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# REFORMATION & REVIVAL JOURNAL

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1. To encourage *reformation* in local Christian churches worldwide.
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in America, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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# SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## *INTRODUCTION*



*John H. Armstrong*

Spiritual formation is a relatively new idea for multitudes of Evangelicals. We talk a lot about evangelism, even discipleship. But spiritual formation has not been a vital part of our recent history.

In recent years spiritual formation has become a veritable buzz word in our ranks. We have created new courses and Christian education curricula dealing with the subject. Most seminaries have responded by creating classes, if not whole departments, in spiritual formation. More recently we have seen a line, or special imprint, of new book titles with the theme of spiritual formation. And the Catholic West and Orthodox East have had, and will undoubtedly continue to have, a large influence upon this recovery. I, for one, welcome this recovery. I also watch these developments with a cautious eye since some parts of this tradition are clearly questionable for those of us who are deeply rooted in the gospel of grace alone.

The term spiritual is variously used in our time. Because of the confusion that exists about the term itself many have chosen to avoid it. But the term is not New Age or non-Christian. It has been used for centuries by Christians, in the best and broadest sense, to refer to "the living and the experience" of the Christian life. In this sense Evangelicals have always

been deeply interested in spirituality, and thus spiritual formation. We believe Christians must grow in God's grace. We believe that as they grow they become more and more like Christ by and through the work of the Spirit.

Spiritual formation refers to Christian growth through a definite process of living the Christian life by the Holy Spirit. It also refers to the means, or methods, by which this life is to be lived. Embedded in the term is the idea of development, arrangement, organization and synthesis. To engage the subject of spiritual formation, as we do in this issue, is to consider this arrangement, or organization, of Christian growth in the grace and mind of Christ. And we may learn to do this from the entire Christian tradition, not just our own.

Spiritual formation is a historical and practical study which deals with questions like: "How do I *love others* as the Scriptures require?" "How do I *meditate*, in a distinctly Christian way, both day and night?" "How do I *deal with the passions and desires* which so powerfully influence my daily life?" "What are the *various ways Christians have read* Scripture for personal growth? "What help can I find to *pray without ceasing*?" And, "What place do the *sacraments* have in helping me become more and more *like Christ*?"

The most important warning here is rather simple really. All pursuit of likeness to Christ must be *by the Spirit* and is *not* about fulfilling my *egoistic needs*. Spiritual formation recovery must not become the newest rage in evangelicalism. And it is not about mastering techniques, something we usually do rather well. It is about the hard, slow daily work of becoming more and more like Jesus. To begin we must start at the beginning. Our proper starting point is clear: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).