Chapter two presents a review of the history of the Restoration Movement from 1800 until the Civil War. It depicts the rise of a movement totally dependent upon the rational philosophy of English Enlightenment. A mistrust of what appeared to be an emotional appeal to salvation through a working of the Holy Spirit in one’s life developed during this time. We will see how Robert Richardson sounded a warning call

to not vacate the importance of the Holy Spirit in favor of a totally rational hermeneutics. Because his approach promotes the balance so badly needed in our churches, it is my desire to resurrect many of his thoughts on the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Chapter three reflects on the ancient spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Many authors speak of contemplation and contemplative prayer when referring to *lectio divina*. In part, this is because the final stage of this practice is to become contemplative. This chapter reviews the history of this practice in order to understand how the different stages of this practice function. Our study also helps to understand how differing disciplines helped Christians in the early church grow spiritually. If we are to find growth in our own life, it is important that we learn from those who have gone on before us. For their longing and desires were no different than ours.

Chapter four is a study of Ephesians 4:1-24. Paul reflects in these verses what it means to be a Christian and that Christian growth should become evident. We will study in some detail verses 1-3, 13, 17, and 22-24. Contextually, each of these verses addresses Paul's desire for his readers to live as God desires: "walking worthy," "attaining to the full measure of Christ," "in all things growing up," and "putting on a new self." Each verse conveys this idea of moving toward something that is bigger and better than ourselves. As we will see, the ultimate measure for growth is God himself, for we are "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Chapter five examines what four authors have assembled as practices for spiritual formation. These authors, from different religious perspectives, show us their understanding of spiritual formation. These books reveal how various disciplines can be incorporated into our life to create the rhythm and balance Christians so badly need. The

aim of this chapter is to find that balance between faith and works while maintaining a biblical foundation for each of the disciplines. We look in this chapter not so much at the specific disciplines themselves, but to these authors' understanding of what spiritual formation is and why it is so significant.

The last chapter, chapter six, presents my own paradigm of spiritual formation. The spiritual formation disciplines presented in this chapter incorporate both inward and outward practices. That is, some of the disciplines are outward exercises while others are inward reflections. I want to promote the correct balance within congregations and the rhythm of life through the practice of these disciplines. My hope is to promote a longing for God and the desire to conform to the image of Christ within a religious movement that has difficulty in this area because of its traditions. The aim is to offer a program of spiritual formation that offers an opportunity to attain spiritual growth through the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTIFYING WHY A DEFICIENCY OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION EXISTS IN CHURCHES OF THE STONE—CAMPBELL MOVEMENT

It is in the sanctuary of God that the mystery of man's condition can find its only interpretation in the wonders of redemption.¹

In this chapter we will examine the philosophical distinctiveness of the American Restoration Movement.² We will look at the development and history of the Restoration Movement from 1800 to the Civil War. Because of the important contributions Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin made to the movement, it is essential to look briefly at their influence. The works of these two reformers are fundamental in the development of the theological and philosophical framework of the Reformation Movement. The object of this chapter is to assess how spiritual formation can impact the movement.

Historylessness of the Stone—Campbell Movement

There is a touch of irony in reviewing the history of the Reform Movement in Europe and the Restoration Movement in America. The irony lies in the fundamental thinking during the early years of the Restoration Movement that perceived little benefit from studies of the earlier movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was

¹Robert Richardson, *Communings in the Sanctuary*, intro. and ed. C. Leonard Allen (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2000), 95.

²By using Restoration Movement I am referring to The Christian Church, Independent Christian Church, Churches of Christ (instrumental), and Churches of Christ (a cappella).

believed that the rapid growth of denominationalism in America was a direct result of these early movements. In the thinking of the founders of the American Restoration Movement, the past bequeathed spiritual confusion, sectarian wrangling, and traditionalism. “The Stone—Campbell movement arose from a profound disenchantment with the past. The early forbearers sought to dismiss the past with all its limitations.”³ Soon preachers of the Restoration were not reading church history to understand these early movements, but, if they were reading at all, were doing so in order to “decry them or on occasion simply to ridicule them.”⁴ It is this mentality that finds its way into the core beliefs of Churches of Christ. There are those today who discount the first *eighteen centuries* of Christianity believing it to be an institutional failure at best, or a total disaster at worst. It was believed that if the foundation of a church is the Bible only (minus creeds and denominational doctrines) and if the church were to model itself after the New Testament churches (later referred to as pattern theology), then one need not bother with a study of past church movements, but go directly to the New Testament.

This idea that the past has no significance on churches today affects and distorts reasonable judgments. One consequence of this “sense of historylessness” is an unfair and inaccurate view of the past.⁵ This attitude impacts studies of early Christian movements (the Desert Fathers) and in particular their contributions toward spiritual growth. If no value is seen in these ancient practices, then there can be no appreciation for the important principles they present for a deeper understanding of spiritual growth. I would suggest that there is greater value in not only discovering our roots—the

³C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross—Shaped People in a Secular World* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990), 4.

⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

Restoration Movement did not evolve out of a historical vacuum—but also to call on “our spiritual ancestors and draw them into our circle of discourse.”⁶ In order to deal with this problem of dismissing the religious past, we must ask why it was that churches of the Restoration Movement developed this idea of “historylessness.” We find the answer to this question rooted in church history prior to the American Restoration.

The Contributions of the Reformation to the Stone—Campbell Movement

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546) nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. This changed forever the landscape of Christianity in the western world. Any Protestant church can be traced in some manner back to Martin Luther. He believed that people should be able to read the Bible and interpret it for themselves. He felt people needed to know if they were justified and in a sanctified condition. Eventually, what this did was raise a second issue. Who had the authority to decide whose interpretation of Scripture was correct and whose interpretation was incorrect? Because the Catholic Church was no longer seen as the final authority, people turned to the Bible as authoritative, resulting in multiple interpretations. Not long after Luther opened the door of Reformation, Huldreich Zwingli also challenged the Catholic Church. This time it was not over the use of indulgences, but rather, it was on the structure of the church and its worship.

The Restoration of Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin

To gain a better appreciation of the American movement, it is necessary first to examine the works of Zwingli and Calvin. They had a direct influence on the direction of the American Restoration Movement, also known as the Stone—Campbell Movement.

⁶C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 151.

The Restoration Movement was more entangled with and influenced by the European religious movements and the Enlightenment than some are willing to admit.

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), a Catholic priest in Zurich, Switzerland, followed Martin Luther's example, but his was a reform of the structure and worship of the church. A major difference between Luther and Zwingli is that Luther focused more *on indulgences and justification of the Gospel*, and Zwingli set out to reform *the structure and worship of the church*. A second difference was determined by how they interpreted the Bible, and this is important. While Luther *allowed what the Bible did not prohibit*, Zwingli *prohibited what the Bible did not specifically prescribe*. It is difficult to over-exaggerate the effect that these two differences had on the American Restoration Movement. It was from the prohibitive perspective of Zwingli that the American Restoration would take its lead. From his prohibitive philosophical view point, Zwingli had the church in Zurich gutted of its icons and pictures and the interior whitewashed. Singing became *a cappella*, if there was singing at all.⁷ As a result of wanting to return the church and its worship to the examples in the New Testament, Zwingli began reading the Bible as a pattern, or blueprint, for churches to follow. The American Restoration churches followed Zwingli's paradigm of interpreting the Bible and also patterned themselves after what they read in the New Testament. Because of the character and content of Paul's letters and Acts, with their focus on the church, these books are normative texts for Restoration churches.⁸

⁷Some took Ephesians 5:19 to "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" literally and would not permit singing of any form in the church worship.

⁸The importance of Zwingli's influences is pointed out by C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes in *Discovering Our Roots*, 21-28.

Later, John Calvin (1509-1564) assumed a leading role in the Reformed Movement and continued pushing for “correct” forms of worship for the church. He was said to have entered churches and destroyed any musical instruments used for worship. The primary tenet for Calvin was a belief in the primacy of the scripture as authority for doctrinal decisions. He was noted for rejecting the episcopal form of church government in favor of a presbytery form. He believed that control should come from within the church, not from a hierarchy.

From Zurich, the Reform migrated to Scotland where the Scottish Reform Movement was established. The Scottish Reform also rejected the episcopacy, which was the structure adopted by the Anglican Church in England, following the model of the Catholic Church. This would later be a cause for a showdown with King James I. When it was announced that James IV of Scotland was to become King James I, the Puritans of England were delighted. Their hope was that England would become a “true Protestant nation,” putting an end to the compromises of the Church of England and its adoption of practices similar to those of the Catholic Church.

Yet the reality of the situation was very different. James disliked the Presbyterianism, believing passionately that his royal authority was dependent upon bishops. ‘No bishops, no Kings’ summarized admirably his view of the interrelationship of church and state. It is true that the Scottish church (or ‘kirk’) had adopted the Presbyterian system of church government, developed by Calvin in Geneva. . . . in private James IV had serious misgivings about Presbyterianism, which had no place for bishops. . . . James believed that Presbyterianism was linked with egalitarianism and republicanism.⁹

Thus, King James I sided with the Anglican Church’s episcopal form of church structure and in turn mistreated the Presbyterian Church. The theology of the Scottish Reform, however, was to have a strong influence on both Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

⁹Alister McGath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 139.

The Puritans

Out of the Scottish Reformation in England emerged the Puritans. Totally dissatisfied with the laxity of the Church of England, many of the Presbyterians sought a community that included only recognizable devout Christians (visible Christians). In order to accomplish this, they at first had people make a public profession of their faith, sign a covenant, and accept the discipline of the church. Later, the Puritans in both England and America developed a process by which they were able to examine a prospective member's conversion experience. "A visible saint became defined as a man able to give a credible account of the works of grace in his soul; repentance and faith had to be demonstrated by an explanation of how God brought one to repentance and faith."¹⁰ Over time, strong emphasis was placed on having a conversion experience and being able to expound on that experience in some detail. This evolved further as the Puritans struggled to find a way to help people work through the conversion process. Later, in America, Charles G. Finney and Billy Sunday preached that people should have a religious experience (conversion) rather than emphasize theological reflection (belief in the Gospel). The traditions of "coming forward" and "hitting the sawdust trail" were designed to get people down front so the preacher could encourage them to express their experiences. As we will see later, Alexander Campbell strongly rejected this idea of having a religious experience and expressing it. He did not feel that salvation occurred before baptism, but that salvation followed baptism. A person's experience with the Holy Spirit followed their baptism. The notion of having an experience of the Holy Spirit to show that one was saved was commonly called "experimental religion."

¹⁰James Baird, "The Role of Baptism in Conversion," *Evangelism and the Stone—Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker, forward Mark Noll (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 177.

Alexander Campbell's Philosophical Rationalism

Before getting into a discussion of the founders of the Restoration Movement, it is necessary to review three philosophical systems that had a strong bearing on the direction the movement proceeded, those of Francis Bacon's inductive reasoning, John Locke's rationalism, along with Thomas Reid's Common Sense which were the corner stones of Alexander Campbell's hermeneutics. Before we can appreciate what Campbell was trying to accomplish, we first need to understand what these philosophies are.

Because of the importance of the influence of the Holy Spirit in spiritual growth, it will also be necessary to examine the diverse discussions concerning experimental¹¹ religion between 1820 and 1850. Alexander Campbell despised experimental religion while Richardson warned that it should not be totally diminished. These discussions, sometimes intense, proved to have a profound influence on Churches of Christ today pertaining to their attitude toward the Holy Spirit. Many important figures of the movement weighed in on these discussions because of their effect on other issues, such as the influence of the Holy Spirit as it relates to one's conversion, lifestyle, and interpretation of Scripture.

Bacon, Locke, and Scottish Common Sense Realism

Alexander Campbell was not unique in his dependence on reason as a tool for philosophical structuring. The roots of reason are seen in the Deists of England. But, for the Restoration Movement, it was the schemes of John Locke, who wrote a book titled *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*, and the Common Sense Philosophy of Thomas

¹¹Experimental was understood in the 1800s as a Christian life being lead by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.

Reid, which in turn influenced the Scottish independents. It is these philosophical systems of thinking that were decisive influences of the early restoration.¹²

Rationalism is the reliance on the power of the mind to comprehend the reality in which one lives and operates. It stands in contrast with skepticism, which doubts the ability of the mind to grasp truth and with existentialism, which focuses on experienced truth rather than reasoned truth. In England, three philosophers of the enlightenment stood out. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) developed inductive scientific reasoning—as opposed to Aristotle’s deductive reasoning. John Locke (1632-1704), an English empiricist, popularized Bacon. He attempted to show that all human understanding of the sense world could be accounted for by sense data only, and then by assembling this data through Bacon’s inductive thought process it would lead to truth.¹³ A third philosopher, Thomas Reid (1710-1796), developed the Scottish Common Sense in response to the skepticism of David Hume (1711-1776) and the French Enlightenment. By common sense, Reid meant that “people universally accept the data provided by the sense they share with all humans as reliable signs of . . . reality.”¹⁴

Francis Bacon

As opposed to Aristotelian *a priori*, or deductive, reasoning Bacon proposed *a posteriori*, or inductive reasoning. Bacon believed that people could observe and collect experienced data and analyze what is known, then act on these reliable facts. “The

¹²Thomas H. Olbright, “The Rationalism of the Restoration,” *Restoration Quarterly* 11 (1968): 78.

¹³G. Richard Phillips, “Rationalism,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 626.

¹⁴Carisse Mickey Berryhill, “Common Sense Philosophy,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 230.

experiences which come to us by means of our senses (things as they appear) automatically present to our understanding things as they are.”¹⁵ In terms of studying the Bible, one draws from the Bible every verse relating to a specific topic, such as, in Campbell’s case, baptism. After pulling all the verses together, one is able to induce what the Bible has to say on the topic studied. This is known as a concordance study of the Bible. “In a good inductive argument the premises should provide some *degree of support* for the conclusion, where such support means that the truth of the premises indicates that the conclusion is true.”¹⁶ Thus, after a reading of the Bible and pulling together all related passages within their proper contexts, the conclusion should be true. This form of study became a powerful instrument for Campbell as he debated his opponents, particularly those debates centered on the method of interpreting scripture.

John Locke

According to Locke, there are two sources of knowledge—sensation and reflection. The sensation source includes those things external to the mind, and the reflection source includes the internal operations of the mind. “Locke argues that the mind is passive insofar as it receives simple ideas from sensation.”¹⁷ Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* shows how knowledge is attained through intuition, reason, and experience. A combination of all these creates usable knowledge. Locke held that the mind is a *tabula rasa*, or blank sheet, until experiences in the form of

¹⁵Juergen Klein, “Francis Bacon,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2004), ed. Edward N. Zalta [cited 11 November 2005] <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2004/entries/francis-bacon/>>.

¹⁶James Hawthorne, “Inductive Logic,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2005), ed. Edward N. Zalta [cited 11 November 2005] <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/logic-inductive/>>.

¹⁷John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [cited 11 November 2005] <http://www.anglefire.com/md2/timewarp/locke.html>.

sensation and reflection provide the basic material from which most of our complex knowledge is constructed.

John Locke was referred to often by the Campbells and others in the Restoration Movement as a “Christian Philosopher.” Lockean philosophy taught that true knowledge was gained through the five senses and that “human reason must be our last judge and guide in everything.”¹⁸ In Lockean thought, reason served faith, “making faith a sober, deliberate, and rational response to the claims of the Christian Gospel.”¹⁹ For this reason, Alexander Campbell thought of the Bible more as a blueprint for church organization and worship than as a guide for holy living.

Thomas Reid

Drawing on the inductive form of reasoning, the Scottish Common Sense Realism Movement of Thomas Reid stated that common sense “is what people in common would agree; that which they sense in common as their natural understanding. This would be based on what is believed to be knowledge held by people ‘in common.’”²⁰ From this, Campbell concluded that anyone is capable of reading the Bible and finding out what they need to do to be saved.

Campbell and Experimentalism

It is important to discuss “experimentalism” since this is what Alexander Campbell spent so much time and effort addressing and refuting. In March 1824, Alexander Campbell wrote an article addressing “experimental religion.” In this article

¹⁸Richardson, *Communings*, ix.

¹⁹Michael W. Bollenbaugh, “Place or Reason,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 627.

²⁰“Common Sense,” *Wikipedia* [cited 12 November 2005]
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_sense.

Campbell acknowledged that his stand would not be popular with many in the early American religious movements. Campbell expressed his understanding of experimental religion as “the inward experience of grace upon the heart.”²¹ But to him, the emphasis of having an inward feeling of salvation was misplaced. He did not see salvation as “some invisible, indescribable energy exerted upon the minds of men in order to make them Christians . . . independent of, or prior to, the word believed.”²² He explained experimental religion as “a certain mental experience to becoming a Christian, an exercise of mind, a process through which a person must pass before he can esteem himself a Christian. Until we know from his recital of it . . . we cannot esteem him a Christian.”²³ Campbell would argue that there was no inward working of the Holy Spirit until one first experienced the outward expression of faith and baptism. His article presents a good explanation of his view on the work of the Holy Spirit and how it relates to salvation.

I read in the New Testament of many who were the subjects of energies and diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit, but it was ‘after they had believed.’ The gifts of the Holy Spirit by which the gospel was confirmed, by which it was demonstrated to be of God, were conferred on the Jews and Samaritans after they had believed. Even the apostles themselves did not receive those powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit until they became disciples of Christ.²⁴

Campbell believed that “feeling—the experience of the Spirit and his work on the affections of the heart—was the effect, not the cause of faith and of true religion.”²⁵

What Campbell told people—and this was most obvious in his debates—was that if they

²¹Alexander Campbell, “Address to the readers of the *Christian Baptist*,” *Christian Baptist* 1 no. 8 (March 1834), 47.

²²*Ibid.*, 48.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵John Mark Hicks, “The Role of Faith in Baptism: Balancing Faith, Christian Experience and Baptism,” *Evangelism and the Stone—Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker, forward Mark Noll (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 100.

were to have an experience of the Holy Spirit they first needed to have faith and be baptized. It was then that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

Before John Smith, a preacher in Kentucky, met Campbell, he had personal concerns over Campbell's opinions on experimental religion. When they met, Smith told Campbell, "I am suspicious of you . . . I think it strange you should have written that piece on experimental religion. . . . You cannot be so ignorant as that piece would seem to prove."²⁶ As Smith and Campbell continued exchanging thoughts on religious experiences, Campbell stated, "We should not make the [experiences] tests of one another's Christianity, nor was there anything in the Book that requires a man to tell all the workings of his conscience, as a prerequisite to baptism."²⁷

So just what was Campbell's problem with an experimental religion which was so prevalent throughout the early American frontier? His principal concern was how one receives salvation. Campbell could not accept the concept that the Holy Spirit in some way reveals God's love only when one believes in Christ and turns one's life over to him. In his view, faith is not a supernatural gift given to the elect which then affects a hearing of the message. Rather, it is the initial human response that initiates the process of conversion (repentance, confession, and baptism); this is the prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit.²⁸ This was where Campbell's logical mind was so important. From his understanding of English rationalism came the idea that the Bible is not a book of abstract theological truths. Rather, as with any other scientific text, Scripture should be read as a book of facts. Thus, the theologian's challenge is to collect, arrange, and finally

²⁶John Augustus Williams, *The Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati, OH: R. W. Carroll & Co., Pub. n.d.), 165.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 169.

²⁸Robert C. Kurka, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion: Why Restorationists Appear to Be Out of the Evangelical Mainstream," *Evangelism and the Stone—Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker, forward Mark Noll (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 142.

draw an inductive (Bacon) conclusion from this raw data. From the Common Sense philosophy, Campbell reasoned that even though “Divine revelation” certainly transcends the reaches of the five senses, it nonetheless rationally communicates only in the words of the Bible. “These facts are given in intelligible words, thus begetting faith which was actually a reasonable assent to this testimony rather than some subjective experience.”²⁹ For Campbell, to believe in an experimental approach to religion as the proper assurance of God’s salvation actually devalued the Word and the holiness of life. The popular expression of religion through the “experimental” could produce experiences, but it could never reform lives.

The following is an interesting story that demonstrates how strongly the enlightened, rational philosophy was tied to the early Restoration Movement. In 1836 Thornton F. Johnson, then a professor at Baptist-related Georgetown College, decided to open a college related to the Stone—Campbell Movement. The name decided upon was Bacon College, in honor of Sir Francis Bacon. This college came to affirm that the Christian faith was relational and guided by reasoned principles.³⁰ It is little wonder then that the belief of someone such as Robert Richardson, whose beliefs we will look at later, would get lost in a setting where the majority was calling for reason and common sense over emotion and the influence of the Spirit.

The Early Stone—Campbell Movement

Churches of the early Restoration Movement (1800s) were lead principally through the influences of Thomas and Alexander Campbell (father and son) and Barton

²⁹Ibid., 145.

³⁰Richard L. Harrison, Jr. “Bacon College,” *Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 55.

W. Stone, all former Presbyterian ministers. Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were the primary originators of two early branches of the movement that would later be combined into what became the Restoration Movement. Members of these two movements were often in the same town, especially in Kentucky, and at times met together for worship and fellowship. Finally, through the influences of John Rogers and John Smith, who represented the two branches of the movement, the first of many unity meetings was organized. In 1831 these two movements began to merge across the Western Reserve until in 1835 the merge was complete.³¹ Both Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell are recognized as the principal characters of the movement's early history. However, in the final analysis, it was Campbell's rational philosophy based on of John Locke that overshadowed Stone's more emotional appeal toward scripture and an experience of the Holy Spirit.

This single fact would have tremendous impact through the years, for it determined how churches would visualize the Holy Spirit and his effects on the spiritual lives of Christians. It also explains why today many churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement are disposed to dismiss the emphasis now prevalent in many denominations toward spiritual formation. Campbell's charismatic nature and the power of his rational thinking became appealing to many in the Stone movement who were seeking more structure in their limited doctrine. The problem was that Stone was not trying to build a movement based on restoring the original structure of the church as much as he was trying to find freedom from the many creeds and denominational doctrines of his day. He

³¹Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order: A History of the Restoration Movement from 1849-1906*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1965), 32-33.

felt that these were placing believers in bondage to follow “man made creeds” and not the Bible.

A lesser figure in the Restoration Movement, but important in light of this study on spiritual growth within the movement, is Robert Richardson. He was Alexander’s close, personal friend. Concerning the history of the Restoration Church, however, he, along with Barton Stone from his earlier years, was the lone voice calling for the union of relying on the Holy Spirit and rational thinking for Christian living. He felt that the fervor for logical, rational thinking—being as strong as it was in the movement by the 1840s and 1850s—was just too dangerous to Christian living.

Following is an assessment of the theological significance of these three key personalities of the Restoration Movement: Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, and Robert Richardson. Because of the importance of Talbert Fanning to the Churches of Christ, a brief comment on his work in relation to Richardson, is also necessary. Fanning engaged in a written debate with Robert Richardson concerning the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians and the use of Locke’s philosophy in hermeneutics. It was this debate that set the tone for what would eventually become a split in the movement, and led many churches to suppress a reliance on the Holy Spirit in favor of a rational hermeneutic.

Barton W. Stone (1772-1844)

On 24 December 1772, Barton Warren Stone was born near Port Tobacco, Maryland. As a young man he heard the sounds of war from his home. Influenced by the events and feelings from the war, “fires of liberty were kindled in his soul that in years to

come were to find expression in a violent dislike for creedalism in religion.”³² One should not be surprised that the expressions of freedom that resounded so clearly throughout the colonies soon were echoed in religious movements following the Revolutionary War. Like the colonists who sought freedom from the tyranny of English rule, so, too, did many seek freedom from the tyranny of religious control. From within the Stone Movement came the call for religious freedom. Because of his desire to avoid religious controls, it is not surprising that the Stone Movement purposely “avoided developing ecclesiastical traditions of any kind, even those predicated on primitive Christianity.”³³ Thus, the Stone Movement developed largely without concern for dogmas or church structure. “The common thread that held the movement together was a commitment to primitive Christianity whose important features . . . were Christian character and Christian freedom.”³⁴ Stone would agree with Campbell that Scripture was the final authority and source of knowledge in Christianity; however, he had decided early in his life that unless the Spirit of Christ characterized one’s life, precise doctrine and correct practices were useless. He felt that unity could be achieved, but only when followers of Christ, in union with the Spirit, fostered love, peace, and forbearance.³⁵ On the issue of the Holy Spirit, Stone and Campbell would never agree. For Stone, true religion was that which caused the soul

to pant after God, rejoice in his love, follow holiness, resist the devil, overcome temptations, fight against all sins, rejoice in tribulations and cheerfully endure persecutions in the name of Christ.³⁶

³²Ibid., 18.

³³Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 104.

³⁴Ibid., 105.

³⁵Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*, Heart of the Restoration Series, vol. 1 (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2001), 111-112.

³⁶William O. Paulsell, *Disciples at Prayer: The Spirituality of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1995), 19.

While the Stone Movement is described as restorationist, “it focused more in its early years on holy and righteous living than on the forms and structures of the primitive church. Restoration for Stone and his colleagues meant, at first, to restore the *lifestyle* of the first Christian communities.”³⁷ Thus, in the early stages of the Restoration Movement we see present a breath of spiritual renewal, a desire to develop a lifestyle pleasing to God. “The habit of prayer produces a habitual sense of God’s presence and an awareness of our dependence on God . . . so prayer is a means of forming a holy character . . . the means by which grace is received.”³⁸ Stone believed God gave direction in life, and “to those who ask, God gives the Holy Spirit and by the Spirit we are made alive, sanctified, and comforted.”³⁹ Thus, in Stone’s way of thinking, we possess the Holy Spirit according to our faith and obedience. Those who have “the Holy Spirit are characterized by love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance.”⁴⁰

Richard Hughes writes of four different kinds of restorationists: ecclesiastical, ethical, experiential, and Gospel.⁴¹ He refers to Stone as an “ethical restorationist.” Those who followed Stone suggested that the church had, over time, lost its ethical power by surrendering to an emphasis on doctrine. The early Stone Movement “defined the essence of primitive Christianity, not in terms of the forms and structures of the ancient

³⁷Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 102.

³⁸Paulsell, *Disciples at Prayer*, 20.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 24.

⁴¹Richard T. Hughes “Historical Models of the Restoration,” *Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 636.

church but instead as radical discipleship which expressed itself in sacrificial service to the neighbor.”⁴²

Because the Stone Movement was not based on structure and church order, the spiritual emphasis of Stone failed to survive when it was combined with the rationalism of the Campbell Movement. Since Campbell provided structure, order, and certainty, he very quickly overshadowed Stone after the union and became the unquestioned leader of the Restoration Movement. We see how Campbell, in his systematic and rational reconstruction, stood in contrast to Barton Stone’s desire to achieve through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Though early in his life Barton Stone stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit, this reliance on the Holy Spirit is not seen in Stone after the two movements united. It is important, however, not to forget this emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the early part of the Stone Movement. Later, Robert Richardson follows Stone’s earlier example and emphasizes relying on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. However, this, too, was destined to be short-lived.

Alexander Campbell (1788-1866)

Alexander Campbell was raised by his father, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), who was a minister for the Presbyterian Church. His father had a tremendous impact on his life. Thomas traveled, without the family, to America to find a place to settle. When the family first attempted to join him in America, their ship wrecked so they had to wait a year before trying again. During this time, Alexander attended Glasgow University and was educated in the Scottish Common Sense School championed by Thomas Reid, who had died 12 years before. The Scottish Common Sense influenced many prominent

⁴²Ibid.

American thinkers including Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. An avid reader of John Locke in his earlier years, and later, with influence from the Scottish Common Sense, Campbell perceived that the heart of the matter was “the rational and systematic reconstruction of the apostolic communities.”⁴³ Alexander incorporated this same combination of common sense and logic into his hermeneutics and infused it into the philosophy and theology of the Restoration Movement, which had both positive and negative effects on the movement.

Alexander and his family finally arrived in New York on 29 September 1809, and met Thomas Campbell a few days later outside of Philadelphia. By now, Thomas had left the Presbyterian Church for a number of reasons. One was the lack of freedom given to ministers within the synods. In writing the *Declaration and Address*, Thomas explained why he had withdrawn from the Presbyterian Church. In America he began preaching for the Presbyterian Church in the Chartiers of Western Pennsylvania. After a time, he saw discrepancies with the Presbyterian Church so he withdrew to start the Christian Union with others who were in agreement with his plea for a Christian union based upon the Bible only. They were united on the principle that the Bible was the only authorized rule of faith and practice. Thomas Campbell then wrote what was to become the foundational work of the Restoration Movement, the *Declaration and Address*. When Alexander arrived in America, he immediately followed his father’s lead and the Campbell Movement began to grow.

Historically, the single most important principle attributed to Thomas Campbell that had immense impact on the movement was the declaration, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak, and where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” In this statement, we can hear

⁴³Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 106.

echoes of Zwingli not permitting what the Bible did not specifically allow. Thomas announced, at a meeting of people looking at ways to understand the Bible, the great principle upon which he understood they were all trusting. “That rule, my highly respected hearers . . . is this, that WHERE THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK, WE SPEAK; AND WHERE THE SCRIPTURES ARE SILENT WE ARE SILENT.”⁴⁴

However, how the principle of the silence of Scripture should be applied has led to disagreements and divisions among churches in the movement. Foremost for Thomas Campbell was the belief that sectarianism, which was rampant in America, should cease and that unity should become the goal of all Christians. He would later write that “the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”⁴⁵

For the Campbells, “the restoration of primitive Christianity would be the means of achieving Christian unity.”⁴⁶ Alexander set in motion the push for the unity of believers. He began to travel, preach, and debate. He found that the rationalism of the Common Sense was ideal for debating, as it was agreeable with the pragmatic mindset of pioneers migrating west.

In his *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Robert Richardson described how the Campbells, especially Thomas, were “wanting to resume the liberty Christ made for his people—liberty from subjection to any authority but his own in matters of religion.”⁴⁷ Later, Alexander sought to establish the church on the same authority as the church was established in the beginning. As Richardson explained it, Campbell’s distinctly stated objective was to “come firmly and fairly to the original ground and take up things just as

⁴⁴Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, vol. 1, (Indianapolis, IN: Religious Book Service, 1897), 236.

⁴⁵F. D. Kershner, introduction to *Declaration and Address* by Thomas Campbell (Washington, PA: Christian Century Co., 1804; reprint, St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1972), 44.

⁴⁶Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 106.

⁴⁷Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 1:256.

the apostles left them so they could stand on the same ground on which the church stood at the beginning.”⁴⁸ In an earlier reference to Campbell’s work, Richardson wrote that Alexander’s desire for the church “was not an effort so much for the reformation of the church, as was that of Luther . . . but for its complete Restoration at once to its pristine purity and perfection.”⁴⁹ If this could occur, then the church could be set free from the controversies of the first eighteen centuries. We find that Campbell, more than Stone, had distain for these earlier movements of Christianity. Though he was influenced by such theologians as Zwingli and Luther, his primary concern was to read the Bible and rely on what he read. He believed that if the church could go back to the original source, the New Testament, all discussions and controversies over the centuries could be avoided, even ignored. This is where early forays into spiritual formation, such as were practiced by the Desert Fathers and Mothers, were deemed irrelevant as they were seen as adding nothing toward restoring the pattern of the early church.

For Alexander, reason and logic played a major role in the preliminary examination of the facts and evidences of the gospel. Alexander saw the Bible as a blueprint for church organization and worship, not simply as a guide for holy living. This quote from Campbell’s *Christian System* demonstrates why logic, in his mind, played such an important role in reading and interpreting the Bible.

One God, one moral system, one Bible. If nature be a system, religion is no less so. God is “a God of order,” and that is the same as to say he is a God of system. Nature and religion, the offspring of the same supreme intelligence, bear the same image of one father—twin sisters of the same divine parentage.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., 257.

⁴⁹Ibid., 157.

⁵⁰Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded by the Current Reformation* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Pub. Co., 1890), 15.

Alexander believed that as one can observe order and structure in nature, one also can understand how nature works by means of empirical knowledge. So he reasoned, if one was capable of understanding and explaining how nature works then one can also understand the Bible, because God is the author of both nature and the Bible. Thus, logically, one should be able to apply reason to scripture to determine the revelation of God to mankind.

As fervently as Alexander emphasized reason to understand scripture, he equally distrusted the notion that God would use the Holy Spirit to help mankind understand scripture. For this reason, he was never able to sympathize with the experimental thought and revivalism of Barton Stone's earlier years. To Alexander, logic and reason were the only tools needed to read the Bible and understand the way to salvation. So in times of controversy even during the Restoration Movement, when debating anyone and everyone was common, many learned from Campbell to use logic to overpower the graces of spirituality. As one put it, they were "behaving like people with favorite doctrines, they sparred like heavy weights in the doctrinal ring as preachers of the Restoration Movement contend over musical instruments in worship, mission societies, and with denominations."⁵¹ Because of this attitude, as one puts it, "Christian love was sometimes hard to find."⁵² This rationalism that Campbell used when reading the Bible would dominate the restoration landscape for decades to come. Those who inherited the movement from Campbell also inherited his distrust of any emotion related to scripture. Because of this, little emphasis is seen today toward spiritual formation. I hope to

⁵¹Ronald E. Osborn, "Hidden Heritage: Spirituality in the Disciples Tradition" *Mid-Stream* 36 (1997): 245.

⁵²*Ibid.*

minimize this distrust toward allowing the Spirit to have influence on the lives of Christians in today's churches of the Restoration.

Robert Richardson (1806-1876)

What we saw with Alexander Campbell is similar with what was seen in the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches from the Civil War until the 1970s. Leonard Allen and Richard Hughes put it as follows:

Churches of Christ stand in a stream of thought—a tradition—focusing on the restoration of churchly forms and structures. To put it more strongly, we have often proceeded on the assumption that if one did not focus attention on biblical form and structures, then one was actually not a restorationist nor biblical at all, and perhaps not even Christian.⁵³

All focus was on church form, function, and structure. Little was said about Christian living. Discussion concerning the Holy Spirit was rigorously limited. This led some to ask, “Do the external marks alone constitute the church? While one might establish the apostolic forms and practices, are we comfortable with not reforming our inner life?”⁵⁴ Could moral purity, Christian faith, and a transforming life also be true marks of a Christian life? We might wonder if one can speak of the Christian life yet ignore any discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Don't holy living and salvation depend on the working of the Holy Spirit in one's life?

These were the qualities Robert Richardson felt Christians were missing in the mid-1800s. Directly related to his concern over the lack of discussion concerning the Holy Spirit was his concern about an overt rationalism. He was deeply alarmed that emphasizing reason and logic alone would empty Christianity of any spiritual leanings. The presence of logic and reason in hermeneutics was so prominent that any discussion

⁵³Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 155.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 153.

about the Holy Spirit being involved in a Christian's life was often overlooked, or worse, totally dismissed as irrelevant. What Richardson so gravely tried to maintain in the early days of the movement needs to be rediscovered today. What he was telling his contemporaries needs to be retold today. Below is part of what Richardson endeavored to impart to this movement.

Dr. Richardson was Alexander Campbell's personal physician, close friend, biographer, and assistant editor on Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger*. He also taught chemistry at Bethany College which was founded by Campbell. This privileged position afforded Richardson the ideal opportunity to see firsthand the direction the movement was headed. From this vantage point he soon became alarmed. "In a time of controversy and aggressive debating, Robert Richardson was unique in stressing the things of the Spirit and the devotional life."⁵⁵ He was an Anglican and probably got his devotional disposition from that tradition. He is attributed with trying to hold in check the ever present rationalistic and logical tendencies of the movement.⁵⁶ Richardson's role in the Stone—Campbell Movement can be analyzed in terms of three outstanding contributions: (1) his attention to interrelated issues of worship, spiritual devotion, and ethics in the emerging movement; (2) his interpretation of the fundamental goals of the movement and analysis of the nature of Christian reformation in its philosophical, hermeneutical, and ecclesiological dimensions; and (3) his work as an interpretive biographer in his two-volume on the *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*.⁵⁷ Still, we must not forget that he was

⁵⁵Robert Richardson's, *Communings in the Sanctuary*, intro. C. Leonard Allen (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2000), vii.

⁵⁶Pat Brooks "Robert Richardson: Nineteenth Century Advocate of Spirituality," *Restoration Quarterly* 21 (1978): 135.

⁵⁷Paul M. Blowers "Robert Richardson," *Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed.

the lone voice—aside from Barton Stone’s early comments—in sounding the warning call not to ignore the importance of the Holy Spirit. Following is an examination of the first two of these contributions to the restoration movement.

The first contribution of Richardson is the importance he placed on spiritual devotion and ethics as it concerned the Stone—Campbell movement. “Richardson stands out in the history of the movement as an advocate for a more emphatic and consistent teaching on Christian sanctification.”⁵⁸ He saw the Spirit as an “indwelling and cherished guest”⁵⁹ aiding in the growth and spiritual maturing of the Christian. He also understood that the Christian, with the aid of the Spirit, is doing battle with the forces of evil. So unless one is attuned to the spirituality of the Gospel, it is impossible to practice spiritual discipline. Thus, Richardson understood the importance of spiritual formation. “No part of Christianity can be duly comprehended without spiritual discernment, and not one of its commandments can be obeyed without a spiritual relationship with God.”⁶⁰ While many leaders were more concerned with the ordinances of weekly worship and communion, Richardson concerned himself with the mystical and sacramental dimensions of the Christian worship and the Lord’s Supper. The strength of Richardson’s theology for worship and the Lord’s Supper was its balance between the factual and spiritual dimensions.

Just as his position on baptism emphasized not only immersion but also the personal indwelling of the spirit in the soul, his communion piety emphasized not

Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 650.

⁵⁸Anthony J. Springer “Doctrine of Sanctification,” *Encyclopedia of the Stone—Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 776.

⁵⁹Robert Richardson, *Principles of the Reformation*, ed. and intro. Carson E. Reed (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2002), 88.

⁶⁰Paulsell, *Discipline at Prayer*, 17.

only the regularity of the celebration but also its ultimate goal of spiritual union with God through Christ.⁶¹

What Richardson bequeathed the movement was an emphasis on maintaining a balance of facts and doctrine with a spiritual union with God. He showed that redemption is about more than simply believing in facts. Rather, it involves a transforming union with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit.

While Campbell spent his time and energy refuting the popular doctrine of experimental religion, Richardson was communicating to the movement that the Spirit was an important factor in the life of a Christian. He repeatedly warned that spiritual discernment and faith were not a science, but rather they were imperative for a vital and dynamic engagement with the Word of God. He maintained the importance of the Word while stressing the value of the Holy Spirit. Like Campbell, Richardson understood the importance of accurately interpreting Scripture. He even used Campbell's method of interpretation. However, he would not rely exclusively on the science of interpretation and the gathering of facts to understand Christianity.

The Christian faith is not a trust in definitions, doctrines, church order, apostolic succession or official grace. Nor does the Christian faith rest in opinions or dogma whether true or false. Rather the Christian faith rests in a sincere belief of the testimony concerning the facts in the personal history of the Lord Messiah, accompanied by a cordial reception of him in his true character as thus revealed to us and an entire personal reliance upon him for salvation.⁶²

Richardson saw Christianity as more than facts and doctrine. It is also the simple trust in Christ himself.

We take Christ himself as the basis of Christian union, as he is also the chief cornerstone and only foundation of the church. To demand, instead of this, as a profession of faith and basis of union, an exact knowledge of remote points of Christian doctrine, is as unscriptural as it would be irrational to prohibit men from

⁶¹Pat Brooks, "Nineteenth Century," 651.

⁶²Richardson, *Principles of the Reformation*, 48.

enjoying the light and warmth of the natural sun until they had first attained a high proficiency in astronomy.⁶³

Christianity must include the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Richardson's biggest concern was not to lose the influence of the Holy Spirit during the controversy brewing at that time. While he recognized the role logic played in the preliminary examination of facts and evidences of the Gospel, the power of reason had limits. Belief in doctrine could not purify the heart and bring human passions under control; those could be achieved only through the Gospel. Unless one attained the spirituality of the Gospel, it was impossible to practice fully its morality. "No part of Christianity can be duly comprehended without spiritual discernment, and not one of its commandments can be acceptably obeyed without a spiritual relation to God."⁶⁴ This is a powerful statement concerning the importance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

In 1842, Richardson wrote a series of articles in the *Millennial Harbinger* entitled "The Spirit of God." "He pled vigorously for a religion of the spirit and urged a devotional attitude that placed him almost alone in his emphasis throughout the period."⁶⁵ He understood that personal growth in one's spiritual life was only possible if there was also growth in knowledge and grace. He observed how many would "spend hours" in earnest debates over favorite doctrines but would not spend 5 minutes to converse either with their own hearts or with one of the spiritually minded brethren on the character of their own spiritual state. If people denied the work of the Spirit in their lives, how could they experience the devotional emphasis or any manifestation of spiritual progress? He

⁶³Ibid., 59.

⁶⁴Paulsell, *Disciples at Prayer*, 17.

⁶⁵Brooks, "Nineteenth Century," 137.

understood from his studies that the Spirit had to play a major role in the life of Christians.

Richardson saw two extreme views of the Spirit that appealed to many people.⁶⁶ The first was the “Spirit alone” theory. This theory proposed that one was saved through the influence of the Spirit in one’s life to the point of conversion. This was flatly rejected by Campbell and most others in the movement. On the other extreme was the “word only” theory. This theory proposed that conversion came as a result of reading the word (which was inspired by the Spirit) and through the use of proper hermeneutics (for Campbell this implied a logical approach towards Scripture). Salvation was achieved by reading the scripture and putting together all the facts. After reviewing these two theories, Richardson made this controversial statement, “If forced between the two views, I would certainly choose the Spirit alone, which at least leads the mind to seek after fellowship with God . . . a real communion enjoyed with the spiritual world.”⁶⁷ So in a time of emphasis on doctrinal, polemical, and organizational matters, Richardson continually advocated for a deeper, richer spirituality. In referring to the “word alone theory” he wrote:

The advocates of this view effect to rely accordingly upon the ‘word alone’ for the conversion of sinners; and fortifying themselves with Locke’s Philosophy of Human Nature, deny that men *can* be influenced in any other way than by ‘motives;’ by ‘words and arguments,’ presented to his mind. They, accordingly, do not believe that any Holy Spirit is imparted even to believers.⁶⁸

⁶⁶There were four views on how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers: (1) the Spirit has no influence on the believer [word only], (2) the Spirit works only to assist in interpreting the Word, (3) the Spirit works to influence the life and character of the believer, and (4) the Spirit works independent of the Word [Spirit only].

⁶⁷Brooks, “Nineteenth Century,” 137.

⁶⁸Robert Richardson, “Office of the Holy Spirit,” *Millennial Harbinger*, chapter XIII, pages 275-298, [cited 13 January 2005] <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/richardson/ohs/OHS13.HTM>.

Richardson saw the lack of any influence of the Holy Spirit in the movement as a major point of concern. He also saw that many preachers were ignorant of any concept of a spiritual union with God and Christ that lead to spiritual growth and maturity. One could truly say, as Allen does and perhaps even understates, that “the practice and theology of the Spiritual life had not been a central emphasis among the Stone—Campbell traditions.”⁶⁹ This is further reiterated by Richardson in another article.

Some have hastily adopted the conclusion that the indwelling of the Spirit is nothing more than the presence of the word in the mind or memory. These philosophers go on accordingly to attribute the entire results of Christianity . . . to the natural influence of ‘words and arguments’ addressed to the intellect. They do not believe in any actual impartation of the Spirit as such, but the New Testament is with them tantamount to the ‘gift of the Holy Spirit.’⁷⁰

Richardson had strong words for those who continued to ignore the spiritual aspect of the Christian life.

They endeavor to explain away the Scriptures which affirm that this [the work of the Holy Spirit in believers] is sometimes found in order to deny even that *prayer* has influence, except upon the praying individual *himself*; or, that the soul has any separate existence between death and the resurrection; and to attempt . . . to reduce Christianity to a mere system of Rationalism or Materialism.⁷¹

We should not forget that Richardson accepted the idea that there was an “ancient order” to be restored. He, however, understood it within the context of this larger mission of spiritual formation and unity with God. Unity, for Richardson, was understood as “a spiritual oneness with Christ by Christian union, an avowed agreement and cooperation with each other. There can be no true Christian union, unless there first is Christian unity.”⁷²

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Robert Richardson, “Office of the Holy Spirit,” chapter XIV.

⁷¹Robert Richardson, “Office of the Holy Spirit,” chapter XIII.

⁷²Ibid., 651.

The second contribution of Richardson is his analysis of the Christian reform from its philosophical side. Because the debates of Campbell exhibited so much of his philosophy system and his rational approach toward conversion, Richardson soon realized that these debates were leading the movement into a spiritual vacuum. In the final analysis, Richardson realized that the debates would “distract the mind, destroy love, generate dislike, jealousy, revenge, [and] foster the passions of the carnal nature.”⁷³ So in a time of intense controversy and debating, Richardson called for things of the Spirit and the devotional life. For Richardson, philosophy

was a tool to be properly used by the Christian and in itself was not necessarily destructive. But any philosophy is deadly that took precedence over the plain doctrine of scripture. This was his cause for alarm at the spiritual vacuum he saw among many of his brethren with its insidious results in their lives, emphases, and relations with other believers.⁷⁴

Richardson did all in his power to persuade Alexander Campbell away from the “rationalistic suicide” that was present in his debates on spiritual influences in conversion. For Richardson, the explicit use of John Locke’s philosophy by Campbell and others in defending the exclusive agency of the Word of God against the work of the Spirit in conversion was an error of major consequence. The problem, as Richardson saw it, was that of philosophy reducing faith to a mere belief of doctrinal facts.

Much of the rationalism and skepticism which exists, in relation to the indwelling of the Spirit, arises from the tendency which men have to demand positive definitions and palpable demonstrations in regard to matters wholly beyond the provinces of reason and sensation, and to refuse credence to every thing which may not be actually submitted to sensible perception, or made plain to the ordinary understanding. . . . the cherished idol of the brain becomes the material image of the shrine.⁷⁵

⁷³Richardson, *Communings*, vi.

⁷⁴Brooks, “Nineteenth Century,” 148.

⁷⁵Richardson, “Office of the Holy Spirit,” chapter XIV, 83-84.

Early in the movement, rational thought was encouraged over the emotional (or experimental) feeling. Just how blatant this became was noted by a minister of the Methodist Church. The following quote shows how strongly against emotions the movement had become by the 1890s.

It is customary with their ministry, and especially with their evangelists, to hold up to public ridicule everything looking towards the emotional or experimental in religion; proclaiming, at the same time, a religion of outward obedience alone.⁷⁶

Sadly, this was the very situation Richardson so desired to avoid.

Richardson basically believed that any philosophy was unfit for Christian living. He had come to observe “censuring journal editors diverting into issues not central to the restoration.”⁷⁷ Richardson even took issue with Alexander Campbell for waffling in his affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion sanctification. This, of course, drew criticism from many in the movement.

A controversy between Talbert Fanning and Richardson over the use of Lockean philosophy eventually lead to a split in the movement with the Churches of Christ splitting off, starting in the 1880s. Fanning, who was born in Tennessee, was associated with the Stone movement. He graduated from the University of Nashville in 1835 and traveled with Alexander Campbell in 1835 and 1836. He later became president of Franklin College. Important to the Churches of Christ is the fact that he was the founding editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, a popular publication to this day. Fanning argued that one could find the Spirit at work only through the Word of God, and the way to understand this Word rests on a rationalistic system anchored on the philosophy of John Locke. Richardson published a series of articles in 1856 entitled “Faith versus Philosophy.” In

⁷⁶T. M. Stuart, *Errors of Campbellism: A Review* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), 3-4.

⁷⁷Blowers, “Robert Richardson,” 650.

them he attacked the view that the Bible is merely a blueprint or a book of facts. He argued that the Bible was a conduit for spiritual transformation. He asserted that whatever the virtues the Common Sense/Baconian model of interpreting the Bible offers, this model was still dependent on a philosophical system – Lockean imperialism. Concerning the extreme usage of philosophy, Richardson wrote the following:

Their convictions must rest upon sensible impressions, and unless they can see and feel the evidences presented, they will not believe. The unimpassioned rationalist amuses himself with the notions that he has resolved all the mysteries of the Holy Spirit, when he has persuaded himself that this Spirit is merely a visible tangible New Testament.⁷⁸

Here was the situation behind the debate. Richardson was frustrated that he was unable to stem the tide of rationalism. While the main problem was with Alexander Campbell, he knew he could not openly write about Campbell. Fanning had written an article arguing that he did not believe in the use of rational thought to interpret Scripture. Richardson noticed, however, that Fanning was using the very rational thought he was disputing. This then became the basis for his eight articles. Richardson asserted that many preachers and teachers in the movement had unwittingly imposed a Lockean philosophy on the Bible, and he used Fanning to illustrate this point. Fanning countered in the *Gospel Advocate* that Richardson had abandoned correct thinking for a speculative philosophy, contending that John Locke advocated a correct thinking process. In refuting the insidiousness of human philosophy, Richardson gives the following:

In my judgment, the error consists in the introduction of theories and speculations in direct violation of the very fundamental principles of this Reformation; in other words, that it is to be found in the coming together of human opinions with the Divine teachings and thus adulterating *faith* with human *philosophy*. It is this, I conceive, which has proved a barrier to spiritual progress.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Richardson, "Office of the Holy Spirit," chapter XIV, 84.

⁷⁹Robert Richardson, "Faith versus Philosophy—No. III" *Millennial Harbinger* 4th ser. 7 ((1857),

Later, Richardson would write that of those who are “unconsciously the victims of a philosophy which is an adverse to the truth, and a great hindrance to spiritual progress.”⁸⁰

It is in the fourth article where Richardson first mentions Fanning and directly confronts his use of philosophy.

The reader will see, at once, that these views of Locke and those of President Fanning perfectly coincide. Sensation furnishes all our ideas. Reflection merely compares them with each other. As God and spiritual things are not objects of sense, we can obtain no knowledge of them from our perceptions of nature. Neither can we from the works of our own minds, since reflection is wholly occupied with the ideas furnished by perception, and is incapable of originating any. Man is thus left, in Locke’s view, which is precisely that of Bro. Fanning, wholly dependent upon revelation for all his ideas of God and spiritual things.⁸¹

In Richardson’s mind, Fanning is simply using Locke’s methodology of reading nature and applying that toward reading Scripture. He sees no difference. Scripture is viewed as nothing more than mere facts to be assimilated through Lockean thought. Thus, Richardson saw no value in applying human philosophy since it places an overt emphasis on human capacity and virtually none on spiritual things. His main concern was that

the nature of this sort of philosophy to indisposed and unfit man’s mind to receive anything that is not merely outward and formal, and to estrange them from all inquires and expressions which have regard to “hidden man of the heart”. . . . It gradually dries up the foundation of spiritual sympathy, and creates in the hearer a species of impiety towards the spiritual and invisible which doubts its presence and denies its power, and thus substitutes, in religions, an interested obedience to things external, for the confiding heart to trust of unselfish love.⁸²

So, Richardson was concerned that “mere *grammar* and *logic* should replace *spiritual discernment*, and be permitted to establish themselves as a barrier between the soul and spiritual enjoyment.”⁸³ To this charge, Fanning responded that he did not employ human

⁸⁰Ibid., 257.

⁸¹Richardson, “Faith versus Philosophy—No. IV,” 272.

⁸²Richardson, “Faith versus Philosophy—No. V,” 329.

⁸³Ibid., 330.

philosophy, but that Richardson had himself turned to speculative thinking, not relying on the Word, but on emotional impulse.

In this dispute, “Campbell first appeared to side with Fanning, but later reversed himself and attacked Fanning on behalf of Richardson.”⁸⁴ This rift between Fanning and Campbell over Richardson’s articles reflects the ideological differences between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ that still exist today. Many of the churches in the south followed Fanning, rejecting the warnings of Richardson. This powerful Lockean philosophy in interpreting Scripture is still prominent among the Churches of Christ in the twenty-first century.

While a teacher at Bethany College in the 1840s and 50s, Robert Richardson delivered a number of communion meditations to the Bethany Church. At the request of many, including J.W. McGarvey, these meditations were collected and put in a book. This is perhaps the greatest devotional book produced by this movement, and remains as relevant today as it was then. There are three dominant themes in this book: (1) the mystery of the body, recognizing that the divine mystery was foundational to the Christian faith; (2) the mystery of Christ’s atoning death; and (3) the mystery of the union of God with Christ.⁸⁵

What Richardson so earnestly strived to maintain in the early days of the movement needs to be rediscovered. What he was trying to tell his contemporaries needs to be reiterated for today’s restoration churches.

⁸⁴Blowers, “Robert Richardson,” 332.

⁸⁵Richardson, *Communings*, xv.

Is Spiritual Formation Present in the Restoration Movement Today?

Churches of the Restoration Movement are definitely “children of their heritage.”

If we can appreciate what Allen and Hughes write, we can also begin to understand how to work through our dilemma. They acknowledge, “We cannot escape tradition and its effects upon us. We can deny it, but we cannot escape it. . . . We inherit not only the Bible itself but also a traditional way of reading it. We are part of a tradition of interpretation.”⁸⁶ The early Restoration leaders mistakenly thought that they could forego the past and move directly to the text. We must not repeat this mistake of believing that what happened before our time has no bearing on who we are and where we are going. We must understand scripture as our only authority—*sola scriptura*. Rational processes are only aids to help translate scripture into our life and the church. Many today are beginning to question, and even reject, the traditional doctrinal system that for generations gave the Restoration Church its distinctive identity. Others are beginning to question the notion that having a correct understanding of doctrine is the only absolute essential for salvation. As a result of the “debate-all-comers” attitude, many now find themselves spiritually malnourished, hungry for things of the Spirit. These formative attitudes of the Restoration Movement have lead many to spiritual disorientation. Cold rationalism offers no consolation for the pain life presents. The comfort of the Holy Spirit is lacking.

Leonard Allen is now sounding the modern day warning to begin moving “to the centrality of the cross and to a renewed ‘Trinitarian’ spirituality that gives due place to the dynamic role of the Spirit in the lives of the Christian.”⁸⁷ As Richardson taught long

⁸⁶Allen and Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots*, 4.

⁸⁷Springer, “Sanctification,” 668.

ago, it is the Holy Spirit who forms the character traits that lead the way of the cross. We must resist the idea that holiness can be achieved through individualism in today's culture and place sanctification squarely within the community where the Spirit works.

The heart of the Christian faith centers on the person of Jesus Christ, not on a body of doctrine. It does not depend on accuracy of doctrine but on a transformed inner life leading to a fruitful outer life. While we should be rational in reading and interpreting Scripture, we also need to balance this with the influence of the Holy Spirit. The foundation for spiritual disciplines was always present in the Restoration Movement, but it was overshadowed by a strong rationalistic system of reading Scripture. We must renew Richardson's call to listen carefully to the influences of the Holy Spirit through experiences of spiritual formation in order to conform our life to that of Christ's and to form a union with God.

In the next chapter we will examine *lectio divina* which is an early church practice for developing spiritual growth. By looking at this ancient practice we hope to understand the effects a contemplative practice might have on a religious tradition that is in every way a dichotomy to this. Our hope is to have a positive experience of discipline on a rationalistic mindset.

CHAPTER THREE

LECTIO DIVINA: A HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In this prayer we confront the most fundamental human question: “Who are you, Lord?”—and wait for the answer.¹

In this chapter we will examine *lectio divina*, an ancient practice of reading and reflecting on scripture. There are two important elements to *lectio*—reading and prayer. In this chapter we will learn how to read via *lectio* and how this ancient practice facilitates redirection reading from the mind and into the heart.

Lectio divina requires slowing down and relying more on the heart to hear God through the Bible. In contrast, churches of the Restoration Movement, by tradition, generally read to gain an understanding and knowledge of the text. There is a perceived need to “get a handle” on the text. Thus, it is important to understand the significance of slowing down and listening to God in order to develop a similar paradigm for spiritual formation in Restoration churches. Understanding the nature of *lectio divina* helps to recognize reasons for reading the Bible other than gaining knowledge and understanding. *Lectio* introduces the idea of living the Christian life through quiet meditation and peaceful reflection.

¹Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: A Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: The Continuum Pub. Co., 1997), 115.

Lectio has proven itself to be a useful and time-tested way for growing spiritually. Over the centuries it has shown itself to be a beneficial discipline for those who have taken the time to acquire the disposition and discipline to put it into practice. Some may call *lectio* a Catholic practice; I tend to disagree with this assessment. It is an ancient practice *used* by many Catholics, but is probably older than Catholicism. Meditation as a religious practice of *lectio* was reported to have been practiced in the Indus Valley of India in the third millennium B.C.E. It was also a practice of the Jewish mysticism.² *Lectio* itself is an ancient practice that presents one type of discipline to help Christians grow spiritually. This timeless practice of assisting Christians to live a spiritual life makes *lectio divina* an excellent ancient paradigm. By studying this practice we realize many of the values found in spiritual formation. Setting the Stone—Campbell Movement in juxtaposition to *lectio divina* demonstrates just how greatly this movement needs to realize that there is more to reading the Bible than to gather knowledge. Through *lectio* Christians learn to read the Bible with the heart and not just the head.

What is *Lectio Divina*?

It is necessary to begin our study of *lectio divina* by noting that some terms are used synonymously such as contemplation, contemplative prayer, meditation, reflection, and sacred reading. For example, throughout this chapter we make reference to *lectio* as contemplative prayer. In defining the various terms, we first turn to Thomas Keating. He refers to contemplative prayer as “any prayer practice that spontaneously evolves or is deliberately designed to free the mind of excessive dependence on thinking to go to

²Frederic B. Underwood, “Meditation: An Overview” *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 9, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: McMillan Pub., 1987), 326-327.

God.”³ His list of the various types of prayers that evoke a contemplative attitude include the Jesus Prayer, the Veneration of Icons, *lectio divina*, and the Rosary. He defines *lectio divina* as “listening to the book we believe to be divinely inspired; the most ancient method of developing the friendship of Christ by using scripture texts as topics of conversation with Christ.”⁴ It is through this style of reading—or listening—to scripture that we are able to reflect or meditate on what it is saying. Keating claims that *lectio divina* has been the “classical meaning of contemplative prayer for the first sixteen centuries.”⁵ Thus, he understands *lectio* as existing under the larger idea of contemplation. He identifies contemplative prayer as the “normal development of the grace of baptism and the regular practice of *lectio divina*. [Through contemplative prayer] we open our awareness to God whom, we know by faith, is within us.”⁶ Another term Keating uses in conjunction with contemplative prayer and *lectio divina* is “centering prayer.” This he defines as “a method designed to deepen the relationship with Jesus begun in *lectio* and the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to cooperate with this gift.”⁷ *Lectio* is understood, then, as one form of contemplative prayer, and centering prayer is understood as a deeper component of *lectio*.

It is necessary, however, to tread lightly with these definitions. For while these understandings and definitions help to understand the nature of *lectio divina*, “a conceptual definition fails to communicate the qualitative existential richness given in a quiet moment.”⁸ The problem with defining these different forms of prayers is that they

³Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 147.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 138.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., 139.

⁸James Finley, *The Awakening Call: Fostering an Intimacy with God* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1984), 20.

are not concepts we see and observe, for they are perceptions that deal with thoughts within us. They are what Finley calls the “unseen, spiritual dimension of the ‘I’ that is asking the question.”⁹ So, contemplation involves seeking to discover that which has to do with the inner self. Adding the divine dimension simply pushes the concepts further from a definitive definition. Finley suggests that perhaps a better solution for this dilemma of understanding contemplation is to shift from the “direct approach” to a less direct, and less problematic approach. *Lectio divina* is understood as moving from spiritual reading, to meditation, to prayer, and finishing with contemplation.¹⁰ This form of prayer is best understood as a process or progressive. It transitions from reading, to reflecting, to lifting thought of reflection up in prayer. There is within *lectio divina* a sort of inner momentum.

Thomas Merton agreed with Finley when he wrote, “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. . . . Contemplation is not vision because it sees ‘without’ seeing and knows ‘without knowing.’”¹¹ Again, contemplation is defined by describing what happens *within* the heart—seeing without seeing; knowing without knowing. Merton addresses the difficulty of defining contemplation in his chapter titled, “What Contemplation is Not.” He says that the only way to “get rid of misconceptions about contemplation is to experience it.”¹² “Contemplation,” writes Merton, “cannot be taught. It cannot even be clearly explained. It can only be hinted at, suggested, pointed to, symbolized.”¹³ He then proceeds to reflect on what contemplation

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 21

¹¹Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Direction Books, 1961), 1.

¹²Ibid., 6. Keating has a similar chapter in *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 5-11.

¹³Ibid.

is not, which in some ways becomes a warning of not allowing *lectio* and prayer to become simply practices created to serve our wants.

Lectio is not an intellectual exercise of control and information gathering. Rather, it is a voluntary immersion into the world of God. Spiritual reading melds revelation and experience. A value of *lectio divina* comes in how it corrects the often overused form of reading that pushes for knowledge and doctrine. *Lectio divina* stresses a reading of scripture that opens up the inner self to receive God's loving call of grace. It has been suggested that scholastics approach scripture by focusing on it as an object to be studied and investigated, seeking knowledge and theology; monastics approach scripture through meditation and prayer, with an orientation toward a life of devotion. Scripture becomes less an object to be used and more a tool for approaching God.

So, in some way, it is impossible to obtain more than a "gray" understanding of *lectio*. Still, as a spiritual discipline, it serves as a powerful tool in leading us closer to God.

The Development of *Lectio Divina* as a Form of Prayer

What is *lectio divina*, and how are the various components developed? A Carthusian monk from the twelfth century, Guigues du Chastel, also known as "Guigo II" (1083/4-1136-8[?]), is credited with formally outlining the classic method of *lectio divina* as it is practiced today.

Understand now what the four staves of this ladder are, each in turn. *Reading*, lesson, is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one's will and wit. *Meditation* is a studious in searching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill. *Prayer* is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil. *Contemplation* is the lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savour. Reading seeks, meditation finds, prayer asks, contemplation feels. . . . The four degrees are so bound together, and each of them so ministering together to each other, that the

first as reading and meditation helps only a little or nought all, without those that follow it, such as prayer and contemplation. Also without the first two we delay winning the last two. What use to spend your time in reading or listening to the deeds of the Holy Fathers, unless we bite and chew on them through meditation, and draw out somewhat and swallow it and send it to the heart, so that we may find, and by this understand, our own defaults, and after such knowing that we set ourselves to work that we may attain those virtues that were in them?¹⁴

We see that actually four different practices are found to be utilized within *lectio divina*.

It is important to remember that Guigo never thought of these as four separate and distinct practices, but rather as practices built upon one another, one leading naturally to the next. He also believed that *lectio* was incomplete unless each element was practiced. Later, from between 1522 to 1526, Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, composed *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*.¹⁵ Within these exercises he utilizes the practice of *lectio divina*.

Following are the four stages, or processes, as Guigo II preferred, of *lectio divina*:

- (1) *Lectio* (reading): The selected verses of scriptures are read, usually aloud.
- (2) *Meditatio* (meditation): After the verses are read, they are meditated upon, (chewing the text), to understand how they relate to life's situations.
- (3) *Horatio* (prayer): Any thoughts or emotions derived from meditation are raised to God through prayer.
- (4) *Contemplatio* (meditation): This is where one empties their mind and allows God to speak to them. This becomes a God led prayer.

While *lectio divina* was originally practiced with scripture, many today practice it with many different forms of spiritual writings.

¹⁴Guigues du Chastel, "Scala Claustralium" or "Scala Paradisi," n. p. [cited 2 December 2005], online: <http://fisheaters.com//guigo.html>. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁵St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, intro. Robert W. Gleason, trans. Anthony Mottola (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1964).

The Development of *Lectio Divina* in Conjunction with Other Issues

It should be noted that while *lectio divina* was being shaped, the church was also going through its struggle of forming a “correct” Christology. Many of the doctrines we have today developed at or near the time *lectio divina* was coming into practice. The church struggled for centuries to determine what it believed to be a correct christology. This was important since soteriology, or salvation, was understood as being directly tied to Christ. Thus, to incorrectly understand the work and nature of Jesus Christ was to incorrectly understand the nature of salvation. “We can see this in the major heresies that dominated the seven centuries with which we are concerned.”¹⁶ When studying these heresies and what they teach, the sincerity of those who believed them should not be doubted. The nature of Christ was taken seriously as was the importance of what he meant to humanity. Each of the theologians tagged as a heretic strongly felt that what they believed was at least as accurate as the understanding of Christ held by the majority of Christians, if not more so. The theologians of earlier times maintained a delicate balance in defining the differences between the humanity of Christ and his divine nature. If one drifted too far to one side or the other, they were branded as heretics and were sometimes exiled. This time period was tumultuous and inflamed. It is important to remember that, “It was the issue of human salvation that propelled their speculation, just as, for that matter, it did the speculations of the orthodox.”¹⁷ The importance of understanding the struggles between orthodoxy and heresy becomes apparent when speaking of “spirituality.” The early Christians prayed via *lectio divina* and used other

¹⁶Boniface Ramsey, “The Spirituality of the Early Church: Patristic Sources,” *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 27.

¹⁷Ibid.

spiritual practices that stressed the importance of Christ. They believed that “Christ was the measure, the model, and the goal of the spiritual life. He was the measure in that he defined the nature of that life by whom he himself was.”¹⁸ For many, Christ was the model and thus their goal was to intimate his life. But more than that, they understood that Christ was the very reason that spiritual life was possible. As they understood it, spiritual living would be impossible were it not for Christ and his example. This is why many of the early church were so concerned that they correctly understand the nature of Christ to its fullest.

The Two Theologies on Knowing God

The study of God is immense. There is much to know about God’s character and what he desires from us. There is also a great deal about God that is not known. Therefore, two traditions for explaining God were developed in the early church. The early Christians came to think of God in different ways and over time developed two differing theologies of God. One is a theology that states we can discern God and appreciate his character. This is referred to as *kataphatic*, meaning the affirmative—the *via affirmativa*. In describing *kataphatic* Thomas Keating portrays it as “the exercise of the rational faculties enlightened by faith.”¹⁹ We find this theology rich with the language of presence. It uses various expressions that speak of the nature of God. This is expressed in Exodus where God speaks while passing before Moses: “the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex. 34:6-7). These words convey a nature and character of God. Icons are likewise used to express

¹⁸Ibid., 28.

¹⁹Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 145.

his nature. This theology understands a Christian as a doer and a talker on account of its active mode of thinking. Images, symbols, and rituals are characteristic of this tradition. Over time this tradition became characteristic of western Christianity with its emphasis on the knowledge of God through revelation.²⁰ This theology teaches that God revealed himself through scripture and nature. A thorough knowledge about God might never be known, but since man is in God's image, even the existence of humanity reveals some of the characteristics of God. Prayer leads us into the presence of God. There is a holiness of life and a sense of personal renewal.

On the other side of the spectrum is the *apophatic*, known as the *via negativa*.

"We here have to say that the words or qualities adequate to describe creatures do not fully describe God, the creator. In order to speak with greater accuracy, we therefore have to negate or reject our affirmation."²¹ This theology teaches that God is "unknowable."²² Keating describes the *apophatic* as "the exercise of pure faith; resting in God beyond concepts and particular acts."²³ This tradition is more characteristic of Eastern Orthodoxy. In a short essay entitled "The Mystical Theology, Pseudo—Dionysius writes concerning the mystery of God. In it he advises Timothy to,

leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him which is beyond all being and knowledge.²⁴

²⁰Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 468.

²¹Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today* (Boston: Cowley Press, 1997), 141.

²²To get an understanding of the unsurpassing knowledge of God one need only to read the theophany of Job in chapters 38-41. Then our response would be like that of Job: "I spoke of things I do not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (42:3).

²³Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 145.

²⁴Pseudo—Dionysius, "The Mystical Theology," *Pseudo—Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, intro. Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135.

Later when describing Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai he writes,

But then he [Moses] breaks free of them, away from what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.²⁵

Indeed, here is a theology that “stresses God’s transcendence and mystery.”²⁶ This tradition lends itself to meditation and reflection, a practice more common the Eastern Orthodoxy than to western Christianity, and to the practice of resting in the “presence of God.”

While these two theologies are presented here as nice, neat divisions, they are not absolute. “In reality, no one is purely cerebral with no emotion or solely heart without mind. . . . Similarly, no believer behaves as if God is utterly hidden or completely unknowable.”²⁷ Understanding the differences between *apophatic* and *kataphatic* is essential for understanding *lectio divina* and its various stages, especially contemplation.

Lectio Divina: The Practice of Sacred Reading

The ancient art of *lectio divina* involves a progression through four parts: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Ideally, one practices *lectio* for thirty minutes each day, but certainly for no less than fifteen minutes each day. It is greatly enhanced when there is a continuity in the reading of sacred writings. As an example, a book or letter should be read from beginning to end. We are going to look at *lectio divina* as it is described by Guigo II. While the practice of *lectio divina* was first introduced to the west

²⁵Ibid., 137.

²⁶Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 468.

²⁷Ibid.

by the eastern desert father John Cassian, early in the fifth century, it is the practice as described by Guigo II that is most common today.

Reading (*lectio*)

“Looking on Holy Scripture with all one’s will and wit.” Guigo II

Lectio, as a method of communing with God, begins with reading of a biblical passage, perhaps rereading it a couple of times. The actual practice of *lectio* is simple. Find a private place and read, then reread, the text. This reading can be done aloud.

There is an interesting story about Augustine and how people of his time read.

One of Augustine’s most exciting experiences in his early days in Milan was the discovery of a new method of reading. He had been taught to read in a way that maximally engaged the body and senses: reading aloud, seeing and hearing words, simultaneously moving the lips and projecting the words with one’s breath—an expressive art of tone and emphasis. So he was astonished as a young man, new to the sophisticated imperial capital of Milan, to witness Bishop Ambrose reading silently: ‘When he read his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent.’ Augustine and his mother sat watching him for a long time, speculating on why he chose to read in this strange fashion.

In Augustine’s time, reading aloud was a public practice, conducted in a company of people, so that those who were illiterate could benefit. But Ambrose read both in silence and in private, observed but not heard, his thoughts about what he was reading unspoken, inaccessible to others.²⁸

As Miles states, perhaps one of the reasons that reading was auditory when *lectio* was being developed was to permit those who were illiterate to participate.

A person selects a passage and reads it (or hears it read) a couple of times. In order for this to be most effective, a select set of verses should be read each day. One might decide to read from one of the gospels, the Beatitudes, or verses on a selected theme. The intent is to maintain continuity which gives stability to the practice. As one

²⁸Margaret R. Miles “On Reading Augustine and on Augustine’s Reading,” *The Christian Century*, May 21-28: 510-514. [cited 5 August 2005] <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=74>.

works through the books or letters of the Bible a sense of continuity is maintained with each day's reading. "This stability in the material read is one of the distinguishing marks of monastic *lectio divina*. This constancy is a matter of respect for the literary unit of what is written. It does not mean that we have to read the Bible from beginning to end."²⁹

What is important in sacred reading is to read the verses a couple of times. While reading, one becomes cognizant of the feelings they have and aware when a word, phrase, or sentence resonates with them. For example, when reading Psalm 23, one might become aware of a phrase such as "he guides me in paths of righteousness." They then repeat the phrase becoming aware of what is happening to them: feelings, emotions, or inhibitions. In reality, when reading is done in this manner, one will most likely read only one Psalm a day as they will doubtlessly discover something in the first Psalm they read that will catch their attention. When reading like this it is important to listen for the words or phrases that resonate. This helps us move naturally into meditation. Reading in this manner opens the heart to the text, making it ready to perceive what is read. "We approach our reading as a disciple comes to a master, receptive, docile, willing to be changed."³⁰

While "sacred reading" was originally practiced with scriptures, it can be practiced with any sacred writings. If one feels guided by the Lord to read Augustine's *Confessions* or Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitations of Christ* they would read them just as if they were reading a passage from the Bible, being aware of inner feelings while reading.

²⁹Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, a member of HarperCollins Pub. 1996), 5.

³⁰Ibid., 6.

In *lectio*, the emphasis is on how one reads. It involves a personal encounter with God. “The object is not to cover as much as possible as quickly as possible; reading for formation avoids quantifying the amount of reading in any sort of way. You are concerned with quality of reading, not quantity.”³¹ Reading by *lectio* is not about speed or the amount of scripture covered. Instead it is about hovering over a sentence or paragraph or perhaps even a whole page. “The point is to meet God in the text.”³²

Meditation (*meditatio*)

“Studious in searching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill.” Guigo II.

When reading the Bible slowly, gently, one comes to an understanding of the words themselves. After a couple of readings, look for what stands out and resonates within. The idea now is to understand the story and its application to our life. Moving from reading to meditation helps in being immersed in the word. As one reads and rereads, there begins to be a connection between the text and the life of the reader. Questions are asked such as, “What is God saying to me through this word or phrase?”, or “How does this apply to my situation?”

This is a time to focus on the text, not allowing the mind to drift toward daily concerns. “The purpose of meditation is to penetrate the scriptures and let them penetrate us through the loving gaze of the heart.”³³ Meditation “attunes the inner self to the Holy

³¹M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000), 55.

³²Ibid.

³³Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 177.

Spirit so that our hearts harmonize and resonate with his voice.”³⁴ Thus, meditation is a spiritual work and an interior invitation for the Spirit to speak to us from within.

Prayer (*oratio*)

“A devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil.” Guigo II.

After meditating on the text and finding deeper spiritual meanings, we transition into prayer. Reflection on the text moves easily into spontaneous prayer. Prayer focuses on issues and concerns arising from what was read. One now takes those thoughts and offers them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, or asking forgiveness, then resting in God’s love. The question to ask here is, “What is God leading me to pray?” “What does God want me to understand from this text?”

A common problem is understanding prayer as a dialogue with God. For many, prayers are no more than petitionary monologues. “In *lectio divina* prayer is specifically related to the two prior movements of sacred reading and meditation on the text.”³⁵

Prayer is the fruit of what was read and meditated upon. It becomes a way of internalizing what is written in the biblical text. The transition from meditation to prayer may take place in a subtle and unnoticed manner. What happens is that prayer becomes the response of the heart to what has taken place in the mind. “It is a movement from truth to implication, from hearing to acknowledge, from understanding to obedience.”³⁶

The result of meditation is that a passage can be either reassuring or painful. The Word is able to expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Therefore, prayer can be a time of confession and repentance or a time of thankfulness and joy. However prayer evolves, it is a time of participation with the Trinity through a prolonged and mutual

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 180.

³⁶Ibid.

presence that enables growth by taking on the nature of Christ. Conformity to Christ is an intentional process of developing a passion for Christ by meeting him and spending time with him in order to know him better and clearer. This happens through meditation and prayer, although one may never really know when movement from one to the other actually occurs.

Contemplation (*contemplatio*)

“The lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savour.” Guigo II.

Lectio has been described as “a prayer that begins as a dialogue and ends as a duet.”³⁷ At this point *lectio* becomes rest in the gratitude of God and his Word. The contemplative prayer, also referred to as the centering prayer, moves a person from the first three phases of *lectio* to “resting in God.” Though commonly used together, contemplation and meditation should not be confused as the same action. It is very difficult to communicate the characteristics of contemplative prayer. It is a mysterious place where language is silent and action becomes receptivity. “True contemplation is a theological grace that cannot be reduced to logical, psychological, or aesthetic categories.”³⁸

Contemplative prayer moves one from the activity of prayer to the stillness of reflection. One simply rests in God’s presence, staying open to God and listening to him while being at peace and silent. The idea now is, “How is God revealing himself to me?” In this phase, however, one usually empties his or her mind and tries not to think a great deal. God reveals as he chooses.

³⁷Gabriel O’Donnell, “Ready for Holiness: *Lectio divina*,” *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 48.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 182.

At this point, it is necessary to restate what was said earlier concerning the *kataphatic* and *apophatic*. *Lectio divina* begins with a *kataphatic* experience. The positive language of the presence of God is found in reading, meditation, and prayer. It begins with an engagement of the sacred text. Reading then moves to meditation and then to prayer. Each of these involves “doing,” a thinking of the mind. This last phase of *lectio*, however, moves to an inward contemplation. The mind is emptied and there is no use of mental images or words. *Lectio* now becomes *apophatic*. It is no longer a prayer of the mind, but a prayer of the heart. It is no longer “doing,” but “being.” It is no longer us praying to God, but God praying through us. We should state here that Christian meditation is not simply an emptying of the mind, but an emptying of the mind in order to be filled by God.

The Value of *Lectio Divina* as a Spiritual Discipline

Lectio divina involves the whole person. It goes from the physical, to the mental, and finally to the center of our spiritual being. By using a metaphor of food, Boas described the four different elements to *lectio*: Reading he describes as taking in food, meditation as chewing the food, praying as savoring the food, and contemplation as being filled.

Through *lectio* we find the balance that integrates and honors the two essential elements of life, “doing” and “being.” St. Gregory advocated the contemplative approach to prayer as rest from the external actions of life in the quest for communion with God. “St. Benedict encouraged the blended rhythm of rest and labor, desire for God and service of neighbor. By uniting the strength of Mary and Martha, we learn to be

contemplative in action.”³⁹ Rhythm is a necessary component of both *lectio divina* and spiritual formation.

This examination of *lectio divina* as an ancient practice of spiritual discipline, demonstrates the need for Christians in the twenty-first century to become more conscious of how they live. Too often there is an overt emphasis on the redemptive steps to salvation and the event of our conversion, and far too little emphasis on the rest of our life. Many Christians spend time studying in order to ensure that they have culled out what they believe as accurate doctrine, thinking that by believing in correct doctrine they will be saved. This is not to say that the point of salvation and correct doctrine are unimportant. It is just that pure doctrine is given too much weight when compared to the development of spiritual living for a holy and sanctified life.

***Lectio Divina* and the Stone—Campbell Movement**

The question before us is, “How can *lectio* find a place in Restoration churches and their quest for spiritual formation?” When these two traditions are juxtaposed, it becomes noticeable that they really have little in common. Most Restoration churches would see little need for finding time to incorporate *lectio* into their lives. The Restoration tradition has developed a strong reliance on Lockean philosophy in order to read and think through the Bible. Scripture is to be read to organize doctrine and to memorize. Scripture is categorized and structured to support and argue a theological proposition. There is a desire to understand scripture and to convince others to have the same understanding. On the other side is *lectio* which does not struggle with the text to gain control or to support an opinion or doctrine, nor to influence others. Scripture is read and reflected on to change one’s heart. As the Restoration tradition emphasizes

³⁹Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 185.

intellectualism to get one's mind around the text, *lectio* emphasizes letting God enter the heart and transform it according to his will. This makes *lectio* a very valuable tool in achieving the goal of conforming to the image of Christ.

We now turn our attention to how spiritual formation is understood within the biblical tradition. To gain a better appreciation of what scripture has to say regarding spiritual formation, we will look at Ephesians 4:1-24. Here, Paul instructs his readers to “walk worthy” of their calling. We will examine what this means in relation to the practice of spiritual formation.

CHAPTER FOUR

EPHESIANS 4:1-24 AND ITS CORRELATIVE VALUE IN UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Take on an entirely new way of life – a God fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.¹

In this chapter, we examine Ephesians chapter four, taking note of its emphasis on spiritual maturity. A major theme in Ephesians four calls for Christians to “walk worthy of their calling.” This is a foundational principle for both this chapter and this dissertation. Ephesians is a letter that strongly encourages Christians to grow spiritually, bolstered through the admonition to “walk worthy” in 4:1. While it is acknowledged that Ephesians does not advocate any of the classical disciplines like *lectio divina*, this letter does encourage the pursuit of these disciplines and, as seen in chapter three, the early church took this admonition seriously. Chapters five and six will look at spiritual formation as one venue toward spiritual growth.

This chapter explores how spiritual formation functions as a tool to facilitate the walk as described through various pericopes discussed here. Eight specific verses are discussed to gain a better understanding of spiritual growth.² Ephesians four

¹Ephesians 4:22-24, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*.

²The specific verses that will be discussed in this chapter are 1-3, 13, 17, and 22-24.

demonstrates Paul's emphasis for Christians to mature spiritually. While there are a number of passages in Ephesians that call for Christians to grow spiritually, Ephesians 4:1-24 presents an explicit foundation for spiritual growth. In many of his letters, Paul stresses the need for spiritual growth.³ Given that Ephesians reads more like a pastoral letter with insights on Christian living than an epistle addressing particular church issues, it is a letter that naturally lends itself to a study concerning the necessity of spiritual formation. Paul's charge for Christians to grow spiritually makes it clear that spiritual formation, while not mentioned in Ephesians, becomes a vehicle for implementing disciplines to realize spiritual growth.

A Background Study of the Letter to the Ephesians

An examination of whom this letter was addressed to presents a student of this letter with a dilemma. Evidence suggests that perhaps this letter was most likely not written just for the Christians of Ephesus. The words *evn VEfe, sw* in the salutation (Eph. 1:1) are not present in several important witnesses (**p**46, B*, 424C, 1739), in manuscripts mentioned by Basil, nor in the text used by Origen.⁴ A possible suggestion for this is that the letter was a circular letter written for other churches in the region besides Ephesus. If this is the case, then if it was Tychicus who read the letter, he would simply insert the appropriate geographical name upon reading it.⁵ There are several issues involved with this problem that go beyond the scope of this chapter. Ephesians

³Romans 8:29 and 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 2:5; Colossians 2:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

⁴Bruce M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second edition (New York: United Bible Society, 1994), 532.

⁵Guthrie, while admitting that objections toward the blank-address theory are strong enough to cast suspicion on it, that in itself is not sufficient to dispose of the circular theory. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 511. O'Brien suggests that while a circular letter is possible, there is little evidence in the first century to attest to such a practice, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 85.

being a circular letter is one possible suggestion why “in Ephesians” is missing from many important manuscripts. It becomes an issue for this chapter when trying to understand the nature and intent of this letter. If it was written as a circular letter, that could explain the absence of conflicts seen in most of Paul’s letters. It also suggests that the letter might have been composed by Paul as a pastoral letter aimed at addressing concerns about the nature of Christian living and educating congregations on his reflections concerning spiritual growth.

The next question is, “What is the occasion for and purpose of this letter?”

Normally this is understood from knowing the recipients. However, it is uncertain for whom this letter was intended. Donald Guthrie suggests that “If the circular-letter theory stands we are able to suggest a probable purpose from the circumstances of the writer rather than of the readers.”⁶ But there is as much uncertainty with the authorship as with the recipients. Though there are many scholars who refute Paul as the author,⁷ for the purposes of this dissertation, Paul is assumed to be the author.⁸ If Paul is the author, along with letters to the Colossians (also a disputed epistle), Philippians, and Philemon, while in prison in Rome,⁹ then the purpose for this letter could be suggested. Perhaps it is a letter meant to circulate among churches in the Lycus Valley and through the province of Asia dealing with topics concerning the church and Christ. This letter

⁶Ibid., 515.

⁷Refuting a Pauline authorship see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 42, ed. Bruce M Metzger (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1990) and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991).

⁸Favoring a Pauline authorship see T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, ICC, ed. Charles Augustus Griggs, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Alfred Plummer (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905); Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, Anchor Bible series vol. 34, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1974); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*; and Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999).

⁹These four epistles are often referred to as the “Captivity Epistles,” Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 472.

addresses issues not only the topic of ecclesiology, but also calls on Christians to change their attitude and behavior.

Of all the letters written by Paul, Ephesians is the least situational. There are no apparent problems addressed in the letter, and it does not express the same sense of urgency or a response to a crisis as other Pauline letters. Ephesians, denoting a sense of reflection on Christian living, recaps Paul's thought the church and Christian attitude. In Ephesians "Paul stood aside from the conflict and contemplated God's overall design for his church and for his world."¹⁰ Barth also alludes to this when he writes, "Ephesians represents a development of Paul's thought and a summary of his message which is prepared by his undisputed letters and contributes to their proper understanding."¹¹ This suggests Ephesians as a letter where Paul reiterates much of what is in his other letters on Christian living, minus the issues they were designed to dispute. Ephesians is then understood to "epitomize the whole of Paul's teaching and lifts it to a new level of presentation."¹² One example of this is given by Bruce when he points out that Ephesians shows close affinity to 1 Corinthians, in that Ephesians "universalizes the teaching about the church which in the earlier epistle is applied to the life of one local congregation."¹³ These thoughts suggest Ephesians as an ideal study for spiritual growth. The study of spiritual formation then becomes important as it relates to advancing spiritual growth. Particularly in the fourth chapter does the mood of this letter become clear as the various

¹⁰A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 17.

¹¹Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 4.

¹²Wood, *Ephesians*, 18.

¹³F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1977), 426.

pericopes lend themselves toward expressions of spiritual growth. The practice of spiritual formation lends itself toward realizing this growth.

Literary Analysis of the Letter to the Ephesians

Ephesians is understood as having two distinct parts consisting of 1:1–3:21 and 4:1–6:22. Chapters one through three are kerygmatic, or instructional, while chapters four through six are paraenesis, or ethical. Some label the former chapters as the indicative and the latter chapters as the imperative. These distinctions, however, should not be read as absolute, as we find ethical admonitions and doctrinal instructions in both parts. In writing in this way, Paul encourages his readers in the later chapters to live a Christian life based on teachings from earlier chapters. “The proclamation of God’s glorious and gracious deed is made in the form of indicatives; the exhortations which follow them often have the form of imperatives.”¹⁴ As Barth would later phrase it, “All things ethical are subject to the Gospel and faith.”¹⁵

While this chapter focuses mainly on eight verses in chapter four, it is important to be aware of the intertextuality played out within the letter. Ephesians one through three presents God’s saving purposes, emphasizing his desire to bring two people into one new (created) person. This provides the theological basis for chapters four through six with its encouragement for church maturity and unity. The later chapters address the more practical material, the substance, essential for walking in harmony with the divine calling, or “the commendation of humility, meekness, forbearance, concord, peace, and

¹⁴Barth *Ephesians 1-3*, 53.

¹⁵Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible series vol. 34A, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1974), 426.

all brotherly relationship; the duty of *growing in likeness* to Christ and obedience to him.”¹⁶

Ephesians 4:1-3

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Chapter four begins with a topic sentence that gives the readers a general exhortation to be worthy. This second part of Ephesians is grounded by *οὕτως*, having direct reference to the first part of the letter.

“Ephesians repeatedly draws attention to the sharp contrasts between believers’ former way of life and their new life in Christ.”¹⁷ This contrast is underscored by Paul’s use of the “once-now” form. The portrayals of their pre-Christian life are intended to remind the readers of their new position as Christians, urging them to pattern their new life after the character of God in Christ. This means they must stop following the life patterns of the culture in which they reside. Thus, we could say that “on the basis of our union with Christ, and thus our relationship with God, the letter urges us to challenge our inner being and character in a radical way.”¹⁸ Paul tells his readers that they need to live by a particular code of conduct. He stresses that they need to live their lives in reference to Christ. Thus, Christians should focus continually on Jesus Christ as they live their lives. When reading through Ephesians four, it is important to keep in mind Paul’s insistence to follow his teachings as a means of following Christ.

¹⁶S. D. F. Salmond, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, Expositors’ Greek Testament (EGT), vol. 3, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903), 210. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁷Peter O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 2.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 3.

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I *urge* you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” These opening words of the exhortation in Ephesians 4:1 mark the transition to a new section. Paul uses *parakaleō*,¹⁹ as a lead into his encouragement for readers to live in a worthy manner. Terrence Y. Mullins has suggested that there are four verbs in the Greek language used as official petitions.²⁰ The highest level is referred to as the “routine official” petition.²¹ This reflects the petitioner’s lack of concern for those he is petitioning and expects that his requests will be followed without question. An example would be a centurion of the Roman army. He expects his orders to be obeyed. The lowest level of a petition (*parakaleō*), more personal in tone, is referred to as the “personal” petition.²² This word expresses warmth. In the New Testament it is the word used most often for petitions (twenty-one times in the epistles). It also is the verb used in Ephesians 4:1. It is typically translated as *urge*, *ask*, or *beseech*. Thus, Paul begins by appealing for readers to adhere to a particular lifestyle. While not a command, like that of a military commander, still Paul expects his readers to accept his admonition as authoritative.

He is asking (urging, beseeching, or encouraging) that they *walk* in a way or manner worthy of their calling. Eight times in Ephesians Paul uses the word *peripatēō* (to walk)²³ when describing a lifestyle. This is a major motif woven throughout the letter. It is a favorite word for Paul when describing Christian behavior.²⁴

¹⁹It is characteristic of Paul to introduce a parenthetic section with the *parakaleō* clause (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1, 10 and 5:14; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16 and 16:15; 2 Cor. 2:8; 6:1 and 10:1; Rom. 12:1; 15:30 and 16:17; Philemon 8-10).

²⁰Terrence Y. Mullins, “Petition as a Literary Form” *Novum Testamentum*, V (1962), 46.

²¹*Ibid.*, 47.

²²*Ibid.*, 53.

²³Ephesians 2:2, 10; 4:1, 4, 17; 5:2, 8, and 15.

²⁴1 Thess. 2:12 and 4:1, 12; Gal. 5:16; Rom. 6:6; 8:4; 13:13 and 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:3 and 7:17; 2 Cor. 4:2; 5:7; 10:2-3 and 12:18; Phil. 3:17, 18; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7 and 4:5.

Here he uses it to encourage his readers to conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of their calling.

We find *peripatē* used previously in Ephesians 2:2 to describe the former lifestyle of these Gentile readers. Then, by way of contrast, Paul uses it again in 2:10 to describe the good works God has prepared for them to “walk in.” Although we will not explore all the occurrences of this word, it should be noted that “it appears within five major pericopes of chapters four through six. Maintaining the unity of the church, which is on the road to maturity . . . is the key admonition of this first exhortation section (4:1-17).”²⁵

The encouragement to “walk worthy” is a call to live a life that follows a set path. This was a common Hebraism. It was used when referring to ethical conduct or a way of life.²⁶ To the Hebrews it meant following a prescribed path in a fixed order, as in the march of Israel under God’s guidance in the wilderness. In Ephesians, it is used as an appeal to live as God has called them to live, which “presupposes that God’s gracious initiative requires a continuous human response and that his call bestows high privilege and high responsibility.”²⁷ The walk Paul refers to here is a prescribed lifestyle. It is a call toward unity in faith and an understanding that leads to maturity and contemplation. While Paul uses the remainder of the letter to describe what he means by *worthy*, we will only deal with it as expanded on in chapter four. In this chapter, Paul explains how personal growth is important for Christians to move toward spiritual maturity.

The last term in this verse relevant to our discussion is *calling* (κλη/sij). Elsewhere, Paul used this word in reference to God drawing men and women into

²⁵O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 67.

²⁶Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 94.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 235.

fellowship with his son²⁸ or into his kingdom and glory.²⁹ In Ephesians, Paul reminds his readers what God had done for them. “A key concept in this context is God’s call entrusting man with a high status and high responsibility.”³⁰ “Calling” signifies an appointment to a position of honor, signifying great responsibility. Paul is saying that an honorary position has been entrusted to Christians by God. He reminds his readers of the acts God did in their midst. They were already called into salvation (1:3-14) and its hope (1:18). Thus, God’s call “carries great privileges and great responsibilities.”³¹

What Paul does with this topic sentence is help the readers realize that in light of all that God has done for them, there is something they must do. God’s initiative and call establishes both a norm and a criterion to which their conduct was expected to conform. The verses that follow this admonition (vv. 2-3) give greater detail of their responsibilities.

We find that these verses extend the walking motif by illustrating, through a number of virtues, how Christians make the journey toward a mature lifestyle of godliness. The immediate context shows that the “worthy walk” consists of humility, patience, bearing with one another, and unity.

Spiritual Formation of Ephesians 4:1-3

Three words in Ephesians 4:1, “walk,” “worthy,” and “calling,” relate closely to the idea of spiritual formation. While they do not give us a “how to” for spiritual formation, they do reveal the need for achieving spiritual growth. There are only two types of *walking*. Our walk either pleases God (conforming to his will), or displeases

²⁸1 Corinthians 1:9; Romans 8:30.

²⁹1 Thessalonians 2:12.

³⁰Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 453.

³¹O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 275.

him (ignoring his will). Paul reminds his Gentile readers that once their life (walk) was displeasing to God (2:2). Now Paul, in these verses, urges his readers to live (walk) in a way that enables them to become godlier. These words are the touchstone for the remainder of the letter. Spiritual formation helps direct our life to realize that walk.

Worthy describes the manner in which one is to walk. A worthy walk aligns with the lifestyle prescribed by the calling. A key issue for many of Paul's letters is that somehow his readers never connected the dots; they never learned that being a Christian meant living a new lifestyle. Becoming a Christian means surrendering a former lifestyle for a new one. This worthy admonition prescribes a lifestyle that is godly. Worthy becomes the goal of spiritual formation. We grow toward a worthy life.

When the question, "Worthy of what?" is asked, Paul's answer is, "Worthy of the calling." This is a direct reference to their response of the gospel.³² The calling is the standard by which Christians are to live. Paul later wrote that they were to "Be imitators of God."³³ Our goal in spiritual formation is to become God-like.

We find that in Ephesians four, an essential element of a congregation is an environment compatible for developing programs to foster spiritual growth. The individualism in America is often counterproductive for congregations to nurture unity, as there is usually an "I" attitude instead of a "we" attitude. There is an ancient African word, *ubuntu*, that means "humanity to others." However, *ubuntu* also means "I am what I am because of who we all are." This attitude of unity, or community, cultivates a more beneficial atmosphere for promoting spiritual growth in one another. Unity is what Paul

³²Phil. 3:14; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Cor. 1:26.

³³Eph. 5:1; c.f. Matt. 5:48.

hopes to accomplish with his letter, a “unity of the faith.” Community is an important element in fostering and developing spiritual formation within a church.

Ephesians 4:13

. . . until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We find that in verses seven through sixteen, Paul diverts from his opening exhortation for unity to an explanation of unity and how to achieve it. Thus, in verses seven through ten, Paul discusses the value of the diversity of gifts. Paul shows that the unity they needed was achieved through the spiritual gifts given by God. Unity gained through these gifts help lead to full maturity in Christ. It is not until verse seventeen that Paul again resumes his discourse of “walking worthy.”

The use of *katanta, w* (reach) in verse thirteen implies movement. It means to “come to or arrive at” another person, place, or thing. The goal for this movement is lofty because it expresses the idea of striving toward the goal of being Christ-like.³⁴ Three phrases are used to describe this destination: (1) the oneness of faith and knowledge of God’s son; (2) the perfect man; and (3) the measure of the standard, Messiah’s perfection.³⁵

The two phrases in this verse that describe spiritual growth are “becoming mature” and the “fullness of Christ.” *Mature* (*te, leion*) carries the idea of a corporate body, the church, maturing.³⁶ In this context, the body, or church, becomes more like a mature adult and less like a child or an infant (verse 14). This signals growth in Christian behavior and character.

³⁴Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, 184.

³⁵Barth, *Ephesians*, 485.

³⁶O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 307.

Fullness (plhrw, matoj) conveys the idea of becoming a complete or whole person. In this context, completeness is achieved through Christ. Paul previously used this word in his prayer in Ephesians 3:19, “the measure of all the *fullness* of God.” Christians and congregations measure their growth by the divine standard of Jesus Christ. Jesus became the measure after he completed all that God required of him. He was “a high priest . . . who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus suffered death on the cross in his obedience to God. His being obedient to God to the point that he was willing to die becomes the definitive measure of fullness of God and the ultimate measure for Christians. Paul shows in this verse that our measure for fullness is no less than that of Jesus.

It is this idea of living up to the measure of Christ that Robert Richardson endeavored to achieve through his attempt to steer the Restoration Movement toward a more spiritual leaning. He was aware that Christians need more than just salvation which is merely the initial stage. Christians need to progress toward becoming like Christ.

Spiritual Formation of Ephesians 4:13

Verse thirteen implies that when unity and knowledge of Christ are achieved, maturity and attainment of the fullness of Christ become possible. Maturity is seen in the Christian whose life is attuned to God’s calling (vv. 2-3). It involves moving from immaturity, self-centeredness and sin to becoming a perfect person. The complete attainment of this goal by Christians, unlike Jesus, is not possible in this life.

This perfection is possible by measuring oneself against the fullness of Christ. Messianic perfection is achieved through the knowledge of the Son of God. Only when we understand and appreciate the perfection of Christ—controlling his anger, resisting

the temptation to call thunder down on a city that refused his presence, willing to sacrifice his wants for the benefits of others, and ultimately dying on the cross – will we then find it possible to strive toward maturity. It is according to the measurement of Christ that Paul calls the readers to mature.

Through spiritual formation we attempt to attain the “measure of Christ” in our life. Again, this verse, while not telling us how to become mature, does imply that we are to make maturity the goal of our life. Through spiritual formation this becomes possible as we prepare ourselves, working with God, to realize spiritual maturity.

Ephesians 4:17

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Ephesians 4:14-16 prepares us for verse 17 by addressing how Christians should conduct their lives. Once they begin their journey toward maturity, they are no longer to behave like infants. This passage presents a contrast between a “mature person” and a “child.” “Children” refers to the silliness of young people. The plural use of “children” stands in contrast with the singular “mature person.” This contrast shows “individualism being a sign of childishness, unity a sign of maturity.”³⁷ “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him . . . Christ” (4:15). Maturity is expressed and exhibited through love (4:2).

Verses nineteen to twenty-four demonstrate movement from the negative portrayal of their earlier life as Ephesian gentiles to the positive portrayal of their present Christian lifestyle. Verses seventeen to twenty-four consist of two parts: (1) a strong exhortation not to live as the Gentiles (17-19) and (2) the kind of life Christians are

³⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 186.

expected to live (20-24).³⁸ The contrast between 4:17-19 and 4:20-24 could not be stronger. The condition of those who are outside of Christ is contrasted sharply with the ongoing transformation of the mind leading to a righteousness and holiness that reflects the character of God himself. This implies that the human mind, outside of divine control, is unable to maintain a way of life that is pleasing to God.

Paul, in 4:17, by using *ou=n* (“now”) as a “presumptive force,” reverts back to 4:1-3 and resumes the exhortation. While the exhortation in verse one is positive, it now presumes a negative tone.³⁹ Paul directed this letter primarily to gentiles who were converted and were to abandon their former lifestyle. Their mindset was to be transformed from “not knowing God” to “thinking only of God.” To emphasize this, Paul employs the word group *evn mataio, thti tou/ noo. j auvtw/n* (“in the futility of their mind [or thinking]).” “Futility” implies losing touch with reality through a lack of a relationship with God, the one who stands as the epitome of world reality. “‘Mind’ has to do with understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding. Here Paul is dealing with the reader’s mindset.”⁴⁰ If a Christian is to follow Paul’s injunction to walk worthy, a change in how he or she thinks is needed. In Ephesians two, Paul wrote about his gentile readers’ former mindset:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts (Eph. 2:1-3).

This passage employs Paul’s motif of “walk” (live) as he describes how the Gentiles once lived. Now in Ephesians 4:17, he again encourages them to change how they think and

³⁸Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 275.

³⁹Salmond, *Ephesians*, EGT, 338.

⁴⁰O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 320.

live. The verses that follow describe in greater detail what is meant by futile thinking. In verse eighteen Paul tells how they formerly had no sense of who God was or what God was about. Their former life was marked by a life of ignorance. In verse nineteen, he talks about how they indulged in a life of impurity and lust. Their walk, before Christianity, was totally void of God.

Spiritual Formation of Ephesians 4:17

In spiritual formation, the spiritual practices are to help create an attitude of godliness. Once a person becomes a Christian, the process begins and that person learns to think on the reality of the divine. Before becoming a Christian people live in the reality of a lie. Paul's admonition to "no longer walk as the Gentiles do," tells the readers that the attitude of their former life was unacceptable. They were expected to change. Before, they neither know God nor understand how he expects them to live. After becoming a Christian, they know God and know what he wants. Spiritual formation helps this process. The disciplines work on centering the mind on what is important and godly. Praying and meditating help control the mind. Thus, Christians no longer think of only themselves, as was the past lifestyle, now they think of the good that can do for others. Paul wants Christians to stop living a life of lying, spiritual impurity, immorality, and greed. This happens when the attitude is changed to think of God and Christ. What Paul tells the readers in 4:17 is that the past is no longer appropriate for who they now are.

Ephesians 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

In this next pericope, verses twenty to twenty-four stand in contrast with verses seventeen to nineteen, emphasizing how a Christian is to walk. Paul is emphatic that there has to be a change of lifestyle. This change is the contrast in this chapter between the past life and the present. The Galatian gentiles use to have a particular lifestyle (v. 17-19), now they should show evidence of a different life style (v. 20-24). The paradigm for this new lifestyle is found in Christ Jesus.

The difference in life style depends on if one comes to know Christ. The words “learning Christ” (v. 21) are not found anywhere else in the New Testament. “Learning Christ means to welcome him as a living person and be shaped by his teaching.”⁴¹ Not only do Christians learn more about Christ, but they find in him the source of their new life and their relationship with God.

Paul wrote that they “heard of him and were taught in him” (v. 21). This draws the attention of the readers not only to their initial response to the gospel, but to their ongoing instruction. This instruction, as Paul puts it, is the truth in Jesus (αὐτῷ, ᾧ ἐν εὐαγγελίῳ | τῷ Ἰησοῦ). This *truth*, found in Jesus, is the reality of God’s will. Truth is used again in verse twenty-four. Paul’s use of the name, Christ, in verse twenty, and Jesus, in verse twenty-one, was probably deliberate. He uses the historical name, Jesus, perhaps to stress the point that “the truth” is found in the historical Jesus himself, and that this truth, or reality, is rooted in the historical act of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:22-24 are built around three infinitives. At times, infinitives may carry the same force as imperatives, and Lincoln agrees that these infinitives, as part of a paraenesis, do take on some imperatival force.⁴² Lincoln also explains, however, that

⁴¹Ibid., 324.

⁴²Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 284.

besides the imperative, there are other possible interpretations. Since these infinitives are with the accusative case (u`ma / j), it is possible, and most likely, that these infinitives are used to further explain the truth about Jesus in verse twenty-one.⁴³ It is this further teaching which becomes important later for discussion of spiritual formation.

The three infinitives are: (1) “to put off” [v. 22], (2) “to renew” [v.23], and (3) “to put on” [v. 24]. They are probably best understood as three fundamental aspects of the Gospel tradition passed on to the Ephesians.⁴⁴ These infinitives are to emphasize their break from the past.⁴⁵

The first infinitive is an aorist middle found in verse twenty-two, avpoge , sqai (“to put off”). Here the reader is told that becoming a Christian meant a radical break from the former way of life. In chapter two Paul told his readers that at one time they were separated from God, but now that condition no longer exists.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11-12).

This shows that a new humanity, created to be righteous and holy like God, comes from the truth.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Eph. 2:13-16).

⁴³Ibid., 285.

⁴⁴O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 327.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Verse twenty-two echoes back to these verses—and perhaps to all of chapter two. The background of “putting off” is comparable to that of Colossians 3:8-9. Except that Colossians has reference to particular vices, while Ephesians refers to the entire person being changed.

The second infinitive, a present passive, is found in verse twenty-three, *avnaneou/sqai*, (“to be made new” or “renewed”). The passive tense suggests that this renewing is, in reality, an action God does on his people.⁴⁶ “It is the positive change which must follow the ‘putting off.’ The verb expresses a spiritual change, a transformation from old to new.”⁴⁷ This suggests that believers, through passive posture, allow themselves to be renewed. The present tense might emphasize that this is a lifetime process of change. Over time, one is being renewed. This is understood as a change of the mind, of the inner person, not just a change of action.⁴⁸ The next verse (24) clearly states that the consequences of an inner change are then expressed through external actions. We must be cognizant of the fact that spiritual renewal is a process. This verse implies that God is involved in the lives of believers, effecting change in their attitude and behavior.

The third infinitive (v. 24), *evndu, sasqai* (“to put on, to cloth”), is again an aorist middle.⁴⁹ This verse shows that the readers had been taught to put on a new self.

⁴⁶See also Romans 12:2.

⁴⁷Salmond, *Ephesians*, 342.

⁴⁸We read in Philippians 2:7, an undisputed letter by Paul that the word translated in Ephesians as “attitude” is translated in Philippians as “mind.” This word denotes the idea that it is through the mind that ideas and thoughts of changing are first formed by God.

⁴⁹There is disagreement as to where the aorist infinitive conveys the idea of completed action. “It is to be noticed that the two verbs get rid of and put on are both in the aorist, indicating one decisive action; the verb “renew” in verse 23 is in the present tense, indicating a continuous process.” Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians* (New York: United Bible Society,

This infinitive matches well the first with its reference to “taking off.” Some have suggested that Paul’s use of the metaphor of “taking off” and “putting on” is in reference to Christian baptism.⁵⁰ The idea is that when we become believers God expects our life attitudes and actions are to reflect our new faith.

The garment metaphor and the act of changing garments as seen in 4:22-24 of Ephesians⁵¹ are effective symbols. The idea of the old being replaced by the new is strengthened by this metaphor. The changing of clothes signifies a change of identity. In our own culture we say that the “clothes make the man.” “In this Gentile culture, clothes are seen as protection, ornament and augmentation of power. They reveal the real self. A man’s power extends to his clothes.”⁵² When clothes are changed, it suggests that personalities, identities, or stations in life are changed. If one mourns, clothes are torn. If one is repentant, sackcloth is worn. If a person goes through status change, white clothes are worn.⁵³

This language of taking off and putting on has ethical implications. “All three infinitives are dependent on the verb “taught” (4:21). These infinitives are equal to imperatives and express a command.”⁵⁴ Thus, believers are expected to carry through with making the change complete. This new man discovers his form by being created⁵⁵ “to be like God.” This creation theme echoes back to Genesis 1:27 in which God’s first creation was to make man in his image. Now, through baptism, a second creation of humanity is afforded an opportunity to become the image of God.

1982), 115. Stanley Porter, however, does not agree that the aorist infinitive carries the idea of completed action, Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1994).

⁵⁰Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook*, 115.

⁵¹See also Gal. 3:8-10.

⁵²Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 540-541.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 505.

⁵⁵For Paul’s earlier use of creation, see Ephesians 2:10 and 15.

Paul concludes by describing that man is to be like God “in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24). “Truth” here is understood as being juxtaposed to “deceitful” in verse twenty-two. This expression has its origin in the “words of truth” of the Gospel in Ephesians 1:23. The ethical element of this passage is implicit when believers are said to be created to be like God “in righteousness and holiness.” Righteousness involves the idea of integrity. In the Old Testament God said that Israel was to be righteous. “Holiness” means being set apart for God’s purpose by being different from the world. This idea is a major theme in Leviticus. “You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own” (Leviticus 20:26). Now Christians are to live by this injunction, to be holy like God and be set apart from the world for God’s purpose.

Paul directs his readers to alter their mindset. They should no longer maintain their pre-Christian attitude. So also in spiritual formation, this idea of changing the thinking process is a key element in changing the lifestyle. Paul reminded the Romans in like manner to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2).

Spiritual Formation of Ephesians 4:22-24

Controlling the mind is critical to making the changes needed to mature in Christ. The disciplines of meditation, contemplation, and transformational reading prepare the mind to incorporate change. We have seen in Ephesians, especially the first twenty-four verses of chapter four, how Paul wants his readers to embark on a life unlike that which they previously experienced. “Walking,” a major motif of this epistle, consists of a life

that follows the path or journey God asks of believers. The believers are in a process of change. Two things stand out: first, this change is not achieved by believers alone, but *through* God. The spiritual formation disciplines (e.g. prayer, silence, and solitude) prepare Christians to allow God to (re)form them; second, Christians are working to effect the desired change while God is working in them. As Christianity is not a passive religion, neither is spiritual formation a passive Christian practice. The letter to the Ephesians shows how Christians are responsible to prepare themselves in order to be receptive to God.

Verses 17-24 speak the language of spiritual formation. First, these verses reveal that the change of mind is critical for spiritual growth, generally, and transformation, specifically. The former life, expressed as “futility of the mind” and “hardening of the heart,” must be changed. Spiritual formation works for a change of the mind and heart.

Second, change comes through an understanding of Jesus Christ, who is the Truth (reality). When the mind reflects and contemplates on the Truth, it is able to change which changes the lifestyle.

The infinitives present the strongest language on how spiritual formation takes place. First, is putting off the old self with its mindset and lifestyle. Next, is the continual practice of renewing through the attitude of the mind. Spiritual formation works to keep the Christian in a continual state of renewal, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in a Christian. Last, is putting on a new person, which is a new self, a new mindset, and the subsequent new lifestyle. These infinitives define the parameters for true spiritual formation. While “putting off” and “putting on” is suggested by some scholars as a final act, much as is seen with baptism, it might be that Paul, by putting these three

infinitives together, is stressing how Christians need to ensure that they are not stagnate in their Christian living. Their life is to reflect change which is more in line with that of God. A change effected by God's own action.

This is a major challenge. For the most part, the American Restoration Movement rejects the idea of the Holy Spirit directing the steps of Christians, as this is often seen as being too emotional. The letter to the Ephesians shows that only through the Holy Spirit and his influences, will God be able to effect change in Christians so that they can become righteous and holy.

This gives a biblical perspective for spiritual growth. Realizing Ephesians' emphasis on spiritual growth and maturity, lends credence for spiritual formation as an essential focus for local churches. For the aim of spiritual formation is to aid the practitioner in growing spiritually. We now turn, in the next chapter, to examine how four authors view spiritual formation and what it suggests to them concerning Christian living.

CHAPTER FIVE

A DIALECTIC INVESTIGATION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.¹

In this chapter, we will examine spiritual formation as understood by four different authors.² We find that spiritual formation is becoming a common practice in many contemporary Protestant churches in America. What we are doing in this chapter is gaining a better understanding and appreciation of what spiritual formation can do for Christian growth. What we are asking in this chapter is why these authors felt it necessary to present these spiritual disciplines and how these are helpful for Christians.

The authors of the books we examine come from various denominational traditions and offer diverse perspectives on various disciplines and how the disciplines are advantageous in promoting spiritual growth to those who earnestly desire it. When we examine these books, we look to gain an appreciation of what the authors want to achieve from these disciplines. We also want to learn the authors' perspectives of their overall understanding of "spiritual formation."

¹Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1941), 30.

²Though Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* is considered a classic, I did not include his book in this chapter since he dealt more with the disciplines themselves than with the nature of spiritual formation.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life
by Marjorie J. Thompson

Thompson's book is one of the standards on spiritual formation. She presents seven different spiritual practices: (1) spiritual reading, (2) prayer, (3) worship, (4) fasting, (5) confession and self-examination, (6) community, and (7) hospitality. While Thompson is a Presbyterian, she states that her presentation of the practices is for an ecumenical environment.

Her first chapter, "Hunger and Thirst for Spirit,"³ deals with gaining a handle on what spiritual formation is and presents her view of it. In this chapter, Thompson describes what it means to have a spiritual life. If we were to ask concerning the nature of spirituality, Thompson would say that it is dynamic. "God's spirit is continually challenging, changing, and maturing us. It is a process of growing."⁴ Our "process" is toward the goal of acting and thinking like Jesus Christ. We were created in the image and likeness of God, but through sin, that image has become distorted. However, in Christ, we are reshaped to the pattern in which we were created.

To understand where Thompson is coming from we must first ask, "What does she mean by 'spirituality?'" She admits that *spirituality* has gained wide currency in our cultural imagination, including churches. "Protestants are attracted to the word in part because they perceive it as fresh and open to meaning."⁵ *Piety*, a word once respected, she believes now conveys the idea of moral rigidity. She also believes that the word *devotion* has suffered much the same fate. While Thompson prefers these older terms,

³Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 1-16.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 5.

she admits that because of its current acceptance it is now preferable to accept the term “spirituality.” She concludes by writing,

I prefer to begin with a more biblical phrase, the spiritual life. Scripturally speaking, the spiritual life is simply the increasing vitality and sway of God’s Spirit over us. It is a magnificent choreography of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit, moving us toward communion with both Creator and creation.⁶

She further writes that it is “conformation to the image of Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁷ She would see spiritual formation as spiritual because the Holy Spirit is actively involved in it.

We find that Thompson uses spirituality in two senses.⁸ In one sense, it is simply the capacity for spiritual life; the human capacity to respond to the Spirit of God. The other sense is more practical; it is the way we realize spiritual involvement—the conscious awareness of the work of the Spirit in us. She sees that spiritual formation begins with, depends on and ends in God; our life is *curpax Dei*,⁹ embodying divine life.

Let us look for a moment at the comment she makes here. She believes that spiritual formation is an activity that never ceases. She also believes that we continue to change and mature as we engage in spiritual formation. But one of the most important elements of spiritual formation for Thompson is that “it depends on God.” She would warn against losing the focus that it is all about God. We depend on him to grow. Thus, as she sees it, we are working with God to get the kind of goal he wants. “Christian spirituality is thus initiated and sustained by One who lives both within and beyond us . . . Spiritual growth is essentially a work of divine grace with which we are called to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., 7.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 8.

cooperate.”¹⁰ So in order to realize the growth that we need, we first must come to the realization that we are not capable of making change happen. It is through the use of spiritual formation that God is able to work with us to realize the goal. She adds the cautionary note, “Discipline does not come naturally to most of us; it must be cultivated.”¹¹ This leads us to look briefly at her last chapter, “Putting It All Together,”¹² because here, Thompson speaks of creating structure and finding order in life so that spiritual practices do not become a hit-and-miss routine.

Thompson discusses the value of using the *rule of life* structure.¹³ A concern she has is ensuring that spiritual practices do not become a disorderly practice of disciplines. The *rule* helps us acquire the discipline required to sustain spiritual discipline as a regular exercise. However, I would suggest care be taken when talking about “rules of life.” The concern is that once we start setting rules and set times that it now becomes too easy to develop spiritual programs that then become just another compartment in our life; something where specific time needs to be set aside to accomplish what needs to be done. There is nothing wrong with setting routines; we just need to take caution to avert the idea that only at such and such a time will I work on my spiritual life.

Another idea behind the *rules of life* is that one needs to make choices. Part of preparing to practice the disciplines is deciding which disciplines to choose. Thompson tenders seven possible choices. Each of our authors warns not to practice so many disciplines that we create a gluttony of disciplines. This is a concern I wonder about as I

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 9.

¹²Ibid., 137-148.

¹³The *rule of life* structure provides order so as to avoid confusion and disorderliness while practicing spiritual growth. Two classic orders are *The Rule of St. Benedict* and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

develop my paradigm. I am concerned about overloading with an excess of disciplines. The important issue is to find balance amongst the disciplines: some disciplines focus on the inner person, while others focus on the outward, while still others might focus on people whose lives intersect our lives.

Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation
by Ruth Haley Barton

Ruth Barton states that this book comes from trying to understand the longings she sometimes feels. When she would have one of these longings she would “tweak” her busy schedule to try and satisfy that longing. Finally, she realized that she had to surrender to her longings and reorder her life in order to listen to them. It was these longings that began her search for spiritual practices to establish the life rhythms that offered more of what God promised. The practices she presents are: solitude (space with God), scripture reading (*lectio divina*), prayer (intimacy with God), honoring the body (holistic living), self-examination, discernment (recognizing the presence of God), and Sabbath (the rhythm of work and rest).

Barton starts by stating that “the most basic thing we need to understand about spiritual transformation is that it is full of mystery.”¹⁴ She begins with the understanding that in truth we really do not understand everything concerning spiritual transformation. What an important principle! This brings to light the proper relationship between God and humanity. That, of course, is true, not only here, but with the entire Story of God. His revelation to us is about how humans deal with his mystery. That is what she does here. Through the use of spiritual transformation, we come before God with all his mystery. And what does Barton say? “We can be open to it, but we can’t accomplish it

¹⁴Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 11.

for ourselves.”¹⁵ For Barton, this is the beginning of an understanding on how spiritual formation works. It is the intervention of God and we only cooperate with him.

To further illustrate how we should understand the function of spiritual formation, Barton uses the illustration of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. There is a metamorphosis that causes profound changes in the character of that caterpillar. She sees spiritual formation in much the same light. There is a reference to Romans 12:2 where Paul uses the Greek word, *metamorpho, w*, to explain to Christians “Do not be conformed to this world but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind.” I would understand this as a continuation of God’s mystery at work. We change from who we were, before being a Christian, to someone who is behaving so differently that many would not recognize who we have become. For Barton spiritual transformation is just that. We are changed spiritually into someone else. We are metamorphosed to resemble the one we are now following—God.

Barton further states that “the most hopeful thing any of us can say about spiritual transformation: *I cannot transform myself*, or anyone else for that matter.”¹⁶ Barton explains that we need not worry how we do the metamorphosis. And what she says next is critical. “What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”¹⁷ We now have a good picture of how Barton’s understanding of spiritual formation unfolds. For her, it is a mystery of God and we have no control over the transformation process as we transform into the kind of person God

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 12. Emphasis is hers.

¹⁷Ibid.

desires us to be. We, for our part, create the conditions that enable us to allow that change to happen.

This next part is important to my own understanding of spiritual transformation. She states that we develop and maintain a rhythm. I have found that this is an essential element that needs to be achieved and developed to have spiritual formation.

Another of Barton's ideas concerning spiritual formation that I have emphasized regularly, is that the action we take for spiritual growth should not be undertaken as an individual achievement. I appreciate how Barton points this out when she writes, "The spiritual journey was never meant to be taken alone. . . . At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after praying and listening to God all night, he chose a small community of twelve disciples."¹⁸ She stresses just how important community is when she adds, "Our commitment to community and to spiritual friendship within that community is in itself a spiritual discipline."¹⁹ She goes on to describe how to have a meaningful "spiritual friendship." Her understanding of spiritual growth is grounded in a good community.

Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today
by Joan Chittister

Having been a former prioress in the Benedictine Sisters, Chittister addresses the principles of spiritual growth from the perspective of the Benedictine Rule. For that reason her quotes come almost entirely from the *Rule of Benedict* instead of scripture. While most of the disciplines she discusses are grounded firmly in the Benedictine tradition, she does present an excellent study of the disciplines with a profusion of Christian insights. She writes, "The Rule of Benedict has been a guide to the spiritual life for common people since the sixth century. Anything that has lasted that long and had

¹⁸Ibid., 15.

¹⁹Ibid., 16.

that kind of impact in a throwaway society is certainly worthy of consideration.”²⁰ It would be hard to disagree with that statement. She states “it is spirituality that draws us beyond ourselves to find significance and meaning in life.”²¹ Today, so many Christians are struggling to find meaning and purpose in life even though they are going to church. Spirituality can only be found when we approach God and allow him to transform us through the Holy Spirit. Many Christians, while attending church services, fail to find an avenue by which to approach God. Chittister does warn that spiritual formation can be turned into a legalistic practice, devoid of both spirituality and God. This legalistic attitude can be fueled when congregations are bound up with traditions and rules that allow no freedom.

Because of its Benedictine perspective, this book offers a unique understanding of spiritual formation that has value and longevity. There are found in Chittister’s book a number of principles from the Benedictine Rule that are helpful to any Christian, not just Benedictines, interested in developing a spiritual life. It is because of a desire to capture the Benedictine perspective of spiritual formation that this book is included here.

The disciplines Chittister discusses are: (1) prayer, (2) reflective reading of scripture, (3) community, (4) balance and simplicity, (5) humility, (6) mindfulness and awareness, (7) obedient listening, and (8) stewardship of the earth. While some of these disciplines can be found in the other books, there are also some different ones. For example, she writes of the “stewardship of the earth.” Most Protestants, especially evangelicals, might not consider this a discipline. But Chittister sees value in a discipline such as this because we not only meet God through scripture, but we also meet him

²⁰Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Pub., 1990), 4.

²¹*Ibid.*, 5.

through creation. Her chapter titled “Work: Participation in Creation” also meshes with the idea of creation. An interesting quote reads, “God the creator goes on creating through us.”²² This suggests that there is an association we have with God that involves us not only through scripture, but there is also an association with God through creation that impacts our lives. The more God is able to reach into our lives the more we become like him. Realizing that we meet God in creation gives us yet one more way to be shaped by God.

Chapter two, “Listening: The Key to Spiritual Growth,” presents an excellent discussion on the value of listening for spiritual growth. Chittister mentions that there are a number of things that need to be heard to enable spiritual growth to thrive. The scripture, of course, needs to be listened to first. However, we also need to listen to other people and the world around us. She words it as follows:

We read the Scriptures faithfully but fail to apply them. We listen to the needs of the poor but forget the reading of the gospel entirely. We prefer to hear ourselves than to listen to wiser hearts for fear they might call us beyond ourselves. Benedictine spirituality requires the medley.²³

Spirituality is listening, and sadly, many Christians do too little of it. “Listening has something to do with being willing to change ourselves and change our world. Listening is a religious discipline of the first order that depends on respect and leads to conversion.”²⁴ Chittister suggests that we learn to appreciate scripture as the voice of Christ, so then we can hear him in the office, in the kitchen, and on the street corner. Listening is needed in order to hear (God’s) wise instructions and directions. Listening is an important principle to Chittister. To her, scripture is the same as the “voice of Christ.”

²²Ibid., 87.

²³Ibid., 15.

²⁴Ibid., 19.

When we learn to listen to scripture our life becomes fortified from lesser objectives. Scripture has a way of drawing us back to God's original purpose. One need not be Benedictine to appreciate the value of listening as a discipline for growth.

Her chapter titled, "Prayer and *Lectio*: The Center and Centrifuge of Life" is a compelling chapter. It should not be surprising to find prayer as Chittister's first discipline. As the subtitle suggests, prayer is the center of life and an essential discipline for spiritual growth. Her expression on prayer brings wisdom to the understanding of prayer.

Under the bright light of broadened human consciousness, I come to realize I am not the center of the universe but I am cut from its cloth and subject to its struggles and promised its promise. I learn that prayer expands my horizons, not enwombs them. I find I bring to the microscope of prayer not simply the mood of the moment but the whole life task of being fully human.²⁵

Her thoughts on prayer and listening help us understand that prayer does not consist of simply talking to God. While we do speak in prayer, listening is a must. James said to be "quick to listen, slow to speak" (Jam. 1:19). This applies to our relationship with the Father as well as with other people. I fear that at times we tend to use prayer as a vehicle to convince God that he has an obligation to help us. We come to him with our laundry list expecting him to hear us out and fulfill our wishes. If we will pay attention to Chittister's words on prayer, we will find that prayer can become a great tool to grow by.

***The Life You Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*
by John Ortberg**

Why I chose this book soon becomes obvious to anyone interested in the subject of spiritual formation. Ortberg presents his practices in a popular reading style. He

²⁵Ibid., 32-33.

approaches the subject with seriousness, yet with a humorous tone. It could be said that this book was written with the “person on the street” in mind. Ortberg wrote this book while ministering with the Willow Creek Church in Chicago. The disciplines he proffers are: (1) celebration, (2) slowing, (3) servanthood, (4) confessions, (5) guidance from the Spirit, 6) secrecy, (7) reflection on scripture, and (8) suffering.

The objective for Ortberg is finding true and authentic spirituality. He writes that “The primary goal of spiritual life is human reformation. . . . The first goal of spiritual life is the reclamation of the human race.”²⁶ He cautions that to transform does not mean getting rich or having good information about the Bible. Transformation is a change of the heart and attitude so as to change behavior. This, he states, is “God’s work of art.” He states that God does not just repair our brokenness; he makes us new creatures. Thus, when Ortberg writes about the disciplines, he also writes about the fact that believers become new, in that God re-creates them. This is important because often people think that God just “tweaks” them after they become Christians. This is not the case at all; the truth is that God starts over again. New (created) implies beginning anew, without the old blemishes and brokenness. Ortberg wants his readers to realize that the disciplines he offers are not “makeovers” but tools to assist Christians in starting over. They simply form the Christian to be prepared for God to work with them.

In Ortberg’s view, misunderstanding the true values of disciplines adversely influences how they are practiced. To get his point across, he uses the illustration of the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, toys from Japan that have the ability to “morph” into

²⁶John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 21.

martial art warriors for justice.²⁷ As stated before, we don't just have an attitude adjustment, rather we become new creatures. Paul said, "Put on the new self, created to be like God" (Eph. 4:24). This is the primary goal of the spiritual life in Ortberg's understanding. While this is true, we need to be conscious of how many people see their life through introspection. Yes, some may understand that they need to make their life more spiritual. This can be where they run into trouble. They recognize their "spiritual life" as one component of their whole life, alongside, yet separate from their many other life components: financial, vocational, educational, recreational, and family. Thus, they feel they need to "make time" for their spiritual life. In addressing this, Ortberg writes, "The truth is that the term *spiritual life* is simply a way of referring to one's life—every moment and facet of it—from God's perspective."²⁸ This, then, is a perception problem. If not addressed adequately, efforts to get people working on their spiritual life will only remain a church program. It is necessary to push for the idea that true spiritual living strikes for a "balance" in life. It is not a component of life; rather it is what regulates life.

An interesting section of Ortberg's book warns against expecting people *not to change*, or being surprised when they do. He calls this a distortion of spirituality, which in turn will become "life or death to the soul."²⁹ The problem lies in misunderstanding what is the center of the spiritual life. If we expect to change we need to know where the center of our life is. Ortberg shows how Jesus taught that the center of life is the heart. The deepest longings of life are from the heart. They are not fat bank accounts, fast cars, or fancy vacations. If we take Ortberg a step further, we would say that a key element to

²⁷Ibid., 19.

²⁸Ibid., 15.

²⁹Ibid., 35.

spiritual growth is God gaining control of the heart. Jesus warned that “Where your treasure is, there your heart is also” (Matt. 6:21). So we must learn that through using spiritual disciplines we will learn what is important enough to treasure, thus controlling the heart.

In a later chapter, Ortberg writes of “Developing Your Own ‘Rule of Life.’”³⁰ This same principle was addressed by Thompson. While most people are trying to “order their life,” he says that what they really need to do is “order the heart.” If the heart is balanced, then a plan for growing spiritually will be developed. I would augment his thought on developing a rule with the idea that this actually implies *creating* the proper rhythm of life. It is from the rhythm of living that “we can grow more intimately connected to God.”³¹ This will come about by establishing a routine. Spiritual growth does not happen accidentally; it comes from a well-ordered and well-planned life. But, it is imperative to remember that what is really being said is that spiritual formation does not happen at set times, but are habits and practices that control the rest of life. For one to experience spiritual growth there needs to be no haphazard or randomness in applying the spiritual disciplines. “We need a plan for transformation,”³² and setting a rhythm is key to that plan.

Again, I offer a caution to Ortberg’s thought of building a “rule of life.” My concern is to avoid compartmentalizing our life by setting up a period of time to practice disciplines. When we do this we only promote the idea that there is a time to practice “spiritual living” and a time to get on with the rest of living. To safeguard against this, the idea needs to be emphasized that we continually “practice the presence of God.”

³⁰Ibid., 93.

³¹Ibid., 201.

³²Ibid., 200.

Thus, while we will have a “rule of life,” it is to be stressed that this does not simply mean a period of time to live spiritually, but it is to become a life experience.

Each of these books offers a wealth of thoughts on understanding the need, value, and essence of spiritual growth and spirituality. Each, from their diverse perspectives, challenges us to find disciplines best suited for our particular situations. Care should be taken, however, not to try and incorporate all the disciplines these authors have presented. Such excess will not be beneficial to our goal of achieving spiritual growth. It is, rather, establishing a rhythm and balance in life and practice of disciplines that help realize that growth.

CHAPTER SIX

A SPIRITUAL FORMATION PARADIGM FOR CHURCHES OF THE STONE—CAMPBELL MOVEMENT

Your Lord is more present to you than you are to yourself! Furthermore, His desire to give Himself to you is greater than your desire to lay hold of Him.¹

In this final chapter we present a model of spiritual growth for churches of the Stone—Campbell Movement. This model for spiritual growth serves as a paradigm to help churches get beyond the rationality of their tradition. This spiritual paradigm will help those desiring to find spiritual growth in the Lord and create rhythm in a chaotic life.

One of the first challenges in creating a spiritual growth model for restoration churches is being able to overcome the obstacle of believing that being Spirit-led equates to being emotional. Kenneth Boa refers to this experiential phenomenon with which the early Restoration Movement was encumbered. “The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the growth of an experiential approach to the spiritual life that is based on the believer’s new identity in Christ.”² Boa then goes on, however, to explain that this “identification with Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection means that our old life has been exchanged for the life of Christ. This approach to spirituality moves from a works

¹Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* Library of Spiritual Classics, vol. 2 (Sargent, GA: Christian Books Publishing House), 1975.

²Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 101.

to a grace orientation and from legalism to liberty.”³ Thus, it is after becoming a Christian that one’s life begins changing as a result of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their life. Our concern here is not with the works of the Spirit before one becomes a Christian, but after one has “put on the new self, created to be like God” (Eph. 4:24). For this dissertation, the concern lies with how a Christian’s life changes to become more Christ-like. While many churches help people to prepare for death, they often fail to help when it comes to preparing people to live. Thus, our concern is not whether one has the Spirit guiding them to an understanding of the Gospel and salvation, but rather what the Spirit does after one becomes a Christian. The primary concern in this dissertation is finding ways to live a spiritual life. Ortberg made this point plain in his observation concerning the prime objective of spiritual formation.

The primary goal of spiritual life is human transformation. It is not making sure people know where they are going after they die, or helping them have a richer interior life . . . Let’s put first things first. The first goal of spiritual life is the reclamation of the human race.⁴

If we fail to identify the priorities of the Christian life, we fail to engage in those things that matter most to God. If we fail to focus on matters of importance, we will often concern ourselves in matters of lesser importance.

To show this, we saw how, in chapter two, the Stone – Campbell movement placed strong emphasis on conversion, rather than on how the Holy Spirit works in one’s life. Since emotionalism was attributed to the Spirit, it became natural for churches of the Restoration Movement to diminish the influence of the Holy Spirit and place almost total reliance upon the mental prowess of reason. It is argued that since God made

³Ibid.

⁴John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 21.

humanity with the capability to reason, humanity could then, by reading the Bible and applying rational thought, deduce how one is to be saved. This, however, fails to address the bigger question of how one is to live the Christian life. I have repeatedly suggested that by pursuing the path Robert Richardson sought, churches will discover the appropriate balance between justification and sanctification.

Chapter three looked at an early Christian form of discipline called *lectio divina*. Full developed around the fifth century AD, it was a common practice among the Desert Fathers and Mothers as a tool for Christian maturity. It was John Cassian, one of the Desert Fathers, who would introduce this practice to the West. It became an essential element for many orders in the Catholic Church such as the Benedictine and Jesuit. *Lectio* is actually part of what we understand as the contemplative prayer. This form of prayer helps us approach God by removing the concerns of the world around us and realizing the presence of God. *Lectio* enables one to achieve the sense of God's presence. There are four stages, or movements, to *lectio*, each of which is a discipline of spiritual formation on its own. These stages are spiritual reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. In *lectio*, they are practiced together seamlessly. It was never intended that one would practice only a portion of this discipline; for instance, that one would pray, but not move on to contemplation. Our examination of this practice enables us to better understand its usefulness and helps realize that *lectio* promotes what we advocate in this dissertation. Although spiritual formation practices might be new to the Restoration tradition, they have been used by Christians for centuries.

We noticed in chapter four that Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, was most concerned that his readers make the life changes expected of them. His admonition of

“walking worthy” is followed by an explanation of why they were to do this. He showed that Christ had given the Ephesians spiritual gifts that enabled them to help one another, as a community, to walk in a commendable fashion. In a number of passages in Ephesians four, Paul implied that faith is not static but progressive. Paul used such expressions as, “becom[ing] mature, *attaining* to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13); “we will in all things *grow up* into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (v. 15); and “to be *continually made new* in the attitude of your mind” (v. 23). All these passages point to the fact that Christianity is not confined to the idea of being a one-time event of conversion. Conversion must be understood as just the start of the Christian life, when a Christian puts “off your old self” (v. 22). Following their conversion, Christians are to begin their transformation into an image of Christ.

Let it be understood that spiritual formation is a tool only, designed to prepare Christians for the Spirit to mold them into the image God desires. It must be clearly understood that people do not transform themselves. This is made apparent when Paul wrote to the Romans stating that they needed to stop being conformed to the world’s values and “*be transformed* by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The verb in this passage is passive and implies that Christians allow God to alter their life. Thus, through the disciplines of spiritual formation, we prepare ourselves to be shaped by the Spirit, conformed into God’s image.

In chapter five we looked at the practices of spiritual formation that were described in four different books. This enabled us to view disciplines for spiritual formation vis á vis contemporary times as juxtaposed to the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. From these books we learned of disciplines which deal with the inner and outer

person. The authors of these books emphasized that the heart is the center of spiritual formation. For example, in the chapter titled “Lie with a Well-ordered Heart,” John Ortberg challenges the idea that if people want to get their life balanced they need only to get their personal priorities correct. Instead, Ortberg suggests that one needs to reorder the heart. He illustrates this with a quote from Augustine: “a miser prefers gold to justice; it’s through no fault of the gold. For although it’s good, it can be loved with an evil as well as a good love.”⁵ The problem of a disordered life lies not in an external schedule but with an evil heart. A change of the heart is needed, and spiritual disciplines help facilitate this change. Spiritual disciplines prepare the heart to be transformed by God.

Marjorie Thompson, too, wrote of needing to manage one’s heart to be receptive to change. She suggests that, “When it comes to spiritual growth, human beings are much like these plants. We need structure and support . . . Without a rule of life, very little of what you have been reading and exploring in this book will prove to be of lasting value to you.”⁶

Thompson also strongly emphasized that spiritual formation is a process that occurs over an extensive period of time; to be more precise, a life-time. We are not suggesting practicing spiritual formation as a six-month church curriculum, then discontinue because those involved have accomplished their goal. Rather, this is a lifetime practice of striving for Christian growth and is one where the church is involved. We should stress that spiritual formation is not to be categorized as a curriculum, because

⁵Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, 198.

⁶Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: The Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 137.

most curriculums are not intended to be long-term. Spiritual formation, instead, is a lifetime process where Christians, as a community, support one another in this journey.

Thus, spiritual formation is both a profitable and indispensable practice. The disciplines presented here are biblical and practical. Churches might need to be re-educated and oriented on how they must view and understand church activities so that spiritual formation does not get grouped with church programs such as evangelism or biblical training, which might run for only a few months. Spiritual formation is to be done habitually and with dedication, thus permitting God to intervene in our lives.

The disciplines presented here are not an exhaustive list;⁷ however, these disciplines are chosen as supportive for Christians of Restoration churches. None of these are original with me. Some are ancient disciplines, classics, of the church. The seven disciplines for spiritual growth presented here deal both with the inward relationship with God and the outward service to others.

The seven disciplines are: meditation and service, prayer and reading, fasting and community, and journaling. Six of these disciplines are selected, not only because they are beneficial standing alone, but because, when coupled with a second discipline, they together establish rhythm. It is suggested that journaling be practiced in conjunction with each of the other disciplines. I would suggest that when anyone is selecting disciplines, they also consider how each discipline is balanced by a second discipline. While I want the six to be understood as working in conjunction with its partner, I will be describing each as a separate discipline.

⁷Calhoun lists 62 different disciplines and 7 different categories. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

Meditation

In a culture and a tradition where life is usually lived in the “fast lane,” there is little time allotted for a discipline of this nature. Yet, in the Bible we find that meditation is practiced a great deal. Meditation is a discipline often mentioned in the Old Testament: “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalms 1:2); “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:10); “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight (Psalms 10:17); “May my meditation be pleasing to him” (Psalms 104:34). It is not possible to know God, nor his desires for us, if we are too busy working, planning, and doing. This practice brings rhythm into our life when it counters our fast pace; when it slows us down. It is this rhythm that displaces chaos and allows for the peace of God to enter. Too often people find themselves so busy helping and serving others that they do not find the time to help themselves. We can see this rhythm used when Luke places two stories in juxtaposition. Luke 10:25-37 contains the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is then countered by the succeeding story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. We see rhythm in these two stories as they show the importance of helping people with physical needs, yet allowing time for our spiritual needs. Each gospel shows Jesus helping people, but also allowing time to be alone, if not for prayer, then to simply slow down (Mark 6:31). In Acts, we read where Paul chose to walk from Troas to Assos while the others went by boat. They later met him at Assos and took him on board. The verse reads, “We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos where we were going to take Paul on board. He made this arrangement because he was going there on foot” (Acts 20:13). This was not a long distance, and it was very unlikely that there were any towns along the

way. This was simply time for Paul to be alone before meeting with the elders from Ephesus, then going on to Jerusalem and his subsequent arrest. If we do not slow down, we cannot meditate, because our mind is racing. We need time for silence and meditation. It prepares the mind to accept God's help.

It is easy enough to say that God is seeking us, and even to stress how central this understanding is to Christianity. But it is harder to realize that we have to prepare so that God can break through to us. Meditation is simply the way we prepare, setting up the conditions that can help to make this possible. . . . It is the process of opening ourselves to the realm of nonphysical reality in which God can touch us far more directly than in the physical world.⁸

Meditation is the door through which we gain access to God, allowing him to work in our life. Meditation also helps prepare us for other disciplines.

It is natural to think of silence and solitude as components of meditation. As humans we need time to get away, to let down, to just be ourselves. When tension is reduced, it then becomes possible to read, journal, reflect, and pray without life's issues crowding into our mind. We must not think of meditation as simply emptying our mind so that there is nothing there. We are rather opening our mind up to God and his presence. We are getting rid of our preoccupation so we will better be able to focus on God.

Meditation can also be practiced as part of the church's worship service. Since many who attend worship services have busy lifestyles, we can utilize some time at the beginning of worship service for slowing down in order to receive God's grace in the rest of the worship services.

Practice

First, get into a comfortable position in a chair and begin to relax, becoming aware of the body, silence and stillness. In order to get relaxed, take a few deep breaths.

⁸Morton T. Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence: A Guide to Christian Meditation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 8.

Feel the diaphragm expand, and then slowly expel the air. It is important to set a rhythm of breathing. We must never forget the importance of establishing a rhythm in our lives, even in our breathing. Once we become relaxed, we can begin to empty the mind of issues and thoughts. If it becomes difficult to keep the mind centered, recite the Jesus Prayer: “Jesus Christ, savior, have mercy on me a sinner.” This prayer helps to center the mind in order to release any issues or tensions that may be pressing. Once the mind becomes free from clutter and tension, begin to enjoy the presence of God. One should remain in this state for 5 to 10 minutes.

Meditation can proceed in a couple of ways. One is to picture a narrative section of a passage in the gospels. Let the mind be free to picture the scene: smells, colors, conversations, and faces. Imagine Jesus is looking at you or speaking to you in that setting. During this time, ask yourself, “How am I reacting as Jesus speaks to me?” “What do I want to say to Jesus?” “How do I react as he looks at me?” “Did he touch a nerve?” “Did I feel him looking into my life and seeing the pain of a broken life?” Become aware of any emotions that surface during these times. You could record these thoughts and feelings in a journal, as part of your reflection on this verse, or verses.

A second way to meditate is, after getting relaxed and emptying the mind of any thoughts or concerns, becoming aware of God’s presence. Take note of any feelings or thoughts that surface and ask, “Is this God speaking?”

After a period of time, go into prayer, asking the Spirit to guide the prayer. This way we entrust God as the agent of prayer. When finished with the meditation, take a little time and give thanks to God for the quietness and peace you enjoyed.

Meditation can also be practiced in a community. As a small group, meditation can be done to prepare the mind of the participants for other practices, such as prayer, scripture reading, or journaling.

Spiritual Reading

The value of reading scripture cannot be over-emphasized. However, it should not always mean reading to gain knowledge, as is the practice in Restoration tradition. The goal of this reading is to “listen to the text,” not getting a handle on the text or getting our mind around the text. This reading is slow, deliberate, and reflective. It will help us follow Paul’s injunction to “be renewed.” When we allow scripture to affect us and shape us, it then begins to affect our attitude and actions.

The aim of spiritual reading is to put ourselves into the Story. Everyone has a story. People are storytellers. When we go to church and hear the Bible read or listen to the sermon, our story is incorporate into the Story. The idea here is for the Story to have influence on our personal stories. Susanne Johnson suggests that “Christians are shaped by three basic texts of story: (1) life story, (2) cultural story, and (3) Christian Story.”⁹ While all of these are important, it is the Christian Story that gets emphasized and utilized through transformational reading of the text. This happens in no greater way than through a spiritual reading of the biblical text.

If the purpose of reading is to gather facts, formulate doctrine, or to read the entire Bible in a year, the pattern of reading is formed accordingly. Usually, the pace is quick in order to cover a fair amount of text. But, if the point of reading is to allow the text to influence us, then it is necessary that the rate of reading be slowed considerably, allowing

⁹Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 90.

the text to wash over us. Many refer to this as “transformational reading.” This allows the scripture to effect transformation of life. In the amount of time it once took to read the Gospel of Matthew, one might read just the beatitudes or even a part of the beatitudes. As we read, questions about how the text applies to life will be asked and addressed. This allows time for the text to soak in and ruminate in our mind. This also allows us to gain a better knowledge of God and Christ. In Ephesians Paul refers to this idea when he wrote,

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to *know this love that surpasses knowledge*—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19, emphasis added).

This knowledge is gained when we allow the text to fill our mind and life through a slow deliberate reading of the text.

Spiritual reading can be done by a congregation through having a passage read aloud during worship service and allow time for members to reflect on the passage and its relevance in their lives.

Practice

Before reading the Bible, spend about 5 minutes meditating and relaxing. Empty the mind of stressors of the day and any issues that might cause a lack of concentration. When relaxed, slowly read a selected passage of scripture. It works best to pre-determine what will be read for a number of days ahead, such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Letter to the Ephesians, or the Psalms of Ascent. This gives continuity and regularity to the readings, preventing them from becoming random or without purpose. This rhythm in reading gives continuity. While reading, become aware of feelings or emotions that might surface. Spend time on these feelings. Ask questions: “Why do I feel like this?”

“Why am I uncomfortable dealing with this passage?” “Why does this passage make me feel angry, sad, or frustrated?” This moves the reading from the head to the heart. It allows God to use the passage to shape and form you. It is good to later journal on any feelings you had. This helps to connect with these feelings and so understand why you had them.

If formative reading is being practiced in a small group, after reading the text, the group discusses how the text made them feel and why they felt that way. This would then be followed with journaling and prayer.

Prayer

Prayer is an essential element for Christian living and spiritual formation. It is through prayer that we communicate with God, asking him to be involved in our lives. We need God in order to have spiritual growth. Luke 11 teaches that prayer is something to be learned. We are not born with the ability to pray. Luke 11:1-10 tells us that it is not just the words that are important, but also the attitude. When the disciples found Jesus praying, they realized they had more to learn about prayer. Many today do not know how to pray as Jesus prayed.

What is prayer and how is it to be taught? Jesus began teaching the disciples with a few simple words, words that focused on God and righteousness. Prayer is not theology, but a practice. Jesus did not explain what to do or why they were to do it. Rather, he gave a model to follow.

Foster, in his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, presents twenty-one different forms of prayers. One example he offers is what he calls the “Simple Prayer.”¹⁰

¹⁰Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, Pub., 1992) 7-15.

He writes, “Simple Prayer involves ordinary people bringing ordinary concerns to a loving and compassionate Father. There is no pretense in Simple Prayer.”¹¹ In presenting prayer as an integral element to spiritual growth, this Simple Prayer is where one would begin. While there are other types of prayers, this is basic. It evolves from a hurt and broken life. Still writing about Simple Prayer, Foster says, “Very simply, we begin right where we are in our families, on our jobs, with our neighbors and friends.”¹²

Another form of prayer Foster calls the “Formation Prayer.” This prayer asks God to help form us, to change us. Many times we approach God as an equal provider, a dispenser of goods; however, there are times when we need to come to God letting him change us, asking him for nothing. Foster warns not to “overstate the place of prayer in the formation of ‘holy habits.’ Prayer by itself is severely limited in the good it can accomplish. It is only a part—albeit an important part—of a much larger whole.”¹³ As a discipline for spiritual formation, it is important to recognize the importance of prayer. While not the “final” solution, it needs to be acknowledged as an important element for change.

Although prayer is communication with God, care must be taken to ensure that talking *with* God does not become talking *to* God. Early in our Christian life, prayer is what we say to God. Hopefully, we come to realize, later, that prayer is also listening to God. We can listen to God in many situations. We hear God through circumstances in our life. We might hear God speak through others as we listen to them and contemplate on what they say. Then there are times when ideas enter our mind as God places in us thoughts, suggestions, and maybe even solutions to problems. Others might hear God in

¹¹Ibid., 10.

¹²Ibid., 11.

¹³Ibid., 58.

their dreams. In order to better hear God, prayer sometimes needs to be made in solitude. This releases us from self-concerns and worries. Then we can comfortably come into the presence of God. For spiritual formation this is important. In order for God to be the “potter,” we must become the “clay.” Formation Prayer is an important step in creating such an attitude. Prayer, as suggested here, allows for time of meditation. By first meditating, we permit God to lead our prayers, whether it is the Simple Prayer, the Formation Prayer, or any other form.

Practice

While there are a number of different types of prayers, here our focus is on acknowledging the presence and love of God. I refer to this prayer as adoration. This is not a prayer that centers on petitions for our needs or the needs of others. In prayers of adoration, the focus is on the relationship with God. It expresses our thoughts and feelings for God. This can be done in two ways. We can give glory to God for what he has done for us, or, in praise, we give glory to God for who he is. We should not focus too much on the distinction, but understand that in practice they are more likely to weave themselves into our prayer. Usually, the latter will lead to the former. The prayer of adoration moves us away from praying and focusing on our needs and wants, and lets us recognize who God is and our relationship with him. This is a natural lead-in to the simple prayer. While in this practice I suggest the adoration prayer, others can be practiced as needs calling for other types of prayers arise. This prayer gets us before God, but not calling on him to give. We simply want to come into his presence.

In community, the small group will pray to God for what he means to them, and the importance of their community in Christ. The focus is on how God forms community

to resemble himself and the trinity, and the value of the community to being formed into God's image.

Spiritual Journaling

Journaling is actually a very common practice today. It is used, not just by Christians, but also by many writing from a nonreligious perspective. Journaling is used for a number of purposes. It is used to record moods and to record what happens in our life, much like a diary. But journaling is also “a tool for self-discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror for the soul, a place to generate and capture ideas, a safety valve for the emotions.”¹⁴

For our purpose, journaling aids in defining the direction one will take to achieve spiritual growth. “It helps focus the mind and heart on issues of growth with the aim of discerning what God is doing in one's life. By using a journal, we come in touch with our cutting edges of growth.”¹⁵ Journaling records what happens in life and the thoughts and reflections on the importance of these events. Writing in a journal helps us become keenly aware of what is going on around us, how we are reacting, and why. It allows us to become intensely aware of how and when emotions arise and how these emotions are handled.

Journaling can also be used to reflect on what we read, whether from the Bible or other spiritual readings, and to record the reactions and emotions which come from these readings. When we wrestle with our thoughts and emotions, we become aware of God's presence. We could use journaling to ask a question such as, “Why did God have me

¹⁴Ron Klug, *How to Keep a Spiritual Journal: A Guide to Journal Keeping for Inner Growth and Personal Discovery* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2002), 7.

¹⁵Richard Peace, *Spiritual Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God* (Hamilton, MA: Navpress, 1995), 9.

read these verses?” or record questions that might arise from the verses read. These are ways we might interact with the text through journaling in order to open ourselves up to the influences of the Story.

Finally, journaling becomes a vehicle for prayer as we record our prayers. In the Bible there are plenty of examples of those who journaled their life. The most obvious is the Psalms, where writers like King David and others wrote down their thoughts, reflections, and prayers to God. The writings of Ecclesiastes (Kohaleth) and the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) may also be read as spiritual journals.

There are a number of ways to journal. For our purpose here, journaling is used to record thoughts and feelings. After meditating, or spiritual reading, we write our feelings, thoughts, pains or joys. In this way journaling helps to heal hurts; to express inner feelings when they cannot, or should not, be expressed verbally, and to dialogue with oneself when life becomes confusing, painful, or just uncertain. Later a journal is read as further reflection and prayer.

Practice

The mechanics of journaling are important as they provide the structure and manner in which one writes. While it is best to write daily, this often is not possible. Try to journal at least three times a week. This allows for the story to form and keep a sense of freshness, while not making it a burden. Find a place where you are alone to assure silence in order that reflection and prayer can be without distraction. If half-hour blocks of time are available, this is best. The basic problem is knowing what to write about. The process begins by asking for God’s direction, then following the Holy Spirit’s guidance. What is desired in journaling is to discover your story, and hopefully its place

in the Story. This is done in a number of ways: record daily events, write about feelings experienced, reflect on past history to understand its effect on who you are today, write down insights or thoughts, or to reflect on your family history. We have already mentioned writing our reflections and feelings from scripture readings. To differentiate the different styles of journaling, we might use a different journal for different topics or styles.

I would suggest taking time to read journals others have published from which we can learn. One such suggested reading is Henri Nouwen's *the Genesee Diary*.¹⁶ He presents quality examples of how to journal, and different formats for journaling.

Journaling is also valuable in community. After deciding the topic for the journaling session, allow 15 to 20 minutes for participants to write in their journals. Next, for 15 to 20 minutes, they share with the group what they wrote. Then, the remainder of the time they tell what they gained from their writing time. This allows those who are just beginning to journal an opportunity to learn from those more experienced. Each person will develop his or her own particular technique for writing, and the group affords them the opportunity to share these different styles. Groups will grow together spiritually as they share their spiritual journeys through writing.

Fasting

One discipline seldom practiced in Christian circles today is fasting. The pain and harshness of this practice are enough to discourage many. Fasting was a regular practiced in the Old Testament at times of mourning and national repentance. It was also practiced when they needed strength and mercy to survive. Fasting was a regular practice

¹⁶Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (New York: Double Day, 1986).

of the Jews in the days of Jesus. In the Gospels we see fasting as a Jewish form of spiritual discipline, albeit an abused discipline. Fasting was also practiced by the early church. During his ministry, Jesus was challenged because his disciples were not fasting. After explaining that they would not fast as long as he was living, he then said, “But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; in those days they will fast” (Luke 5:35). Then, in Acts, we read that the church in Antioch was worshiping and fasting when the Holy Spirit called out Saul and Barnabas for a missionary trip (Acts 13:2).

Fasting might be viewed as too harsh or too ascetic for our modern sensibilities. Thus, some today do not consider it a valuable discipline. Yet, what discipline has a more gripping effect on us? Hunger heightens awareness. Fasting, as shown in Acts 13, can be practiced in concert with prayer and worship. When we are not eating, we are better able to focus on praying. “Fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained.”¹⁷ Fasting helps us focus on God for the development of spiritual formation. Jesus fasted and prayed as he resisted temptation in the desert. As a discipline, fasting is valuable for its heightened self-awareness.

There are many today who fast in preparation for coming event such as Easter. This is referred to by many as Lent. Fasting focuses the church on what Jesus did for us and how he ultimately gave his life as the definitive sacrifice.

Practice

Because of dietary restrictions, some may need to limit their fasting to half a day or 24 hours. Others might need to add some nutrition to their fluid intake. People should

¹⁷Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Pub., 1978), 48.

begin with a partial fast. Foster suggests a lunch-to-lunch fast, drinking fruit juice only. After three to four weeks of fasting a few hours one day a week, one can then move to a twenty-four hour fast with water only. Only after the body has been prepared does one fast for more days at a time. During this time of fasting, focus on Jesus, not on the fast. Be receptive to what God is saying to you. Do not tell anyone that you are fasting except those who need to know. This will keep the fast from becoming an opportunity to impress others with your “righteous act.”

Fasting can also be done as a community. If the setting is a retreat, the fast could be for one or two meals for those who want to fast and are physically able to. If the setting is a church small group, then the group can fast together over a prescribed period of time.

Community Service

It is important to realize that spiritual formation does not strictly relate to our private well-being. Jesus’ ministry consisted of helping people who were not able to help themselves. Today we should understand that the service we do for others is simply an extension of Jesus’ ministry. Helping the disenfranchised is a spiritual discipline. Service is helping people who are, for whatever reason, unable to help themselves. James saw taking care of those in society most vulnerable as an essential element of Christianity: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to *look after orphans and widows in their distress* and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (Jam. 1:27 - 2:1 emphasis mine). This discipline might involve feeding people at a soup kitchen or handing out blankets and coats to those living on the street. It might be going to the home of the elderly and cleaning their house or tending their yard. Helping

others helps us to focus on God. We realize that God resides with the people we serve. Perhaps in no other way do we understand God better than when we are involved in the lives of people. We are then seeing them as God see them. Caring for people and healing them was not just a form of ministry for Jesus. It was a discipline. As Jesus had compassion for people, so we need to extend our compassion. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches this principle very clearly. Christianity is about helping those unable to care for themselves. Serving others develops godliness within us. “Of all the classical spiritual disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility.”¹⁸ As Jesus was the humble servant (Phil. 2:6), so, by following Jesus’ example of helping people, we become more like him in serving humanity. “The Spirit of Jesus is a compassionate, serving Spirit that always works for the good of others. Jesus maintains that radical love for others demonstrates whether we know God or not.”¹⁹

Practice

Service can be practiced either as an individual act or a community, in the form of a small group activity. It would be best if an activity of service could be practiced consistently, at least once a month. This sets a rhythm of service in our life. It might include regular visits to a rest home or visiting an elderly couple at their home, maybe for the purpose of cleaning the house or working in the yard. Perhaps it would be feeding the homeless at a local shelter. One church I attended provided babysitting services twice a month for parents of autistic children. Making service a routine practice allows it to become a part of life’s rhythm.

¹⁸Ibid., 113.

¹⁹Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 145.

For our practice here, two or three couples go to the homes of elderly once a month and help with house chores. While some vacuum, sweep and mop the floor, and clean the bathroom, others would do necessary maintenance work around the house such as fix loose shingles, repair broken appliances or work in the yard.

Community of Believers

I believe there is an important injunction stated and restated by Paul. We tend to downplay the importance of community within our Christian life. For the past two centuries, there has been a growing sense of individualism which has become a basic component of American culture. People today speak of “personal rights.” One of the main arguments in favor of abortion is the idea that a woman has the right to control her own body. The individualism we witness today is far removed from what Paul wrote about concerning churches and the Christian life. Take notice of what he wrote to the Ephesians. “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as *each of the parts* does its work” (Eph. 4:16, emphasis added). The church in Ephesians was not composed of individuals working separately from each other, attempting to build up their own faith. Paul would expect that any church which read Ephesians would understand that in order for the individual members to obtain real growth, a community would need to be formed. This is the same argument Paul made to the Romans. “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Rom. 12:4-5). Paul never thought that a Christian would speak of his own “*personal* faith in Christ,” or worse, of Jesus as “my *personal* Lord and savior.” We, rather, are *his* servants in the

body. A popular saying today states that it takes a village (community) to raise a child.

So it is with spiritual formation. It takes a community to form Christ in Christians.

Though many of the disciplines presented can be done in private and, indeed, many are practiced alone, it remains important not to lose the sense of community. Thus, I suggest practicing some of these disciplines as a community. If practiced in small groups, at a spiritual retreat, or on a weekend retreat, disciplines such as reading, journaling, and praying would be conducive to community participation. Service such as singing at a rest home, feeding the poor, and visiting the shut-ins certainly might be more effective if done as a group.

The advantage of community is that when people come together they form a bond of support. The Old Testament always understood that as individuals went so Israel went. It was always better to be with others than alone.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

It is also in communities that Christians can keep the admonition to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15). Also, if God is going to speak to us through others, we need to be around those people. There are times when we should be alone. Jesus made a practice of being alone, sometimes praying all night. Sometimes, he even removed his disciples from the crowds just to rest. But when talking about living the Christian life and practicing spiritual formation, it is important to look to the Christian community as the environment for spiritual growth to occur and to find the help and support needed.

The early church understood the Trinity as community. They would “describe the Trinity using the term *perichoresis* (*peri* – circle, *choresis* – dance): the Trinity was an eternal dance of Father, Son and Spirit sharing love, honor, happiness, joy and respect.”²⁰ This is our best and most perfect model for living as community.

Practice

This is an activity the church needs to ensure happens. God intended from the beginning that mankind not live alone: “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 3:18). We learn community from God himself: three in one. In Ephesians four Paul wrote that the church is to use their individual gifts not to their own benefit, but to ensure that they, as a community, become spiritually mature. God designed the church as a community for Christians to grow to their individual maximum capacity. There needs to be activities that are inclusive of everyone. It becomes especially important for those who are less involved to become involved. One of the principles for church growth is having a task or responsibility for every person. This provides the attitude of inclusion. The church can have potlucks and other fellowship activities that allow time for the congregation to assemble. Work parties at the building, or picnics, also cultivate time together. It would be good if the congregation goes to a retreat center and spends a few days practicing spiritual disciplines in the quiet, as a community. It is important that congregations find as many ways as possible to be together in order to form bonds of fellowship with one another. The contemporary push for small groups will do a lot toward developing a community everyone can get involved in.

²⁰Brian C. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 56.

Final Thoughts on Spiritual Formation

Spiritual growth is not something a person can achieve in 10 minutes, 30 minutes, or 24 hours. It is a lifetime commitment. Michael Casey was speaking of spiritual formation when he wrote, “*Lectio* is a sober, long-term understanding and, as such, better reflected in sustained attention.”²¹ Spiritual formation should be approached as an exercise that first becomes a habit, then a lifestyle. It would be wise for churches to establish “spiritual formation small groups.” There is no ideal plan to live spiritually except to, as Nike says it, “Just Do It.” Churches of the Restoration Movement need to realize there is more to Christianity than correct doctrine. There is the need for a lifetime of “sanctifying” our life, becoming holy before the Father. He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life. If we are able to look beyond church traditions, we can see the wondrous world God has given us.

While the spiritual world is beautiful, it is also dangerous unless we prepare ourselves to live “in the image of Christ.” The danger comes when we are asked to change who we are, to become who we have not yet prepared ourselves to become. We must be certain that we are ready to change, to give up what we value in order to conform to Christ. It is only through spiritual formation that this can happen.

Concluding Thoughts

To tell someone else how to become spiritual or how to grow spiritually is a most humbling experience. We are all far from being perfect. Although I now have a better grasp of what spiritual formation means as a result of this study, I also know that I need to have the disciplines as a significant ingredient of my own Christian walk. For I, too,

²¹Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, a member of the HarperCollins Pub., 1996), 9.

need to learn to “walk worthy of the calling” I have received. In a sense, we are all beginning students of spiritual formation, and always will be beginners.

I need to emphasize a point I have brought up throughout this dissertation – that life is a cycle of seasons, a rhythm. In the first chapter of Genesis we read about the cycle of days and nights, the seven-day week, and the seasons.²² God built into our human existence this scheme of rhythm. Writing about this thought found in Genesis one, Eugene Peterson said:

When we speak of this text aloud, or listen to it being spoken (which is how most people would have done it in biblical times), the text gets inside us. We enter the rhythm of creation time and find that we are internalizing a creation sense of orderliness and connectedness and resonance that is very much like what we get from music.²³

He further added that, “We are created to live rhythmically in the rhythms of creation.”²⁴

This is further brought out in Ecclesiastes. Here, our author wrote, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). It is imperative that we learn from these passages and others, that we must work with and within the rhythms of our life. We see this in Jesus’ ministry. He ministered to people, withdrew for a while, and then returned again to ministering.²⁵ This cycle allowed Jesus to work and not be “burned out,” reducing the risk of his ministry becoming ineffective. Let us imitate Jesus. Ruth Haley Barton writes that there are four rules that will make rhythm effective in our life. First, “An effective rhythm of spiritual practices will be very *personal*.”²⁶ As no two persons are identical, neither is their spiritual life similar.

²²Sabbath is only alluded to here and builds on the Exodus time table of a cycle of weeks (Sabbath), the year (the Passover) and 50 years (the Jubilee).

²³Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2005), 67.

²⁴Ibid., 68.

²⁵Mark 6.

²⁶Barton, *Sacred Rhythm*, 148.

Second, she writes that “Our rhythm of spiritual practices also needs to be ruthlessly *realistic* in view of our stage of life.”²⁷ The life rhythm of a couple with children will be different from a retired couple. Barton’s third rule is that “An effective rhythm of spiritual practices will also be *balanced* among the disciplines that come easily to us and those that stretch us.”²⁸ Extroverts will be stretched to practice solitude and silence while introverts will feel stretched by being involved in a community. This rhythm ensures a balance in life’s rhythm. Her last rule is that “It is important that we enter into it with a great deal of *flexibility*.”²⁹ This will help ensure that a legalistic attitude does not develop. The objective is to learn how to use the rhythms in our life and in the life of our congregation in order to grow spiritually.

When we learn to work with our rhythms and find the balance in our religious community, we will find spiritual formation an effective and useful tool to help Christians grow spiritually.

²⁷Ibid., 149.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 150.

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