

## Reformed Spiritual Formation: A Confessional, Ecumenical, and Theological Approach

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**Audy Santoso** 

International Reformed Evangelical Seminary, Indonesia  
[audysantoso@sttrii.ac.id](mailto:audysantoso@sttrii.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

Spiritual formation as a practical subject in a Christian's life is often not thought reflectively, if not altogether ignored, even by those who claim within the Reformed tradition. This paper argues for the uniqueness of Christianity's spiritual formation from the other Abrahamic religions based on scriptural arguments and religious-social phenomena. The Reformation contributed to Christian spiritual formation based on general principles and Calvin's anthropological insights. The article concludes that Christian spiritual formation is none other than living a Triune life, that is, to be Christ-formed and Spirit-filled in our lives as children of God.

**Keywords:** singing, praying, anthropology, John Calvin, justification, trinitarian.



## Introduction

There is an old Latin phrase, *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*, which means the law of praying is the law of believing. In this phrase, Robert Jenson distinguishes between our worship practice as the first order discourse of our belief and theological reflection as a matter of the second order.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when it comes to spiritual formation, Christians may neglect the reflection part simply because we have been conducting it faithfully in our ritual practices. The theologoumenon's absence is merely a result of the ritual's presence.<sup>2</sup> However, some who claim to be reformed pastors reject the notion of spiritual formation with an idiosyncratic view.<sup>3</sup> Or is theirs a majority view? These "predicaments" may be why some speakers or authors ask a probing question that may seem difficult to answer first: "Is there such thing as a Reformed spiritual formation?"

In his 2016 article, Hans Burger remarked that Oliver O'Donovan, an Anglican Minister, developed not so much of "the form" but "the narrative" of the story of Jesus Christ for a Christian to participate in.<sup>4</sup> Burger gave a critical remark towards O'Donovan's centrality of love in his notion of knowledge that the bodily and affective dimensions of our being human were given too little attention. Burger noted that there must be a formative role of life forms, a necessity for formation practices in Christ. However, he did not offer any proposals.

This example points to a broader miss. Craig Bartholomew was the one who first incited the author to look into this subject upon hearing his Herman Bavinck Lecture 2019 at Kampen, "Spiritual Formation, Mysticism and Ethics: An Engagement with Herman Bavinck".<sup>5</sup> In his lecture, he pointed out that there is yet to be an alternative to Thomas A. Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ's* interpretation of spiritual formation. Bartholomew lamented that Jerome's *contemptus mundi* had distorted its spiritual inclination in that book. At the end of his lecture, he addressed

The challenge upon us is to produce, within the Reformed and Evangelical tradition, a corpus of literature, but more important than that, practices of spiritual formation that allow Christ to take shape within our humanity.

A similar account was recollected by Kyle Strobel upon him asking John Webster regarding a go-to book on Sanctification.<sup>6</sup> It is clear to the author that there is a need to reflect on the Church's practices to depict: "What is a Reformed spiritual formation?"

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1 Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), part 1.1.

2 Cf. A good insight is given in the example of Athanasius in his polemical theologoumenon against Arians in Christopher A. Hall, "Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation: A Response," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & SoulzCare* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 213–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700205>.

3 Cf. Jon Moffitt, "The Biblical and Historical Problems with Spiritual Disciplines, part 1–3", Theocast. Accessed November 1, 2021, <https://theocast.org/the-biblical-and-historical-problems-with-spiritual-disciplines-part-1-notes/>. Moffitt was bashing, one among many others, work by Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, which J.I Packer endorsed.

4 J. M. Burger, "Receiving the Mind of Christ: Epistemological and Hermeneutical Implications of Participation in Christ according to Oliver O'Donovan," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 10, no. 1 (2016): 68–9, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697312-01001013>. One does not need to be a modernist, nor be a post-liberalist, to recover the grand narrative of the scripture. Cf. Calvin, *Inst.* 1.6.2. stated that the cosmos/ creation we live in is none other than the theater of God's glory.

5 Craig Bartholomew, "Spiritual Formation, Mysticism and Ethics: An Engagement with Herman Bavinck" (lecture, Theological University Kampen, February 4, 2020), <https://en.tukampen.nl/discover/hermanbavinck2019/>.

6 Kyle Strobel, "The Christian Doctrine of Sanctification: A Review Essay," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 12, no. 2 (2019): 260–68.

## A Provisional Definition and Characterization of Reformed Spiritual Formation

If a word can describe a reformed spiritual formation, it may be “piety”.<sup>7</sup> However, while piety comprises the unity of knowledge and desire, the term lacks the connotation of formation. Ford Lewis Battles understood Calvin’s pietas as “his whole understanding and practice of Christian faith and life.”<sup>8</sup> There is a gradual growth in that Christian life, but not as an independent quality; it is relational in our total dependence upon God.<sup>9</sup>

After surveying some articles and books on spiritual formation, the author finds that James K. A. Smith’s book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, articulates what is close to the heart of the Reformed worldview.<sup>10</sup> Smith expresses more comprehensively what others also pointed out in their respective articles: the importance of love in that human person as a lover.<sup>11</sup> Smith notes the importance of habit in the liturgy as ritual practices.<sup>12</sup> He notes the importance of worship and Christian engagement with culture in a typical neo-Calvinist tradition.

One critical contribution that Smith proposes is that every pedagogy presupposes philosophical anthropology.<sup>13</sup> In his book, Smith polemicizes against the false conception of humans in his cognitive aspect. He points out the differentiation between education as disseminating “information” and “formation” involving embodied practices. The differentiation itself is a good way of contrasting, though the modern project formation drives it.

The articulations of Christian spiritual formation within the contemporary reformed circle ignore the presupposition of Reformed theological anthropology. Thus, the author seeks to incorporate more native theological anthropology towards the spiritual formation in the reformed tradition: Calvin’s notion of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness in the image that God has given to humans and ruined but found its restoration in Christ.

The author will first highlight the distinction between Christian spiritual formation and the other Abrahamic religions to answer the question of reformed spiritual formation. After presenting the uniqueness of a religious-social phenomenon in the Christian spiritual

7 Belden C. Lane, *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 24 rightly discerns Reformed theologians prefer the word “piety” rather than “spirituality”; thus “referring to a more practical, communal, and societal expression of obedience to Christ.” Meanwhile, Roger Haight, “Calvin’s Contribution to a Common Ecclesial Spirituality” in *Restoration through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited*, ed. Henk van den Belt (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 160 proposes “the Christian life” that includes stewardship.

8 Ford Lewis Battles, “True Piety According to Calvin,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 192.

9 Battles, “True Piety,” 204.

10 Articles: Sean Michael Lucas, “‘Divine Light, Holy Heat’: Jonathan Edwards, the Ministry of the Word, and Spiritual Formation.” *Presbyterion* 34, no. 1 (Spr 2008): 1-11; Greg Peters, “Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation: A Call,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 203-9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700204>; Christopher A. Hall, “Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation: A Response,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 210-19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700205>; Kyle Strobel, “The Christian Doctrine of Sanctification: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 12, no. 2 (2019): 260-68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1939790919869526>.

Books: Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) focuses in a more practical manner on 40 days meditation; a spiritual formation that does not focus only on personal meditation but also communal and missional; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol.1 of *Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2009); In a Quakerian tradition, Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980); he later with James Bryan Smith co-authors *A Spiritual Formation Workbook – Revised Edition: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth* (HarperOne, 2010), this book gives an interesting but rather caricature categorizing: contemplative tradition by practicing prayer-filled life, holiness tradition by practicing virtuous life, charismatic tradition by practicing the Spirit-empowered life, the social justice tradition by practicing the compassionate life, the evangelical tradition by practicing the Word-centered life, the incarnational tradition by practicing the sacramental life.

11 Lucas, “Divine Light, Holy Heat”, 9. Cf. Smith, part 1, 1 “*Homo Liturgicus*: The Human Person as Lover”.

12 Hall, “Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation,” 211, 14, 15, “all spiritual formation is time-bound, historical, and specifically contextual.” Since spiritual formation takes time, in the process, it must develop a *habitus*. Cf. Smith, part 1, 2 “Love Takes Practice: Liturgy, Formation, and Counter-formation”.

13 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, Introduction.

formation scripturally, the author will show how the Reformation's general principles and Calvin's anthropological theology contribute to a positive theological development of Christian spiritual formation. In the last part, the author will conclude by defining reformed spiritual formation and re-establishing what appears to be missing in the Church's current practice. Thus, the article presents a confessional approach in the first step, an ecumenical approach in the second, and a theological approach in the final step.

## Comparison: The three S-s of Abrahamic religion's spiritual formation Shema in Judaism

In its root, Christian Spiritual Formation saps from the common root of Jewish spiritual formation. In their practice, Judaism interprets their scripture (the Old Testament) as written Torah (Torah she-bich'tav) with their acceptance of the Oral Torah (Torah she-ba'al peh, also known as the Talmud that consists of the Mishna and the Gemara).<sup>14</sup>

For the Jewish people, the Shema is considered the most important verse in scripture (Deut. 6:4-9). Christians have yet to probe the depth of the Shema's significance for the Jews by their rigorous observance of its recitation, as its conduct was discussed and argued in Berakhot, the first part of Mishna. In the following, we can see the difference in interpretations between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel regarding postures in Shema recitation.

Beit Shammai say: One should recite Shema in the manner indicated in the text of Shema itself. Therefore, in the evening every person must recline on his side and recite Shema, in fulfillment of the verse: "When you lie down," and in the morning he must stand and recite Shema, in fulfillment of the verse: When you rise, as it is stated: "When you lie down, and when you rise." And Beit Hillel say: Every person recites Shema as he is, and he may do so in whatever position is most comfortable for him, both day and night, as it is stated: "And when you walk along the way," when one is neither standing nor reclining (Me'iri). If so, according to Beit Hillel, why was it stated: "When you lie down, and when you rise"? This is merely to denote time; at the time when people lie down and the time when people rise.<sup>15</sup>

The time observance and posture discussed in detail show how this daily ritual of Shema recitation shapes and forms Judaism's spiritual formation. There are many other commandments in the Jewish practices as they closely observed all the 613 commandments of Moses.<sup>16</sup>

## Salat in Islam

In Islam, as commonly known, there are five essential pillars of Islam. Out of these five, salat is the five-time prayer to be duly observed daily.<sup>17</sup> In conducting the salat,

14 My Jewish Learning, "The Written Torah and the Oral Torah," accessed October 19, 2021, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-formation-of-the-oral-torah/>.

15 Sefaria, "Mishnah, Berakhot 1.3," accessed October 19, 2021, [https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah\\_Berakhot.1.3?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Berakhot.1.3?lang=bi).

16 Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*. Rev. Ed. (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 107–8, or as they were reduced to eleven by David, or six by Isaiah, or three by Micah, or two again by Isaiah, or just one each by Amos and Habakkuk.

17 Cf. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, rev. and up. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 245 notes A *hadith* of the Prophet, reported in *Mishkat al-Masabih*, James Robson, trans. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1965), 1264–67 about an interesting account of why the praying has to be done five times during Muhammad's negotiation with God as ordered by Moses.

Ade Armando, a lecturer at Universitas Indonesia, stirred up a heated discussion among Indonesian Muslims upon stating the fact that there is no

Muslims will also recite the shahadah formula. Unsurprisingly, Huston Smith makes this possible claim that al-Qur'an is perhaps the most recited book in the world.<sup>18</sup> Thus lies the similarity of Islam with Judaism in its spiritual formation by reciting the most important verse. For Muslims, that verse is the opening sura of the Quran.

Apart from this five-times daily salat, a Muslim must go on a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during their lifetime. Smith gives an interesting insight about teaching human equality based on this observation.

Upon reaching Mecca, pilgrims remove their normal attire, which carries marks of social status, and don two simple sheet-like garments. [...] Distinctions of rank and hierarchy are removed, and prince and pauper stand before God in their undivided humanity.<sup>19</sup>

Like the recitation, pilgrimage to this worship center in Islam followed the once stricter practice of Jewish observance three times a year. Muhammad himself at first appointed Jerusalem as the direction (qibla) in the salat; at later times, he changed the direction to Kaaba in Mecca.

## Singing in Christianity

Regarding Christian spiritual formation practices, we can come across similar practices due to the common root of Abrahamic religions and the common acceptance parts of scripture between Judaism and Christianity. Due to the manifold spiritual formations throughout the church's history, it is simply beyond the scope of this article to trace each tradition from the Roman Catholic church before the Reformation era to the manifold manifestations emphasized in the various protestant traditions.<sup>20</sup> Instead, we should discover the common fundamental element of a Christian spiritual formation. Roger Haight points to Eph 4:4-6 as core elements that define unity among Christians.<sup>21</sup> However, the references are too vague to be observed as a religious-social phenomenon.

I argue that this common element, which simultaneously makes Christianity distinct from the other Abrahamic religions, lies in our singing praises to God. This act of praising is intact without undermining the importance of God's Word. Christianity is a singing religion, not just a reciting one. Such experiential truth is scripture-based and can be observed weekly at any Christian assembly as a religious-social phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

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*nash* in Al-Qur'an regarding the commandment to observe salat five times daily. Ade Armando, "Shamsi Ali, Felix Siauw, Mengeroyok Saya Soal Syariah," video, 11:37, YouTube, November 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYWs6EPTMIY>, Nov 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. See "Ade Armando: Perintah Salat 5 Waktu Tidak Ada dalam Al-Qur'an," *detikNews*, November 3, 2021, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5795034/ade-armando-perintah-salat-5-waktu-tidak-ada-dalam-al-quran/2>; NU Region Coordinator Samsul Ma'arif stated there is nothing wrong with Armando's statement. See Helmi Yaningsi, "Tanggapi Pernyataan Ade Armando Terkait Salat 5 Waktu, NU: Tidak Salah Tapi Kurang Lengkap," *Terkini*, November 5, 2021, <https://makassar.terkini.id/tanggapi-pernyataan-ade-armando-terkait-salat-5-waktu-nu-tidak-salah-tapi-kurang-lengkap/>. For a rather recent socio-political situation in Indonesia, see Abdurrahman Wahid, ed., *Ilusi Negara Islam: Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Desantara Utama Media, 2009).

18 Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, rev. and up., 231.

19 Smith, *World's Religions*, 247.

20 Peters, "Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation," 203–9 notes that in Roman Catholicism spiritual formation, the tendency is to think in terms of schools or traditions: Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit, or parochial. One of the more recent Roman Catholic spiritual formations can be found in Henry Nouwen (1932–1996), who developed solitude spirituality. In Protestant traditions: the Puritans of the 16th and 17th centuries emphasized the sabbath-observance practice, the Dutch reformed congregations inherited the psalm-singing of Calvinist kind of worship, the contemporary Korean Christians are well known for their perseverance of early daily prayers, etc.

21 Haight, "Calvin's Contribution," 162. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

22 Even though I employ the term 'religious-social phenomenon', the church herself is a transcendent event of occurrence rather than a horizontal

The scriptural base can be found, as in many other psalms, in Psalm 47. This psalm exhorts its reader to ‘sing praises’ (זָמְרָה לַיהוָה *zām·merû*) to God five times in v.6–7. It has that overflowing joy with the imperative verb “Clap your hands” and “Shout to God”. Considering the five times repeated commands of “sing praises”, these embodied practices of clapping and shouting are not placed prior. Instead, what holds primary is the fifth command, ‘sing praises’. Verse 7b sings praises with a psalm. This “a psalm” is a misleading translation because psalm is the common word being used to translate *miz·môr* (רִמְזָה), as was done in the title of this psalm. Instead, the word in v. 7b is *maskil* (לִיכָשֶׁת), as noted in the footnote by ESV. *Maskil*, though we do not know the whole meaning of the word, is commonly understood as the song of instructions, based on Psalm 32, which contains instructions.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that our singing praises are not pure emotion-based singing, which consists of just melodies or tunes that lift us. Rather, the tunes carry with them the words of understanding, instructions, or meditations of God upon whom we praise.

This scriptural base in Psalm 47 is not distinctively unique; it is drawn from the Old Testament but can also be found in the New Testament as Paul exhorted us to live a Spirit-filled life.<sup>24</sup> These instructions are clear; it is not just Psalms that Christians can sing, but also hymns and spiritual songs. Similarly, there are three kinds of words to describe praises to God in Psalm 47: *mizmor*, *zammeru*, and *maskil*.<sup>25</sup>

As for the religious-social phenomenon, the author learns this insight from Dr. Stephen Tong, who shared his conversation with a Jew on an airplane. As they got acquainted and spoke about the significant contributions of Jewish people in various fields, Dr. Tong posed a question that struck his conversing partner. “Why are there no top-rated Jewish musicians or composers in the field of music?” He mentioned ‘Felix Mendelssohn’ but was quickly refuted by Dr. Tong that Felix Mendelssohn was not simply a Jew but a Christian. In what sense does being a Christian have anything to do with being a great composer?

A regenerated Christian is solely due to the Holy Spirit’s work, who profoundly transforms a person’s soul. As a result, a regenerated Christian from any background would have to respond thankfully out of a grateful heart for having received such a great salvation. Christianity is a singing religion because Christians sing the praises out from the deepest heart (for out of the heart comes the issues of life, Proverbs 4:23). The difference is not just a matter of quality but quantity. There will always be new generations of Christians who are being saved and want to praise God in return; no wonder Christianity has the most hymn songs compared to other religions.<sup>26</sup> Music is inseparable from Christian worship

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grouping in an immanent sense. The reason is again due to her act of singing praises that have that thanksgiving character as a response to the acceptance of God’s transcendent grace.

23 Cf. N. J. Oppewall, “Maskil,” ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 276. “It is derived from the *hiphil* of *sākal*, “have insight,” “have success.””

24 See Ephesians 5:18b–19 “...but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

25 Anwar Tjen, “Mengenai Mazmur,” accessed October 21, 2021, site inactive on December 11, 2023, <https://selisip.com/slp16/2018/04/mengenai-mazmur-2/>. In Psalm itself, there are other kinds like *Miktam* (Ps. 16), *Shir* (Ps. 120–134), *Tehillah* (Ps. 145), *Tefilla* (Ps.17), and *Shigayon* (Ps. 7).

26 The Guinness World of Record states that there are more than 950,000 Christian hymns in existence. Guinness World Records, “First Hymn,” accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/first-hymn>.

across denominations, which is not so for other faiths. This "grace" element distinguishes Christian spiritual formation from other Abrahamic religions. The thought-provoking fact is that Judaism has the same part of the scripture of Psalm 47. Yet, Judaism is not famous as a singing religion but instead as a Torah observance religion.

In Christian spiritual formation, the spirit plays a significant part, not just recited words. This notion accords with Calvin's teaching of non-separation between the word and the spirit. Now, it doesn't mean Christianity has nothing like the practiced recitation of both Jews and Muslims; this we shall see in the next section.

## **Contribution of the Reformation and the Reformer**

### **The Reformation's contribution: The three marks of the Church**

In what ways did the Reformation contribute to Christian Spiritual Formation? We can quickly point out the three marks of the true Church: where the word is truly preached and truly heard, where the sacraments are administered, and when the spiritual discipline is conducted (Belgic Confession Art. 29).<sup>27</sup> It is beyond the limit of this paper to go through exhaustively each mark that is directly related to spiritual formation. I have two critical remarks. First, there needs to be a formulation of 'truly heard' in the first mark in the Belgic confession. One may argue that "the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached" implicates the hearing. Secondly, the second and the third marks often go together, but we sadly remark on what Mohler pointed out to be accurate: "church discipline is the missing mark of the church."<sup>28</sup>

The word truly preached and truly heard is a formative part of the Church's communal discipline.<sup>29</sup> This mark bears a resemblance to a similar trait in the recitation practice of the Abrahamic religions. The Church conducts this first mark repetitively each week in an ordered, formative sequence. This notion is in accordance with James K. A. Smith's "liturgy" emphasized in its embodied practices.<sup>30</sup> Again, we must emphasize that it is not just the preaching or recitation that matters; the hearing/ Shema should not be discounted. Likewise, in the Jewish interpretations of posture in the Shema recitation and Islam's sequence of postures when conducting salat, Christians have a form of repetition in the liturgy of our worship. Now, as important as analyzing and comparing Smith's notion of liturgy, I want to offer a theological approach that Smith has not covered.

### **The Reformer's Contribution: The Three Elements in Calvin's Theological Anthropology**

Smith believes that every pedagogy presupposes a philosophical anthropology. Now,

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<sup>27</sup> Though the first mark of 'the Word is truly heard' may distinctly come from the Lutheran tradition. As for the third mark, this emphasis may have found its impetus from Martin Bucer. See David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geisler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91.

<sup>28</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr. "Church Discipline: The Missing Mark," In *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998). [https://www.the-highway.com/discipline\\_Mohler.html](https://www.the-highway.com/discipline_Mohler.html) accessed October 30, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, (© T&T Clark, 1992; Louisville: WJK, 1992), 35. Calvin firmly joined preaching and teaching between *kerygma* and *Didache*.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

Calvin offers us his theological anthropology instead of a philosophical one. The life of a Christian is nothing but a renewal into the likeness as the image of God, which consists of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.<sup>31</sup>

We can see a close relation to spiritual formation in terms of knowledge. Learning is why there's a seminary in the first place, a monastery in the Middle Ages, a college founded by Calvin in Geneva, the University of Wittenberg where Luther was assigned to teach, etc. There is simply an irreducible or irremovable pedagogical aspect in Christian spiritual formation. What is Calvin's contribution to this aspect? It lies in his discussion on "faith", which is pervasive in Institutes. Not only did Calvin dedicate a section of the apostle's creed, as in his 1536–1550 editions of the Institute. He also rearranged the creed and its four parts so that the discussion of faith is pervasive throughout his four books in the 1559 edition, the edition of which arrangement is one that Calvin is most satisfied with.

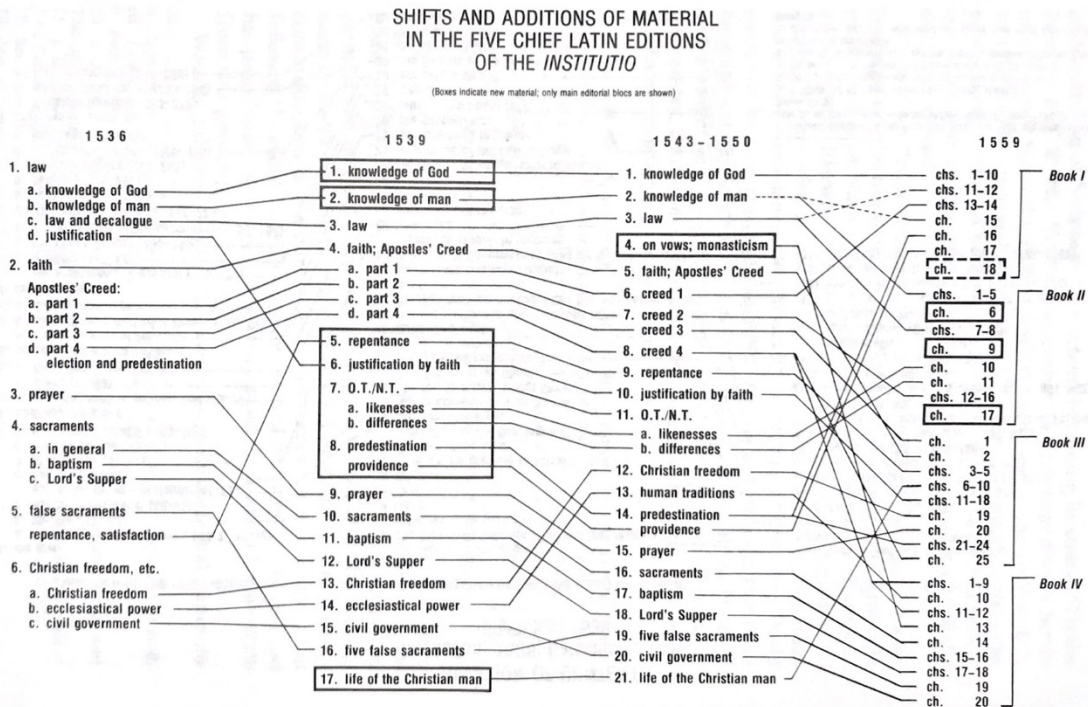


Figure 1. Shift and Additions of Material in the Five Chief Latin Editions of the *Institutio*<sup>32</sup>

In the 1559 edition, the proper discussion on faith is in book 3, which comprises almost the whole chapters (chapter 2 on the faith's definition, chapters 3–10 on the Christian Life, chapters 11–19 on Justification by faith, and chapter 20 on prayer as the chief exercise of faith). In other words, Calvin's theological work is not a scholastic work but a formation of piety, a closely non-separated doctrine, and a life of faith and its practice.<sup>33</sup>

31 John Calvin, *Comm. Eph. 4:18*, trans. William Pringle (Bellingham: Logos, 2010), 291.

32 See the diagram shown by Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin*. Ass. John R. Walchenbach (Philadelphia: P&R, 1980), 15.

33 Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology From Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 80. This trait is inherited down to Beza whose teaching of predestination was not to develop a predestinarian system of theology but the application of election to the life of piety.



As for holiness, it is evident throughout the Church's history how various figures or movements revived the Church when the lack of discipline was pervasive. The Reformation was one of those movements with many figures, though notably one with the most significant impact in history. Concerning spiritual formation, holiness links to the notion of Sanctification. On this matter, we do not need to waste ink by appealing to Calvin but point to the shown arrangement of the Institute above, where Chapters 3–10 is Calvin's elaboration on Sanctification.

The difficulty lies in linking spiritual formation with righteousness, as understood by the Reformation. It is tied closely to the notion of 'justification' understood as *extra nos* and happened just once, instead of continuously like our Sanctification. To what effect can justification, *extra nos*, be related to spiritual formation? What does it entail with the notion of practice? We cannot appeal to Luther, who first discovered this significant truth of "justification by faith." Luther radicalized this truth by advising Melancthon through a letter to "sin boldly." The whole sentence is given in full so as not to defame Luther:

If you are a preacher of Grace, then preach a true, not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly. For he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness but, as Peter says, we look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. . . . Pray boldly-you too are a mighty sinner.<sup>34</sup>

In Luther's theology, spiritual formation based on justification can be dangerous. Thankfully, Luther's dictum to study God's word has a better approach: *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.<sup>35</sup> This may be a potential development in the spiritual formation of the Lutheran tradition. Nevertheless, the advice to sin boldly would be deemed inappropriate by Calvin. The question remains, "How do we develop a spiritual formation based on justification?"

Calvin, too, affirms that justification is *extra nos*; it is a gift of Christ's righteousness. Thus, no Christian can be more righteous nor have more righteousness as they mature in Christ. We believe in the once for all justification through faith. It is forensic; thus, no formation. Is this why there is no "Protestant" spiritual formation apart from sanctification? Thank God. Indeed, there is a Protestant, even so, Christian spiritual formation based on justification. In Calvin, the concept of union with Christ is central, through whom, by being united, we receive double blessings (*duplex gratia*). Here's what Calvin says of our 'justification' in book 3, chapter 11:

Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a

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<sup>34</sup> Weimar ed. vol. 2, p. 371; Letters I, "Luther's Works," American Ed., vol. 48, p. 281–282. <https://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Luther-Sin-Boldly.html> accessed Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> G. Heinrici, "Encyclopedia, Theological," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), vol. 4, p. 126.

gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.<sup>36</sup>

The *duplex gratia* is commonly understood as justification and sanctification/ regeneration. However, we can appreciate it relationally, as our relation to the Father and the Spirit. Herein lies the key to justification with our spiritual formation in our relationship with the Father.<sup>37</sup> The spiritual formation in terms of righteousness is done by our praying to God, no longer conceiving him as a judge but as our gracious Father. Calvin rightly states that prayer is our chief exercise of faith (Inst. 3.20).<sup>38</sup> While we do not become more righteous, we can become more confident in approaching God as our Father by partaking in Christ and being reconciled through Christ. In Calvin's theology, the boldness is not in sinning but in approaching God as our Father. Spiritual formation is a Triune formation in our union with Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, on a short note, does Calvin see our anthropology as a praising creature? Calvin is more restrained in church singing, noting the easily misdirected of our minds to the melody rather than the spiritual meaning of the words.<sup>40</sup> However, Calvin was a much better practitioner in his psalm-singing liturgy than what he reflected in his Institutes. It is a pity that Calvin is downplaying the praising aspect, though he has paid great attention to prayer as a digging act of hidden treasures in Christ.<sup>41</sup> However, his exposition on the Lord's prayer, which consists of our daily grateful praises to the Father, has a more positive note.<sup>42</sup> The Church must be aware lest we, too, neglect the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. We need to discipline ourselves with prayer, even as emphasized by Calvin, who devotes a significant chapter in his magnum opus.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion Towards a Christian Spiritual Formation

At the end of this article, we formulate what a Reformed spiritual formation is. As shown in the first part of our discussion comparing Abrahamic religions, singing praises is formative in Christian spiritual formation. The spirit-filled is emphasized by Paul and as the fulfillment of the Torah in the OT, like in Psalm 47. This scriptural practice is repetitive in Christian liturgy. Christianity has fulfilled what was prophesied earlier by Jesus, that the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23).

Reflecting on the contribution of the Reformation, the three marks of the true Church

36 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 3.11.1.

37 Cf. Audy Santoso, Union with God: An Assessment of Deification (Theosis) in the Theologies of Robert Jenson and John Calvin, *Reformed Historical Theology* 69 (Göttingen: V&R, 2021), 190-1.

38 Cf. Oliver O'Donovan, "Prayer and Morality in the Sermon on the Mount," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2000): 21-33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946808100224>.

39 The spirit intercedes for us in our prayer to the Father (Rom. 8:26). Cf. There is an emphasis on the work of the Spirit also, but differently nuanced from Bucer's "double justification" that may lead to the Wesleyan perfectionism. See Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings*, 89-90.

40 *Inst.* 3.20.32.

41 *Inst.* 3.20.1-2.

42 *Inst.* 3.20.41.

43 *Inst.* 3.20 divides it into 52 sections from page 850-919. Cf. Christopher Woznicki, "What Are We Doing When We Pray?: Rekindling a Reformation Theology of Petitionary Prayer," *Calvin Theological Journal* 53, no. 2 (November 2018): 319-43. Arnold Huijgen, "Childlike Reverence and Trust: Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism on Prayer," *Verbum Christi: Journal of Reformed Evangelical Theology* 7, no. 1 (April 20, 2020): 55-68, <https://doi.org/10.51688/vc7.1.2020.art4>.

spell out a necessary spiritual formation renewal in the discovery of the gospel, brought forth through the means of the word being preached and heard, which the very same promise is administered in the sacraments, and a spiritual discipline is carried out by barring those whose lives are contrary to the gospel from participating in the supper, even to the extent of excommunication. Christian spiritual formation is then carried out communally in the gathered Church. The Church gathers herself to manifest life as God's children.

Lastly, we discover insight from Calvin's theological anthropology regarding the progressive elements of our faith-knowledge, bold righteousness, and sanctified life. This renewal is none other than Christ-formation in our lives. The endorsed spiritual formation by Calvin is prayer. Those who claim the *sola fide* principle of the Reformation should recognize the importance of prayer.

A Reformed spiritual formation lies in our living the triune life by being in the Son and the Spirit moving towards the Father.<sup>44</sup> In our progress, we are Christ-formed as we are Spirit-filled. What marks the whole (*scopus*) and goal (*finis*) in Reformed or Christian Spiritual Formation is to live as God's children.

At the end of this article, I would like to add some future development lines for those interested in researching this subject of spiritual formation. After the Reformation, Christians in England grew dissatisfied with the Anglican Church, thus initiating the Puritan movement, which produced enormous literature concerned with purity in daily living. The similar nature of this experiential theology is shown in the systematic works done by Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), *The Christian's Reasonable Service*. Together with figures like Hermanus Witsius, they worked in the period known as *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Second Reformation). In a more recent discovery of the work of Herman Bavinck—whose centennial death is commemorated in 2021, *Reformed Ethics*—which finds its translation and publication of the first volume in 2019. Thus, we find that Reformed spiritual formation has existed all along.

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<sup>44</sup> The direction toward the Father can be seen as upward, inward, and forward. *Sursum* and *nondum* are often used in Calvin's terminology, while inward are based on Huijgen's concentric model of divine accommodation in Calvin's theology. Cf. Arnold Huijgen, "Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology: Analysis and Assessment (*Reformed Historical Theology*, 16)," (Göttingen: V&R, 2011), 305–16.

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