

THE CALL AND TASK OF THIS JOURNAL



The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care serves as an evangelical forum for the theory and practice of Christian spirituality. Its stated purpose is to provide a peer-reviewed journal published twice a year for advancing the discussion of the *theory and practice of Christian formation and soul care*. Embedded in this purpose are both a *call* and a *task*.

The call of the Journal is to all of us, reader and editor alike, to consider our involvement as learner and contributor to this venture. Every generation of the church faces the unique challenge to understand the process of transformation and cooperate *anew* with the Spirit in this. Yes, we have much to glean from those believers who have gone before us about life in Christ. But the Spirit of God is a *Living* God who is doing a work of transformation *now* in His people: it is about *our* life in Christ. Thus, each generation must *renew its commitment* to the challenge of opening *afresh* to the Word and the Spirit in order to learn, grow and minister to others from this experience. This is not only the task of Christian educators, theologians and pastors. Rather, *the call is to whomever the Spirit is leading to reflect deeply upon and open to their life in Christ.* For all interested in this Journal, this call will minimally take the form of *being a learner*, sitting at Jesus' feet, reading and listening for spiritual wisdom from one another. However, this call might also take the form of *being willing to meaningfully and constructively write* this wisdom for the sake of the church.

If the *call* is to open to the Spirit as learner and potential contributor, *the specific task of the Journal is to encourage believers in mind and heart, in theory and praxis, to give themselves fully and wisely to the process of transformation in Christ and the Spirit and to help others in this process.* Thus, the Journal's mandate is complex, comprehensive and wide-ranging.

First, *the Journal attempts to get clear theoretically and practically on the nature, dynamic processes and directives for spiritual transformation into the image of Christ in order to assist others in better cooperating with the Spirit as we grow in union with God.* Spiritual formation has often been construed only as a praxis or set of spiritual practices. On the contrary, there is also a deep theory of the Christian life and process of growth that can give insight to our praxis and clear away a host of misconceptions, potential pitfalls, unhelpful motivations and distortions in our practices. Moreover, this task of developing a depth *theory and praxis of formation in Christ* is, in fact, the telos or goal of all theological and Christian academic writing insofar as transformation is the telos of the Christian life. Thus, *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* seeks to reflect the

Church's highest and chief reflections. Consequently, we invite pastors, scholars and teachers of systematic theology, church history, Christian education, Old and New Testament to bring out the implications of their studies for the sake of spiritual formation in the Church, for the sake of the love and Glory of God, which is the end of all our study.

Second, *the time has come for a Journal to help transition the contemporary interest and "movement" in spiritual formation from being fringe to becoming more the "warp and woof," the very heart and mind of the church and pastoral training.* The goal here is to introduce and encourage the development of a robust "Spiritual Theology" or "Spiritual Formation" as a unique theoretical discipline of its own with its own unique data, domain of investigation, methodology, aim and language. Spiritual Theology and Formation glean from both *observation of the Word* and *observation of the Spirit working in real human lives* for the sake of understanding the nature and dynamic process of sanctification. This endeavor will necessarily be *integrative* in nature, for it will investigate all relevant sources of truth and reality for understanding transformation in Christ and the Spirit. The *Scriptures* will be a primary source, for they *alone* are God's authoritative interpretations of the Christian life. However, it will also explore *how the Spirit works in the lives of the saints*, those living and the reflections of believers throughout church history, along with *what can be learned from the creation disciplines* such as philosophy, psychology, literature, sociology, anthropology, history, medicine *et al* that is relevant to understanding spiritual transformation of the person—both body and spirit—in Christ. The goal is to raise up a whole new generation of leaders and disciples in the church, in Christian education and seminary training who are committed to this task of understanding and articulating *in the church* a profound and thoughtful account of spiritual growth as it is reflected in *real life*, to produce a *realist* theory and praxis of transformation. Thus, the call is for the people of God to learn and garner *spiritual insight* from all the pertinent sources of information, particularly from Scripture, as well as from theological reflection, life-experience with the Spirit and other relevant academic disciplines.

Third, *the Journal addresses not only spiritual transformation but also the theory and praxis of soul care, that is, how to assist others in the process of spiritual growth.* This moves the discussion of spiritual formation from personal to corporate growth, from how this works in my life to how this can translate into various church and para-church ministries. Thus, the Journal is also concerned with how we can better learn to disciple and care for the souls of one another in the Spirit, whether this is through ministries of missions, higher education, evangelism, friendship, parenting, teaching Sunday school, leading small groups, adult fellowships, worship, discipleship, spiritual direction or preaching and teaching the Word of God. We call upon those of you who have gained spiritual wisdom in how to minister to others to contribute to the Journal that we may learn how to better care for souls in the church and the world.

Finally, the Journal will be an opportunity *to help the body of Christ discern truth from error, reality from fantasy in spiritual formation and soul care*. Our flesh and the devil seek to seduce and deceive the believer and unbeliever alike in so many ways, from the lies of false religion and counterfeit spiritualities to the imbalances and distortions even in our own traditions, theories and practices of Christian spirituality. The call is for the wise and circumspect to reflect deeply on the Word and real life, to open to the reality of Christ in their own life, to discern the impulses of the flesh and falsehood, in general, to help us in the church discern the ways and work of God in human experience.

We welcome you to this venture as learners and potential contributors to the King's business. May God give us grace in this together for the sake of His people and the world beyond.

John Coe
Editor