

Theological Foundation of Spiritual Formation

The two main concepts that provide the theological underpinning for spiritual formation is the imago Dei and godly relationships that surround a truly transformed Christian life. The Imago Dei Armstrong (2009) has emphasized the need for strong biblical and theological support for spiritual formation to prevent the movement from becoming a Christian fad that does not get entrenched in the Body of Christ. Many scholars and theologians have responded by forming theological frameworks to support the spiritual formation movement. Bock (2008) has commented that the best biblical support in the New Testament for spiritual formation is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18. In this verse, Apostle Paul writes that “we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit “ (NIV). Tang (2014) has explained that Paul wanted to use this passage to describe the spiritual formation process where:

- Believers will be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- The transformation process is a lifetime ongoing process.
- It is Trinitarian in nature.
- The Holy Spirit is involved in the transformation process.
- God’s glory is restored when the above take place. (p. 79)

READ & DISCUSS THIS CONCEPT:

The emphasis to be transformed into Christ-likeness is a direct result of the fall of Man. God made Adam and Eve in His image, the imago Dei according to Genesis 1:26-27. However, God’s image was “perverted” when Adam and Eve sinned against Him (Hoekema, 1986, p. 75-96). Jesus Christ came to earth as God’s last sinless Adam and the perfect representative of God’s imago Dei which the first Adam lost. Therefore, when Jesus Christ came to redeem humanity, He came not only to restore humanity’s relationship with God, but He also came to restore God’s original image in humanity as well. **When one becomes more like Christ through the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the process of Spiritual Formation, one is being restored to God’s image as Jesus Christ is the perfect reflection of God.** As believers get transformed into God’s image, the covenant community of believers will display God’s restored image to the world where humanity will see the glory of God.

The Goals of Spiritual Formation

Tang (2014) has suggested three goals of spiritual formation which he derives after examining the formative strands of spiritual formation as proposed by Reed (2011). The three goals are namely:

- Believers acquiring a Christ-likeness at the personal level
- Believers becoming a people of God at the community level
- Believers establishing the Kingdom of God at the missional level

These three goals move God's influence from the personal level to the community level and thereafter, to the missional level where God's people will influence the greater environment.

Both Tang and Reed believe that spiritual formation is not meant to be confined at the individual level but has a progressive missional component that facilitates the community of God to bring transformation and healing to the whole creation. However, transformation at the community and missional levels can only take place when true spiritual formation takes place at the personal level. The transformation at the personal level is discussed earlier when one is restored back to the *imago Dei* through becoming like Christ. It is not sufficient to have a relationship with God through faith in Christ but to continue one's sanctification process after salvation to become like Christ so that the core of one's being can be transformed from the inside out (Crabb, 2013; Hull, 2010). However, spiritual formation is not a method for one to earn salvation or God's favor. It is the work of the Holy Spirit after salvation in helping believers to conform and grow into Christ's image and likeness (Averbeck, 2010). Willard (2002) has given some very insightful thoughts on how one can partner with the Holy Spirit in the process of spiritual formation at the personal level.