

INTRODUCTION TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE



In 1984, J. I. Packer lamented what he labeled the “eclipse of holiness” within evangelicalism. Packer wrote:

A generation ago, on both sides of the Atlantic, the vision of evangelicals outthinking liberals grabbed leading Christian minds. That vision has borne much fruit over the years, and I for one am thankful that it still remains alive and motivates many; long may it do so! But it is high time that a comparable vision of Evangelicals outliving nonevangelicals made a similar grab for our attention and began to motivate us to explore the realities of holiness afresh at the deepest level of scholarship, pastoral insight, and personal experiment.¹

In many ways this journal exists as a response to Packer’s call. The “realities of holiness” are a subject matter that cannot be given too much attention. For if we are really entering into the nature and means of becoming more holy, then everything else will fall into place. Unfortunately, there is some reason to think that Christian holiness has been given too *little* attention within Protestantism rather than too much. Certainly a lot of good material has been written and taught when it comes to spiritual growth, and yet there are numerous signs that the Protestant church continues to recover from Packer’s eclipse or what Richard Lovelace has called “the sanctification gap.”² And so, it is into the aftermath of this “sanctification gap” or “eclipse of holiness” that this journal has come to fruition.

No doubt a scholarly journal will not solve all our problems when it comes to growing up into the fullness of Him (Eph 4:15). It is most likely the case that the deepest barriers to spiritual maturation are not primarily cognitive in nature and so the discursive content of this journal can only go so far. Nonetheless, there is much to be said both biblically and practically in favor of developing a more accurate understanding of the dynamics of the Spirit’s renewal of the human heart. Through various means the Spirit can take that more accurate understanding much farther than we can imag-

¹ J. I. Packer, *Keep In Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 85.

² Richard F. Lovelace, “The Sanctification Gap,” *Theology Today* 29:4 (1973): 363–369. Reprinted in Richard F. Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), 229–237.

ine. In that vein, our hope and prayer is that this journal would not be seen as, nor in fact become, merely a holding place for erudite discussions that are disconnected from the Spirit's work in God's people. Nor, we hope and pray, will the primary motivation for our producing this journal, and your potentially contributing to it, be to gain some sort of personal notoriety or points for promotion. (Of course, we do need your submissions so do not wait until your motives are entirely pure!). Since we know how quickly publications like this can become more or less inconsequential both to our actual lives as well as to furthering the Kingdom of God, we at least want to say at this juncture that our vision and prayer is to do something better.

With that said, let me briefly describe the plan and organizational structure for the journal and then turn to a short overview of the actual content of this particular issue. The plan is for this journal to be published twice a year in the spring and fall. We are currently accepting submissions that will be carefully considered for publication through a blind, peer-reviewed process (see the guidelines for submission in this issue). The topic of the submissions should, of course, fall within the confines of spiritual formation and soul care, though we take these terms to cover a wide-range of issues. For instance, I have already received an inquiry about whether this journal is an appropriate place to address the spirituality of children and another inquiry regarding whether the journal would be open to an article dealing with the impact of sexual abuse on spiritual growth. The answer to both inquiries was an emphatic "yes!" We want to understand formation and soul care in a sufficiently broad manner to allow for a wide-ranging discussion. It should also be noted that while the journal is deeply interested in biblical and theological scholarship, there is eager anticipation on the part of the editors to see work that is integrated with extra-biblical disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, literature, music, art, and so on. Hopefully this helps give you a sense of what you might be able to contribute to the journal as well as what you might expect to find in forthcoming issues.

As to the organizational structure, the journal will be organized into three main sections: articles, reflections, and book reviews. Articles tend to be lengthy, research-oriented pieces as one might find in traditional academic journals, while reflections are shorter, more personal essays. While on occasion we will dedicate a whole issue of the journal to a special theme, generally each issue will not have a unified theme. Our philosophy on book reviews is to carefully select a small number of recent books that appear to be significant contributions to the field. Each issue will also feature a review of a spiritual classic.

Now that you are somewhat oriented to the journal as a whole, let us turn to the issue in hand. Our vision for this inaugural issue is to provide an example of the kind of work that we anticipate having and thereby set the stage for the future. It seemed best to ask a few seasoned scholars within the field of Christian spirituality to offer what they deemed best for such an occasion. We begin with Evan Howard's "Advancing the Discussion: Reflections on the Study of Christian Spiritual Life." We are grateful that Howard chose to exegete the journal's official "call for papers" in order to stimulate

a dialogue “regarding what we are doing and where we might go.” Howard’s thoughtful and historically minded articulation of what is needed when it comes to evangelical scholarship on Christian spirituality sets the course for the current issue as well as the future of the journal. We then turn to Richard Averbeck’s “Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation” as a clear example of the kind of biblical/theological work Howard envisions. Averbeck presents a nice overview of some main biblical themes regarding spirituality and spiritual formation. We look forward to further biblical and theological exploration on these and other biblical themes. John Coe’s “Resisting the Temptation of *Moral* Formation: Opening to *Spiritual* Formation in the Cross and the Spirit” contextualizes a biblical theology of spirituality to the actual dynamics of the human heart. Coe’s penetrating insight shows forth the importance of paying attention to human experience in spiritual growth, and yet Coe clearly sees the resolution in the biblical realities of the cross and Spirit. This integration of spiritual theology and biblical theology is a pattern that demands emulation. In “Spiritual Formation and the Warfare between the Flesh and the Human Spirit,” Dallas Willard provides a much needed analysis of the role of the will in the spiritual life. If Averbeck’s piece is an example of the biblical work Howard envisions, and Coe’s piece connects our human experience to some of those biblical truths, then Willard’s article goes a step deeper and carefully investigates a fundamental constituent (the human will) of the formation process. As is so often the case with his writings, Willard demonstrates the crucial importance of getting clarity on matters that are often glossed over. Appropriately rounding out this issue is James Houston’s “Seeking Historical Perspectives for Spiritual Direction and Soul Care Today.” Houston has been a prophet in the area of Christian spirituality for some time and he, once again, draws deeply from the history of spirituality in order to challenge our resistance to the role of personal relationship in the transformation process. Houston’s brilliant contribution provides a clarion call for further work in the area of spiritual direction and soul care. These five articles are followed by five thoughtful reviews of noteworthy books in the area of spiritual formation. We are extremely grateful to all our authors and reviewers for being willing to help the journal get off to a splendid start.

Packer calls us to “rediscover the realities of holiness afresh at the deepest level of scholarship, pastoral insight, and personal experiment” as a means to begin “outliving” those outside the faith. This “outliving” is not meant to be a one-up-man-ship or holier than thou posturing, but rather a qualitatively different kind of life that manifests the truth of what we believe (cf. Jn 15). This is a kind of life that can only be granted from the Lord of life as we co-labor with His Spirit. May the pages that follow, and the pages yet to come, lead us more deeply into communion with Him.

Steve L. Porter
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