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Reformation
& **REVIVAL**
JOURNAL

**SPIRITUAL
FORMATION**

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A SELECT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tom Schwanda

Spiritual formation has become a very popular topic today. That is both encouraging and challenging. Unfortunately the North American church has a tendency to look for the newest fad only to discard it and search for the next appealing solution or "program" that appears on the horizon. However, spiritual formation is not new. This biblical emphasis is synonymous with sanctification, walking with God, growing in grace or godliness, or spiritual maturity. Since spiritual formation has become so popular and secularized it is essential to add a descriptive adjective to the term, hence Christian spiritual formation or my preference, Christian spirituality. A biblical and healthy Christian spirituality will by necessity be Trinitarian.

The best way to gain an appreciation and awareness for spiritual formation is through reading primary sources. Christian spirituality begins with a prayerful and careful study of the Bible and continues through the writings of the saints who have gone before us. Suggestions of whom to read will vary depending upon taste and background. However, it is important to read widely to gain a fuller perspective of the experiences, desires, challenges, and questions raised by Christians from across the landscape of church history. Accordingly, sample from the writings of Origen, Athanasius, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John Cassian, Benedict of Nursia, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure, St. Francis, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, John Hus, Thomas a Kempis, Catherine of Genoa, Martin Luther,

John Calvin, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Johann Arndt, Frances de Sales, Richard Baxter, John Owen, Madame Guyon, Brother Lawrence, Jonathan Edwards, John and Charles Wesley, Alexander Whyte, etc.

To sort your way through the bewildering array of names and themes, I suggest you begin with a good introduction and history such as Bradley Holt. Also John R. Tyson, editor, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) provides brief biographical introductions and five-to-ten-page samples from the various writers. Paulist Press has embarked upon an ambitious project of publishing the Classics of Western Spirituality. While there are some rather unusual volumes in this series you will find some of the best introductions and critical texts in many of these writings.

Bloom, Anthony. *Beginning to Pray*. New York: Paulist Press, 1970. This spiritual classic written by an experienced leader in the Orthodox Church starts with the disarming confession: "As I am a beginner myself, I will assume that you are also beginners, and we will try to begin together" (1). This brief book of 75 pages is full of wisdom and valuable spiritual guidance.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954. Amid our self-indulgent and individualistic American Christianity Bonhoeffer reminds us of the biblical principles of community and worshiping and praying together. This should be required reading for every person who enters into church membership.

Chan, Simon. *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Chan, an Evangelical and Charismatic from Singapore, helps us to recognize the necessity of thinking theologically about the spiritual life. He has read widely across all of the Christian traditions and integrated the principles of spiritual theology and practices of the spiritual life. His topics include the doctrine of God, sin,

salvation, sanctification, spiritual disciplines, discernment, and spiritual direction.

*Demarest, Bruce. *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1999. Demarest begins with an account of his own discovery that theological orthodoxy must be integrated with orthopathy (affections) and orthopraxy (actions). His spiritual experience was renewed by his participation in the Pecos Benedictine Monastery in New Mexico. This is the clearest and best articulation by an Evangelical on Christian spirituality. The topics include an analysis of the contemporary spiritual hunger, benchmarks for discerning authentic spirituality, the formative reading of Scripture, the importance of contemplation, and a plea to discover the treasures of the Christian classics.

Foster, Richard J. *Prayer Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York: Harper, 1992. For many people, their basic diet of prayer consists of intercession and petition with an occasional confession and thanksgiving. Foster expands our understanding of the broad spectrum of prayer by offering twenty-one different types of prayer. These are arranged according to the themes of transformation, intimacy, and ministry. Also see Foster's, *Celebration of Discipline*, for an overview of the classic spiritual disciplines.

*Holt, Bradley. *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993. Holt is currently revising this introduction to the history of Christian spirituality. Included are exercises that integrate the various themes. Begin with Holt and you will gain the necessary historical context for the movements and themes that surrounded or inspired these writers. *The Story of Christian Spirituality* (Fortress, 2001, Gordon Mursell, editor), is another excellent introduction to the history of spirituality and is lavishly illustrated with art from across the centuries.

Houston, James. *The Transforming Friendship: A Guide to Prayer*. Batavia, Illinois: Lion, 1989. Houston is the spiritual

grandfather to Evangelicals interested in Christian spirituality. His multidisciplinary approach blends the wisdom of biblical truth, church history, spiritual theology, cultural analysis, and psychology to remove the barriers that so often blinds us to the reality that God's greatest delight is to be in communion with us. See also his *The Mentored Life* (NavPress, 2002).

- Jones, Cheslyn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, editors. *The Study of Spirituality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. This standard research tool provides an insightful ecumenical treatment of Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant spirituality. Each article contains a helpful bibliography for further study. Highly recommended. For a more expansive treatment of many of these topics see the three volumes of *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1985, 1987, 1989).
- Maas, Robin and Gabriel O'Donnell, editors. *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990. This broad-based resource examines the representative traditions from the early church to the contemporary period. Each section includes a practicum that offers a spiritual exercise representative of that movement.
- Muto, Susan. *A Practical Guide of Spiritual Reading* (revised edition). Petersham, Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publication, 1994. Muto ably creates a reservoir of resources around various topics of the Christian life (e.g. desert experience, repentance, trust, obedience to God, etc.) with ample suggestions of biblical texts and spiritual readings including novels to enrich our spiritual pilgrimage. See also Eugene H. Peterson, *Take and Read Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List* (Eerdmans, 1996).
- *Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Genesee Diary*. Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1976. The writings of Nouwen, the late Dutch Roman Catholic priest, have drawn many into a deeper relationship with God. This work eloquently captures and distills his seven-month experience at the Trappist Monastery of Genesee in New York. His personal

- struggle with the issues of identity, worth, service, and relationships make this essential reading for anyone in leadership. Other outstanding works by Nouwen that warrant careful reading are, *In The Name of Jesus*, *The Return of the Prodigal*, *Making All things New*, and *Lifesigns*.
- Oswald, Roy M. and Otto Kroeger. *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*. New York: The Alban Institute, 1988. This book, based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, recognizes the reality that there is more than one way to pray, read Scripture, worship, or share the faith. The authors guide us in discovering the wisdom of Dom Chapman, an early twentieth-century monk, "Pray as you can, not as you can not," in finding the best paths of prayer and spirituality for growing in Christ.
- *Peterson, Eugene H. *Working the Angles*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. Peterson combines the rare gift of a pastor's heart with a scholar's mind. He understands the transformative power of the Word and the formative power of words. His writings are compelling, stimulating, and rich in wisdom and guidance. In this work he argues that the pastor should be a spiritual guide devoted to the ministry of Scripture, prayer, and spiritual direction rather than the all too common contemporary model of the CEO. While written for pastors, this book is helpful for any serious Christian who seeks to grow in Christ. Also highly recommended are his *The Contemplative Pastor*, *Subversive Spirituality*, and *Under the Unpredictable Plant*.
- *Thompson, Marjorie T. *Soul Feast*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995. For those who have not read anything in this field, *Soul Feast* is an excellent place to start. Beginning with an evaluation of the contemporary spiritual hunger, the author guides the reader through a number of very practical chapters on spiritual disciplines. In particular, her chapters on the devotional reading of Scripture, prayer, self-examination, and hospitality are outstanding.
- *Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961. Tozer rightly asserts the most important

question ever facing the church is how she thinks of God. He helps us to capture a biblical view of our gracious and holy Triune God. His writings also reflect an evangelical mysticism that needs to be recovered today. Among his many outstanding books, see *The Pursuit of God* and *The Divine Conquest*.

Underhill, Evelyn. *The Spiritual Life*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1955. This slender book was originally a series of radio talks on the BBC prior to World War II. Underhill asserts that being is more critical than doing when it comes to the spiritual life. There is much wisdom in this small gem.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. Willard is always thoughtful and engaging, though at times in his more recent writings he seems to flirt with Quietism. He correctly helps us to recognize that discipleship is expected of all followers of Jesus. His treatment of the management of sin and the curriculum of Christlikeness are particularly helpful for the contemporary church.

*Highly recommended

*T*he ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God.

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*T*he way to be truly happy is to be truly human, and the way to be truly human is to be truly godly.

JAMES I. PACKER