

“NEW WINES AND OLD WINESKINS?
THE RELATIONSHIP OF EVANGELICAL THINKING ON SPIRITUAL
FORMATION AND THEOLOGICAL MODELS OF SANCTIFICATION”

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Spiritual Formation is a significant element in current evangelical thinking.

Certainly that is true for pastors and parishioners in local congregations; certainly that is true in the arena of theological education and the training of men and women for ministry (it is, for example, a significant emphasis at the institution at which I am privileged to teach). And spiritual formation is also a concern for evangelical theologians – witness the ETS Spiritual Formation Study Group of which we are all a part.

But the concern for spiritual formation so called is a relatively recent phenomenon among evangelicals.¹ Not all that long ago, similar concerns among evangelical theologians and ministry practitioners were discussed in terms of sanctification. Various models of sanctification were presented and discussed, with their respective strengths and weaknesses vigorously debated. But this was the arena for discussions of spirituality in the Christian life. For example, in 1888 InterVarsity Press published a multi-author volume edited by Donald Alexander. It was entitled *Christian Spirituality*, with the very significant subtitle, *Five Views of Sanctification*.²

¹Of course, in other Christian traditions (especially Roman Catholic), spiritual formation has been a long-standing and well-developed concern.

²*Christian Spirituality: Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers

And just a year earlier, Zondervan published a similar volume simply titled *Five Views on Sanctification*.³ In the late 1980s, evangelical discussions of Christian spirituality were explicitly framed in terms of the doctrine of sanctification. That was then, however, and this is now. Contemporary evangelical thinking about Christian spirituality and the growth of Christians into the likeness of Christ is most often expressed utilizing the terminology of spiritual formation.

But does this change of terminology reflect a fundamental change in thinking on spiritual growth and character transformation in the Christian life? Or are the continuities between contemporary thinking on spiritual formation and traditional models of sanctification more real and significant than any differences that might exist? Or to use the imagery of Jesus in a different context – are the realities referred to in contemporary spiritual formation discussions new wine that needs to be housed in new and different wineskins than the traditional models of sanctification? Or are these two kinds of discussions – spiritual formation and sanctification – consistent with each other overall and mutually beneficial to each other? That is the topic for this paper – the relationship between contemporary evangelical thinking on spiritual formation and theological models of sanctification.

To do this, I'd like to focus our attention on two significant contemporary evangelical discussions of spiritual formation, Dallas Willard's *Renovation of the Heart*⁴ and

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

³Dieter, Melvin, et. al. *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1987).

⁴Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado

Bruce Demarest's *Satisfy Your Soul*.⁵ Dallas Willard is, without question, one of the "deans" of evangelical thinking on spiritual formation, having written previous volumes on spiritual disciplines and Christian discipleship.⁶ *Renovation of the Heart* is his most definitive work on spiritual formation into Christlikeness. And Bruce Demarest, Denver Seminary theologian and a past contributor to our ETS Spiritual Formation Study Group, is especially helpful to this discussion since he has also written both on spiritual formation and also on the doctrine of sanctification, in his fine work, *The Cross and Salvation*.⁷ In this paper, I will briefly explore Willard's understanding of spiritual formation through identifying 6 theses that express the

Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002). Further references to this work will be given in brackets in the text of the paper, introduced by the initials "DW," e.g. [DW, 24].

⁵Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999). Further references to this work will be given in brackets in the text of the paper introduced by the initials "BD," e.g. [BD, 32].

⁶Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) and *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997). The latter volume was selected as *Christianity Today's* book of the year in 1999.

⁷Bruce Demarest, "Transformed into His Likeness," in *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997). Demarest has also written on sanctification in Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 3:173-236.

emphases of *Renovation of the Heart*. Then I will look at Demarest’s understanding expressed in *Satisfy Your Soul* to see its both its similarities and differences from that of Willard. And finally I would like to compare and contrast these evangelical views of spiritual formation with three significant models of sanctification – the Reformed, Wesleyan, and Keswick models (as presented in the two five views books) – pointing to what I will argue is a mutually beneficial relationship between the two approaches.

DALLAS WILLARD’S UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Let me sum up Dallas Willard’s understanding of spiritual formation in the following six theses.

(1) The goal of spiritual formation is Christo-centric transformation. Willard understands spiritual formation in general to be “the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite ‘form’ or character” [DW, 19]. Specifically Christian spiritual formation, then, is “the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” [DW, 22].⁸ It’s goal is “an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ” [DW, 22].

(2) The human persons who are to experience spiritual formation are holistic

⁸A similar definition is given later in the book. “Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness . . . is the process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it takes on the character of the inner being of Jesus himself” [DW, 159].

beings, and thus spiritual formation must itself be holistic. Willard argues that human persons are complex, interrelated beings. There are, he contends, six basic dimensions of our lives as human beings, which together and in interplay constitute our “human nature.” They are

- \$ Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
- \$ Feeling (sensations, emotions)
- \$ Choice (will, decision, character)
- \$ Body (action, interaction with the physical world)
- \$ Social Context (personal and structural relations to others)
- \$ Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life) [DW, 30].

Willard understands that the human “mind” involves both the aspects of thinking and of feeling, and that the dimension of volition or choice is located in the human will or heart or spirit (all synonymous terms). [DW, 29]. The practical import of this is the fact that for spiritual formation to be effective, it must touch and transform all of the essential elements of the human person.

Willard says, “The ideal of the spiritual life in the Christian understanding is one where all of the essential parts of the human self are effectively organized around God, as they are restored and sustained by him. Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end . . . [And as a result] the human self is fully integrated under God.” [DW, 31].⁹

(3) Spiritual formation is accomplished through a life-long process, which is never fully completed in this life but which nevertheless produces significant growth in Christlikeness.

⁹This holistic approach to spiritual formation provides the foundation for Willard’s structuring of much of his book, with chapters devoted to the transformation of the mind, both in its thinking and feeling dimensions, the transformation of the will, of the body, of our social dimension, and finally transforming the soul. See chapters 6-11 of *Renovation of the Heart*.

The process of spiritual formation into Christlikeness begins, Willard says, when our human spirits “come alive to and through God.” But following that initial act of regeneration comes “the lengthy process of subduing all aspects of the self under God.” Rather than occurring through climactic, crisis experiences, this process is gradual and progressive, involving our being “incrementally changed toward Christlikeness,” [DW, 82]. And Willard is clear that the final completion of spiritual formation “will never *fully* occur in this life” [DW, 41]. There is always more room for growth. Yet Willard is profoundly optimistic that short of complete perfection, substantial progress can be made. Persons committed to spiritual formation in Christlikeness and the transformation of their character do indeed change. Willard says, “Now these people are not perfect and do not live in a perfect world – not yet. But they are remarkably different” [DW, 218]. Such spiritual formation in Christlikeness

doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean we have here a person whose soul is whole: a person who, through the internalized integrity of the law of God and the administration of the gospel and the Spirit, has a restored soul. Such a soul effectively interfaces with God and the full person and enables every aspect of the self to function as God intended. [DW, 220-221]

This is “sanctification.” Willard understands sanctification to be “a condition of the human soul established in imparted (not just imputed) righteousness” [DW, 224]. More specifically, sanctification “comes about through the process of spiritual formation, through which the heart (spirit, will) of the individual and the whole inner life take on the character of Jesus inner life” [DW, 226]. Thus for Willard spiritual formation is the process and sanctification is the result.

(4) The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of spiritual formation, but purposeful human action needs to be involved, cooperating with God in a synergistic relationship. Willard is very clear that spiritual formation is a divine accomplishment in the lives of believers. It is

supremely “formation *by* the Spirit of God” [DW, 24]. Nevertheless he is insistent that we humans are never passive in the process of spiritual formation. Thoughtful, purposeful action is required, all the while trusting in the initiating and enabling grace of God’s Spirit.¹⁰ This action is “something we are responsible for before God and can set about achieving in a sensible, systematic manner” [DW, 25]. Thus, for example, when Willard considers the transformation of our thought life, he argues

After [God] has implanted new life from above in us by Word and Spirit, we can (and must) also begin to take initiative in progressively retaking the whole of our thought life for God’s kingdom. His grace will accompany us every step of the way, but it will never permit us to be merely passive in our spiritual formation in Christ [DW, 102].

Indeed, “Spiritual (trans)formation . . . is achieved by the ministry of the Spirit in the midst of my necessary and well-directed efforts” [DW, 108].¹¹

While Willard admittedly does not describe the precise nature of the relationship between God’s grace and our active and purposeful human response, it is nevertheless abundantly clear that Willard is synergistic in his understanding of the intentional, purposeful human activity required to bring about spiritual formation.

¹⁰Willard says that “Christlikeness of the inner being is not a human attainment. It is finally a gift of [God’s] grace.” Yet “well-informed human effort is certainly indispensable, for spiritual formation is no passive process” [DW, 23].

¹¹One additional example can be cited. When considering the transformation of the human soul, Willard writes, “We must take care to do whatever we can to keep [our souls] in his hands, recognizing all the while that we can only do this with his help” [DW, 207].

(5) The informed, active, and disciplined use of means of grace is crucial to bringing about spiritual formation into Christlikeness. Willard describes the overarching pattern of spiritual growth and transformation by using the acronym “VIM.” The initials stand for *vision, intention, and means*, and these form the essential pattern for spiritual growth in each dimension of our human existence. Willard writes, “If we are to be spiritually formed in Christ, we must have and must implement the appropriate vision, intention, and means” [DW, 85].

The vision that must captivate growing disciples (or to use Willard’s preferred term, “apprentices”) of Jesus is that of living fully and completely in and for the kingdom of God now and not just hereafter. That involves “*partaking* of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 3:1-2) and *participating* by our actions in what God is doing now in our lifetime on earth” [DW, 87]. But simply having the correct vision is not enough. We must *intend* to fulfill or to carry out this vision.¹² But if the vision and the intention/decision to obey Christ are truly there, the apprentice of Jesus will naturally seek out and apply the means to that end. And when we seek out such appropriate means, “we are not left to ourselves but have rich resources available to us in the example and teachings of Jesus, in the Scriptures generally, and in his people” [DW, 89].

These means include self-denial, which Willard understands to be the

¹²Willard argues that “knowing the ‘right answers’ . . . does not mean that we *believe* them. To believe them . . . means that we are set to act as if they are true and that we will do so in appropriate circumstances. And acting as if the right answers are true means, in turn, that we intend to obey the example and teachings of Jesus the Anointed [DW, 88]. And intention “is brought to completion only by a decision to fulfill or carry through with the intention” [DW, 88].

“indispensable foundation” upon which spiritual formation rests [DW, 64] and “the controlling principle of the renovated heart and the restored soul” [DW, 74].¹³ And it includes our “experienced-based confidence in God’s loving care,” which Jesus communicates to us through his resurrection presence in our lives and his teaching¹⁴ and which frees us to love God and neighbor [DW, 70].

In addition to these overarching life attitudes, Willard points us to specific spiritual disciplines.¹⁵ When he considers the transformation of our thought life, for example, Willard speaks of certain “tried-and-true disciplines which we can use to aid in the transformation of our thought life toward the mind of Christ” [DW, 112] These disciplines are

activities that are under our power and that enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort. We cannot transform our ideas and images, or even the information we have or our thought processes, into Christlikeness by direct effort. But we can do things – adopt certain practices - that, indirectly, will increasingly have that effect [DW, 113].

With regard to the transformation of our thought lives, this most obviously includes the discipline of meditation on Scripture, which enables us to “draw certain key portions of Scripture

¹³Ibid., 74.

¹⁴ Willard gives a practical example of how to foster such confidence in God’s loving care through a daily practice of committing his day to the Lord through meditatively praying through the Lord’s Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. [DW, 70.]

¹⁵See Willard’s 1988 work *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. The fact that Willard has written so extensively on the topic of spiritual disciplines clearly explains why his treatment of this issue here, while significant, is not very extensive.

into our lives and make them a part of the permanent fixtures of our thought” [DW, 113].¹⁶ Thinking rightly about God on the basis of his revealed truth confirmed in experience naturally leads to worship, which Willard describes as “the single most powerful force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person” [DW, 107]. In addition to meditation on Scripture and worship, which are, to use categories from *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, “disciplines of engagement,” Willard also highlights the disciplines of solitude, fasting [DW, 155] and the Sabbath [DW, 174-176], examples of “disciplines of abstinence.”¹⁷ And finally, Willard has an extended discussion of God’s law, which he refers to as “one of the greatest gifts of grace that God has ever conveyed to the human race” [DW, 211]. Referencing Ps 19:7, Willard says that “the law of the Lord gratefully received, studied, and internalized to the point of obedience is ‘perfect’ . . . [and therefore] converts or restores the soul of those who seek it and receive it” [DW, 211].¹⁸

¹⁶Willard expands on this: “To take the ‘information’ of Scripture into a mind thinking straight under the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit is to place one’s feet solidly on the high road of spiritual formation under God” [DW, 106].

¹⁷Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 156-192.

¹⁸For Willard, God’s intent is always that his law operates in concert with his Spirit. “The presence of the Spirit and of grace is not meant to set the law aside, but to enable conformity to it from an inwardly transformed personality. . . . You cannot separate spirit from law, though you must separate spirit and law from legalism” [DW, 214].

(6) While spiritual formation is concerned with the transformation of the individual believer into Christlikeness, it is necessarily social and must be pursued in the context of community. Willard says, “Spiritual formation . . . is always profoundly social. You cannot keep it to yourself. Anyone who thinks of it as a merely private matter has misunderstood it. Anyone who says, ‘It’s just between me and God’ . . . has misunderstood God as well as ‘me’” [DW, 182]. If apprentices of Jesus is to be fully transformed into his likeness, they will not only love God with all their being, but they will also love their neighbor as themselves. This is in fact a “sure mark of the outcome of spiritual formation” given by Christ himself, cf. John 13:35 [DW, 182-183]. To that end, we must identify the woundedness we have all experienced in our social dimension – identified by Willard as coming through assault and withdrawal. We must receive healing from that woundedness through the love of God in Christ. And we must pass that healing and that love on to others.¹⁹ The freedom to do that comes from our willingness to trust God’s goodness and loving care for us in all of life. Willard writes,

Spiritual formation in Christ obviously requires that we increasingly be happily reconciled to living in and by the direct upholding hand of God. . . . From within that outlook we can cease from assault and withdrawal and can extend ourselves in blessing to all whose lives we touch [DW, 197].

¹⁹Willard writes, “If spiritual formation in Christ is to succeed, the power of these two forms of evil [i.e. assault and withdrawal] in our own life, within our self – absolutely must be broken. So far as it is possible, they must be eliminated as indwelling realities, as postures we take toward others. They also must be successfully disarmed as they come toward us. And they must be eliminated in our social environment – especially in the fellowship of Christ’s followers.” [DW, 181.]

This social dimension of spiritual formation impacts not only the end goal – a love for God that expresses itself in a genuine love for our neighbors. Spiritual formation is also social in the means that God intends to use in bringing it about. That is why local churches need to focus on this dimension of their ministry. Willard argues that “the exclusive primary goal” of the local bodies of believers is to be the spiritual formation in Christlikeness of its members [DW, 235]. To that end, not only are pastors and other church leaders, but church members as well are to be committed to one another in the common pursuit of spiritual formation into ever-increasing Christlikeness.

BRUCE DEMAREST’S UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Bruce Demarest’s understanding of spiritual formation shares much in common with that of Dallas Willard. Like Willard, Demarest sees spiritual formation to be

§ a transformation of the believer into Christlikeness,²⁰
§ a holistic process that deals with Christians in the fullness of their personal

²⁰Demarest says that spiritual formation “is an ancient ministry of the church, concerned with the ‘forming’ or ‘shaping’ of a believer’s character and actions into the likeness of Christ. The goals of this practice are things as godliness, holiness, compassion, faithfulness, and obedience.” [BD, 23-24.] Elsewhere Demarest uses the term “Christian spirituality, which he defines as “the shaping of our inner character and outer conduct in cooperation with the work of the Spirit, so that we are gradually being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ” [BD, 38]. Or again, “Christian spirituality concerns the shaping of our inner being after the likeness of Jesus Christ by the indwelling Spirit and the living out of Jesus’ values in service to others” [BD, 74].

being,²¹

²¹Demarest argues that human beings have been made by God in his own image with “vast capacities for living – intellectually, volitionally, emotionally, morally, relationally, and functionally. . . . For the Christian, the path of connectedness to God involves the development of a Christlike mind, will, affections (or emotions), character, relationships, and actions. When any of these capacities is undernourished, our spiritual growth is stunted” [BD, 51]. Heart knowledge of God, a crucial outcome of spiritual formation, necessarily involves “loving God with all our faculties of thinking, intuiting, willing, feeling and relating” [BD, 96]. Thus “Christian spirituality involves the whole person: head, heart, and hands – or knowing, being, and doing” [BD, 292] and indeed “integrates the whole person” [BD, 296].

§ a process that is gradual²² and lifelong,²³

²²Demarest approvingly cites Augustine, who “spoke of the believer’s growth in Christlikeness and communion with God as progressive – a ‘path’ or ‘ascent’ on which the Christian experienced continuing deep changes in heart that led to more evidences (‘fruit’) of the Spirit in the life.” Thus the shaping of a Christian was viewed as a “continuing process, during which the Spirit gradually restored and renewed the Christian’s entire life through deepening relationship with his or her altogether lovely Lord Jesus” [BD, 24]. And this gradual and on-going process of spiritual growth throughout one’s life is identified by Demarest as progressive sanctification. [BD, 71-72, citing 2 Cor 3:18; 4:16; and 1 Thess 5:23 in support of the progressive nature of sanctification in this life.] Elsewhere Demarest argues that the Scripture portrays the Spirit’s work of producing Christlikeness in believers as being “gradual and progressive, rather than sudden or instantaneous.” (“Transformed into His Likeness,” 408.)

²³The goal of perfect likeness to Christ will be achieved only at the Parousia and resurrection. Demarest says that true Christian spirituality, which begins with conversion to Christ and the miracle of new birth, “is enlarged through growth into the likeness of Christ and it will finally consummate with the perfecting of body and soul at the Savior’s second coming” [BD, 71]. Throughout this life Christian growth involves a struggle against the remnants of indwelling sin, and the old nature which Christian’s still possess” [BD, 211]. Thus, according to Demarest, “the victorious life [of the Christian] is a striving towards victory rather than a matured possession of victory.” (“Transformed into His Likeness,” 411.) Yet through the struggle, believers can and do make substantial progress in their growth toward the goal of

\$ a synergistic process, which includes the practice of spiritual disciplines,²⁴ and
\$ a necessarily social and communal process.²⁵

But there are also emphases in Demarest that are distinct from and complementary to those of Willard. For example, while both Demarest and Willard speak in the importance of the transformation of our thought life and the importance of knowledge in our relationship with Christ, Demarest makes it very clear that he has in mind a different kind of knowing, a knowing that is not exclusively cognitive. Demarest speaks of this as he describes his own spiritual journey. As “the typical product of evangelical academic culture” he had

Christlikeness. Demarest says, “Our spiritual restoration, then, is all about allowing God’s Holy Spirit to be joined to our human spirits. When the Spirit inhabits the sanctuary of our hearts, we experience a gradual transformation from within. . . . The Spirit makes us qualitatively new in holiness and godliness” [BD, 291].

²⁴Demarest argues that in seeking the goal of “continual soul restoration,” there is great benefit “from the practice of spiritual habits or disciplines . . . [which] foster maturity in the soul. Spiritual growth requires discipline and training. . . . Growing Christians do well to cultivate, each in his or her own way, disciplines of quietness, meditation, verbal and nonverbal prayer, spiritual reading, and the like. *Spiritual progress occurs through the synergy of God’s initiative and our trusting response* – cf. Phil 2:12-13.” [BD, 287.]

²⁵Demarest says that “transformation occurs in the context of community.” The communion of saints (Eph 2:21-22) “is an important pillar of growth,” for “behind every growing saint stand other committed and obedient saints” [BD, 295].

“tended to view the Christian faith largely in terms of rational propositions” and thus “loaded (and probably overloaded [his] mind with intellectual analysis” [BD, 25]. But as a result of the ministry of a renewal team from the Archdiocese of Denver, Demarest discovered his need to grow in an “intuitive way of engaging God,” learning “how to open my heart as well as my head to truth.” He calls this “knowing from the heart” [BD, 27].

Heart knowledge means loving God with all our faculties of thinking, intuiting, willing, feeling, and relating.²⁶ It’s a knowledge formed by personal connection and lived experience, not by intellectualizing alone. We are to deepen in knowledge of God through our hearts, without losing our minds. We must remain doctrinally orthodox, but we must also press on to know God with immediacy in the core of our being. . . . Heart knowledge encompasses the wisdom and insight of encounter. . . . [It is] an intimate knowing through active personal engagement [BD, 96].

In this holistic heart knowledge of God, there is a place for a kind of “Christian mysticism,” defined as “the believer’s unmediated experience of God, ministered to the heart by the Holy Spirit, which facilitates Christlike character and empowers for kingdom service.” This Christian mysticism must be “guarded,” to be sure, but it can be, according to Demarest, “a healthy corrective to evangelicalism’s leanings toward cold rationalism” [BD, 114]. Now these emphases from Demarest do not invalidate the role of cognitive knowing and rational theology. No, all true Christian spirituality must be “revelational,” in that it is “framed and nourished by the Word of God, rightly unfolded by sound principles of interpretation” [BD, 71].²⁷ “Isolated

²⁶Demarest argues that what the inner person of the Christian is longing for is “knowledge of God that comes from encountering, grappling with and participating with God at all levels of human experience – mind, body, and spirit” [BD, 52].

²⁷That remains essential, lest we fail to take seriously biblical warnings against doctrinal

from theology, spirituality can drift into platitudinous piety. [But equally so] isolated from spirituality, theology can become dry and barren.” Demarest’s conclusion is that “Theology and spirituality must be bound together in a mutually nourishing relationship” [BD, 92] – a statement we will return to later in this paper.

For Demarest, heart knowledge leads to intimacy with the Lord.²⁸ This kind of “loving, deepening relationship with the living God” is the “core of Christian spirituality” [BD, 74]. Seeking spiritual satisfaction through intellectual theology alone backfires, for “Christians need to view God less as a proposition to be scrutinized and more as a person to be engaged with the heart” [BD, 96]. Equally deadly is the frenetic hyper-activity characteristic of so many evangelicals, where we get so caught up in doing for God, that we lose sight of the goal of a “daily, directed, in-step relationship with Christ” [BD, 92].²⁹ This union of the believer with God in Christ is not, according to Demarest, an essential, metaphysical union, but rather an experiential union in which “we are indwelt, nourished, and empowered by Christ through the Spirit” [BD, 100]. Demarest’s focus on intimacy with God is not foreign to Dallas Willard, but it

laxity (cf. 1 Tim 1:10; 6:3, 20) [BD, 293]. Demarest continues, “As we deepen our spiritual lives, we must remain firmly rooted in the historic Christian message. We must preserve the pattern of truth set forth in the apostles’ and Nicene creeds. We must cling to the teachings of Christ and the convictions of faithful theologians past and present” [BD, 293].

²⁸See chapter 4, “Knowing God . . . As Intimates” (pp. 92-122).

²⁹Demarest cites Abraham Kuyper, who says “What we’re talking about here is a relationship so personal and intimate that it can’t be described in words” [BD, 99-100].

is fair to say that he places a greater emphasis on this relational intimacy with Christ as the goal and result of progressive spiritual formation.

While Demarest agrees with Willard that spiritual formation is a holistic process dealing with humans as holistic beings, he is more fluid and less precise when describing the component elements of the human person. Willard, as you recall, identifies six distinct and distinguishable elements of the human person. Yet he never gives biblical warrant for these distinctions and at times seems to run into trouble in trying to distinguish these elements. For example, Willard defines the human heart/will/spirit to be “the center or core to which every other component of the self owes its proper functioning [DW, 29]. As such, it is “the executive center of a human life, . . . where decisions and choices are made for the whole person” [DW, 30].³⁰ Yet Willard will also say that it is the human soul, as distinct from the human heart/will/spirit that is “the dimension of the person that interrelates all of the other dimensions so that they form one life” [DW, 37]. It is the soul, according to Willard, that runs your life at any given moment [DW, 199]. The confusion seems evident, stemming, I think, from an undue desire to rigidly and consistently separate these dimensions of the human person. Demarest, on the other hand, identifies intellectual, volitional, emotional, moral, relational and functional dimensions of human image-bearers of God [BD, 51]. But he speaks functionally, not

³⁰Willard likens the heart/will/spirit, in its relationship to the totality of the human person to the CEO of a company [DW, 30]. Later, Willard says that “functionally . . . the will is the executive center of the human self. From it the whole self or life is meant to be directed and organized” [DW, 144].

ontologically, and seems less concerned about trying to draw hard and fast lines between these constituent elements. In this, I would argue, he is more in line with biblical usage of these terms, which seem to denote significant overlap in the way these terms are used to describe the human person -- e.g. the well-known parallelism of the beginning of Mary's Magnificat, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Luke 1:46-47). While Demarest is like Willard in his advocacy of the use of spiritual disciplines as a crucial part of our synergistic response to God's gracious initiative,³¹ he is more explicit on the nature and functioning of some of those means.³² For example, Demarest writes entire chapters on the spiritual disciplines of meditation on Scripture³³ and contemplative prayer.³⁴ And in each chapter, he gives some very specific guidelines for the practice of such disciplines.

Demarest defines meditation as involving "deep, repetitive reflection on eternal truth" [BD, 134]. It happens as we "prayerfully ponder, muse, and 'chew' the words of Scripture and other Christian writings." Its goal is "simply to permit the Holy Spirit to activate the life-

³¹Demarest speaks significantly of the value and power of these spiritual disciplines, "We form spiritual disciplines, and in time they form us" [BD, 207].

³²As noted above (p. 8, n. 15), the fact that Willard has written an entire book on spiritual disciplines no doubt explains why he is not as detailed and specific about practicing them in *Renovation of the Heart*.

³³Chapter 5, "Word That Feeds the Soul," 123-155.

³⁴Chapter 6, "The Power of Contemplation," 157-186.

giving Word of God so that something more of our lives is transformed to bring us, every day, a little closer to the image of Christ” [BD, 133]. To help us in the discipline of meditation, Demarest gives instruction, for example, in very specific breathing exercises to quiet our souls and prepare us to listen to God [BD, 130-132], and in very specific methods of meditation such as *lectio divina* and the formative reading of Scripture [BD, 136-138]. In addition, he deals with meditation on other materials such as Christian devotional writings, hymns, and works of art [BD, 138-144].³⁵

Demarest is no less specific in the practical guidance he gives concerning the discipline of contemplation, which he defines as “the practice of focusing our inmost being by fixing the eyes of the inner man on God himself” [BD, 159].³⁶ He identifies the prayer of the heart, and one form of it, the Jesus Prayer [BD, 159-160]. He gives specific and direct guidelines for this ancient, yet neglected form of prayer [BD, 163-164]. He focuses on a specific contemplative spiritual exercise, journaling [BD, 180-182]. And he links contemplation with the disciplines of meditation³⁷ and worship, focusing on specifically contemplative worship styles,

³⁵Demarest concludes with a balanced discussion on the use of icons in meditation [BD, 144-146].

³⁶Contemplation is necessary to be able to give to God the openness, availability, and attentiveness we need to enable our relationship with God to grow. Thus “living contemplatively is not a luxury” [BD, 158].

³⁷Demarest writes, “Contemplation is the perfect counterpart to the biblical meditation

such as those utilizing the Taizé model or traditional liturgies [BD, 172-175].

In his discussion of the social and communal context of spiritual formation, Demarest gives specific attention to a wide range of spiritual helpers who work together in the ministry of soul care and spiritual formation.³⁸ He speaks specifically of those who can provide spiritual friendship, spiritual guidance, spiritual mentoring and spiritual direction [BD, 188-216]. These soul care ministries form a continuum that range from the more informal, unstructured and reciprocal (spiritual friendship) to the more formal, structured, and one-directional (spiritual direction) [BD, 195]. Demarest's primary focus is on spiritual mentoring and direction, giving specific guidelines for these practices [BD, 204-210]. Demarest speaks specifically and appreciatively of redemptive counselors as well. (Ibid., 220-252). Thus while neither Demarest nor Willard lay great stress on the mutual encouragement and exhortation that are to characterize the body of Christ in our mutual pursuit of spiritual transformation (e.g. Heb 3:12-14; 10:24-25),

that works the words and truths of God into our souls. . . . Both disciplines should be staples in the Christian's spiritual diet. Meditation without contemplation can become dry and ponderous. Contemplation without meditation may lack the surety of biblical rootedness. 'Meditation is the act of turning our attention from the things of the world to the things of God, but contemplation involves turning our attention from the things of God to attend to God himself.'" [BD, 164].

³⁸Demarest contrasts these kind of soul care ministries with more traditional evangelical models of discipleship which focus more "on gaining information (knowing) and acquiring skills (doing), rather than cultivating the inner life (being)." In those discipleship models "crucial issues of the soul are overlooked." [BD, 190.]

Demarest does highlight specific soul care ministries that can and should be carried out in the body of Christ.

Finally, one of the most significant emphases of Demarest is his openness to receiving spiritual guidance and help from ancient traditions of Christian spirituality. His book begins with his own story and the tremendous spiritual help he received from those in the Roman Catholic tradition, especially at the Benedictine Abbey in Pecos, NM. He devotes a substantial effort to defending to his predominantly evangelical readership the God-honoring wisdom and life-giving vitality of this ancient tradition of spirituality. “God was leading me to honor what was true in my own tradition while welcoming back authentic Christian insights and practices from the older tradition. He was leading me to integrate the new and the old – to balance orthodoxy (right beliefs) and orthopathy (right affections) and orthopraxy (right actions)” [BD, 29].³⁹ Demarest highlights six “treasures” he experienced in his sabbatical retreat at Pecos: (1) A Christ-centered orthodoxy; (2) the commitment to community; (3) the practice of spiritual disciplines; (4) spiritual leaders who see their role as that of leading others into the presence of God; (5) a balanced approach to honoring the place and work of the Holy Spirit; and (6) a connection with classic understandings of Christian spirituality as expressed through spiritual masters of history [BD, 31-35]. Demarest does highlight the wisdom of the spiritual classics,

³⁹Demarest found that the renewal teams he had profited from were downplaying distinctively Roman Catholic doctrines in favor of more evangelical approaches to faith. “In essence, they were moving toward me in certain important matters (certain doctrines) as I moved toward them in others (spiritual practices and understanding about soul growth).” [BD, 30.]

specifically citing Augustine [BD, 264-266], Bernard of Clairvaux [BD, 267-269], and Teresa of Avila [BD, 269-274]. and stressing their value for growth in the spiritual life of the believer. And he encourages ancient spiritual practices, such as *lectio divina*. Thus Demarest highlights the great value of ancient spiritual paths in a way that goes beyond what Willard does.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MODELS OF SANCTIFICATION

When we consider the relationship of these evangelical approaches to spiritual formation to Reformed, Wesleyan, and Keswick models of sanctification, it is appropriate to recall Demarest's statement: "Theology and spirituality must be bound together in a mutually nourishing relationship" [BD, 92]. There is, I submit, just such a mutually nourishing relationship between contemporary evangelical thinking on spiritual formation and these more traditional theological models of sanctification. Let me explain.

The views of both Dallas Willard and Bruce Demarest fit most naturally into a broadly Reformed understanding of sanctification. This can be seen through their shared understanding of spiritual formation as being gradual, progressive and incremental,⁴⁰ as opposed

⁴⁰Anthony Hoekema distinguishes between a definitive sense of sanctification and a progressive sense. In its definitive sense, it means that work of the Spirit whereby He causes us to die to sin, to be raised with Christ, and to be made new creatures. In its progressive sense, it must be understood as that work of the Spirit whereby He continually renews and transforms us into the likeness of Christ, enabling us to keep on growing in grace and to keep on perfecting our holiness. One could think of definitive sanctification as the beginning of the process and of progressive sanctification as the continual maturing of the new person who was created by

to the primacy of the crisis experience in the Keswick approach to sanctification (the crisis experience of a deeper surrender to Christ)⁴¹ and in the Wesleyan approach (the crisis experience of entire sanctification).⁴² Though, as Wesleyan scholar Melvin Dieter rightly states, John

definitive sanctification.” (“The Reformed View,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 77.) Note what Bruce Demarest says elsewhere about progressive sanctification. “Scripture indicates that the Spirit’s work of producing Christlikeness in believers is gradual and progressive rather than sudden or instantaneous.” (“Transformed into His Likeness,” 408.)

⁴¹J. Robertson McQuilkin quotes historian Steven Barabas, “[Every child of God] may step into [his rightful inheritance] ‘not by long prayers and laborious effort, but by a deliberate and decisive act of faith.’” (“The Keswick Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 154.) McQuilkin argues, “For Christians who are experiencing a subnormal life, reentry into normal, supernatural Christian living is through the gate of surrender. . . . Depending on the intensity of conflict, the length of time out fellowship, and one’s personality, this decision may be a major emotional crisis. But even without any emotion, in the sense of a turning point or a decisive event, this decision is rightly called a crisis. For such a person, a normal, successful Christian experience is not the product of a gradual process of spiritual development, let alone automatic process. A decisive turning point is needed.” (Ibid., 171.)

⁴²Melvin Dieter writes that for Wesley, entire sanctification is “a personal, definitive work of God’s sanctifying grace by which the war within oneself might cease and the heart be fully released from rebellions into wholehearted love for God and others.” (“The Wesleyan View,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 17.) Laurence Wood argues that Wesley “insisted that

Wesley understood that there is “growth in grace before and after the event of entire sanctification,” and thus the whole of the Christian life can rightly be viewed as a “post-justification process-crisis-process continuum,”⁴³ the central role of this decisive, crisis experience of entire sanctification is certainly crucial in the Wesleyan understanding.⁴⁴

In addition, the non-perfectionistic understanding of spiritual formation of Demarest and Willard is typically Reformed as opposed to a Wesleyan understanding of

perfect love for God (e.g. entire sanctification) could be experienced ‘instantaneously.’” (“The Wesleyan View” in *Christian Spirituality*, 97.) While both Wesleyans and Keswick adherents argue for the centrality of a crisis experience to advance sanctification, the two views possess a significant difference. Wesleyan theology argues that the experience of entire sanctification is distinct from and subsequent to (logically and usually chronologically) justification. It does something “new” for a believer. McQuilkin, on the other hand, argues that in the Keswick view, the crisis experience of surrender takes a believer back to what was spiritually true of him or her at conversion. (“The Keswick Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 165-166.)

⁴³Dieter, “The Wesleyan View,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 41-42.

⁴⁴Dieter argues, “The critical point of this purifying experience need not be chronologically distinct from justification and the new birth, but logically it is distinct from them in the continuum of salvation. However, the scriptural exhortation to believers to pursue perfection in love, as well as the struggles they commonly have with a divided heart, indicates that believers typically purify of love in a distinct crisis of faith sometime subsequent to justification.” (Ibid., 18.)

“Christian perfection,” the hope of “salvation for all willful sin.”⁴⁵ Yet since Wesley did not understand Christian perfection to be absolute or total or angelic perfection and since he did admit to degrees of on-going growth even after the experience of entire sanctification,⁴⁶ perhaps the Wesleyan view is not as far from that of Demarest and Willard at this point as might be originally thought. However Demarest, especially is more in line with Reformed thinking than Wesleyan is that he views the on-going life of the growing Christian as involving a continuing struggle against the remnants of indwelling sin, and the old nature which Christians still possess” [BD, 211]. Thus, according to Demarest, “the victorious life [of the Christian] is a striving towards victory rather than a matured possession of victory.”⁴⁷ The newness the believer

⁴⁵Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶For a statement from Wesley explaining in what sense sanctified Christians are perfect and in what sense they are not, see his sermon “Christian Perfection” (1741) in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 254-271. See also Dieter, “The Wesleyan View,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 13-15 and his quotation from Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Ibid., 45-46).

⁴⁷Demarest, “Transformed into His Likeness,” 411. Sinclair Ferguson also argues that the sanctified life is not one of quietness, but one in which conflict is inherent. This conflict may result from our being in Christ yet still living in the world, from the opposition of Satan and his demonic forces, and because of internal conflict with the flesh. Ferguson writes, “All that is true *for me* in Christ has not yet been accomplished *in me* by the Spirit. I live in the Spirit, but I also

experiences in Christ in this life, while qualitatively real,⁴⁸ is nonetheless not total and complete.

Anthony Hoekema writes that the “new self,” that is, the believer in Christ as opposed to being in Adam (= the old self) is “genuinely new, though not totally new.”⁴⁹ He continues,

We may say that believers are no longer old persons but new persons who are being progressively renewed. They must still battle sin and will sometimes fall into sin, but they are no longer its slaves. In the strength of the spirit, they are now able to resist sin, since for every temptation God will provide a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).⁵⁰

And finally, the synergistic understanding that Willard and Demarest develop of the relationship of the believer’s role in spiritual formation and the working of God’s grace puts their views in the largely Reformed camp. They both affirm what Hoekema calls “the responsible participation” of the believer,⁵¹ though with the clear emphasis that God’s grace is

continue to live in the flesh.” (“The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality*, 62.) Thus mortification of sin is necessary on an on-going basis (Rom 8:13).

⁴⁸Demarest says, “Our spiritual restoration, then, is all about allowing God’s Holy Spirit to be joined to our human spirits. When the Spirit inhabits the sanctuary of our hearts, we experience a gradual transformation from within. . . . The Spirit makes us qualitatively new in holiness and godliness” [BD, 291].

⁴⁹Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 78.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 81.

⁵¹Hoekema defines sanctification as “that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, *involving our responsible participation*, by which He delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of

ultimate and primary in this process of spiritual formation.⁵²

Understanding Demarest's and Willard's views of spiritual formation to fall within this broadly Reformed understanding of sanctification (which is a good thing from my perspective, since I also identify with this Reformed model) can help us to see some genuine advances they have made in their thinking on spiritual growth. Especially as we compare their views with the way a Reformed model of sanctification all too often works itself out in practice, we can see some significant contributions of Willard and Demarest that can shore up some potential weaknesses in Reformed circles. For example, in their consistent emphasis on synergistic human efforts in the process of sanctification, Reformed Christians can often become very imperative-oriented, with a corresponding under-emphasis on the indicatives of the gospel

sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives pleasing to God." ("The Reformed View," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 61 – emphasis mine.)

⁵²Hoekema writes, "It is important for us to realize that sanctification is not something we do by ourselves, with our own efforts and in our own strength. Sanctification is not a human activity, but a divine gift." (Ibid., 70.) Yet while sanctification is primarily God's work, "it is not a process in which we remain passive but one in which we must be continually active." (Ibid., 71.) He quotes John Murray's hesitation to use the word "cooperation" to describe the human effort involved in sanctification, lest we view it as though God does his part and we do ours. Rather "God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work." (Ibid., 72; quoting John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 184-185.)

and of God's positional sanctification of all believers. At this point, several things Demarest stresses are very helpful – including his emphasis on the goal of intimacy in a believer's relationship with the Lord, his emphasis on being as opposed to a frenzy of doing, his emphasis on the value of silence and solitude in Christian spirituality, and the need and the ways to quiet our hearts that we may meditate on his Word and engage in contemplative prayer.⁵³ In addition, Willard's emphasis on "resting our souls in God" in response to the invitation of Jesus in Matt 11:28-30⁵⁴ can help to counter this overly activistic tendency in Reformed circles.

Secondly, the Reformed model of sanctification can tend to become very intellectual and cognitive. In considering means of grace, Reformed theologians heavily emphasize the Word of God.⁵⁵ John 17:17, Rom 12:2 and 2 Tim 3:16-17 are frequently and

⁵³Demarest says that quieting the heart "is necessary for the life of the soul. The inner man needs to breathe in stillness" [BD, 126]. "Quietness creates a context in which our deepest self comes to the fore, where it may be yielded to the Lord of all" [BD, 127]. "By quieting our souls, we create an empty space in our busy lives for God" [BDD, 129].

⁵⁴Willard says that "rest *to* our soul is rest *in* God" [DW, 209]. "We simply have to rest in [Jesus'] life as he gives it to us. Knowledge, from Christ, that he is good and great, enables us to cast outcomes on him. We find this knowledge in the yoke of Christ. Resting in God, we can be free from all anxiety which means deep soul rest." [DW, 210.]

⁵⁵In speaking of means of grace, "areas in which the grace and duties of sanctification coincide," Sinclair Ferguson says that the Word of God "in the primary means." ("The Reformed

heavily stressed. As a result there is a strong emphasis on the personal study of the Word of God for believers and on preaching and teaching as crucial pastoral priorities necessary to advance sanctification. But along with these good and proper goals, there is often a corresponding downplaying of the emotional and intuitive sides of the human person. As we've seen, both Willard and Demarest place great value on God's Word in the process of spiritual formation. It is that which shapes and forms the thought life of the believer; its truth, internalized both by exegetical and theological reflection and by contemplative meditation,⁵⁶ provides the necessary framework and nourishment for our spiritual lives. But the holistic emphases of Willard and Demarest provide needed breadth in considering the fullness of the human person and the spiritual formation of the believer into Christlikeness. And Demarest's frank recognition of the inability of cognitive knowledge of Scripture alone to bring about spiritual transformation,⁵⁷ his

View," in *Christian Spirituality*, 68.). He does mention in addition God's providences (both good and painful), the fellowship of the Church, and the sacraments (*Ibid.*, 71-74), but clearly the Word receives primary emphasis. Hoekema lists three means of grace: union with Christ, the truth, and faith. All are crucial, yet he says, referencing John 17:17 and 2 Tim 3:16-17 that "the Bible is one of the chief means whereby God sanctifies his people." ("The Reformed View," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 64.)

⁵⁶Both Willard and Demarest provide specific and practical advice on multiple ways to internalize the truth of Scripture. This is also a significant step forward.

⁵⁷Demarest says, "The soul begins to die when we view the faith chiefly as a set of intellectual propositions. Just as the thought of food will not satisfy an empty stomach, *cognitive*

emphasis on knowing God from the heart, and his openness to an unmediated, “mystical” experience of God can be very helpful in minimizing the danger of an over-emphasis on the cognitive and the intellectual in Reformed spirituality.

And finally, Reformed sanctification as it is practiced has all too often become overly individualistic. Though Reformed thinkers can identify the fellowship of the church as a means of grace in the process of sanctification,⁵⁸ most commonly Reformed groups tend to be individualistic. The responsibility for my sanctification, insofar as human effort is called for, is mine – both in being transformed through the renewing of my mind (Rom 12:2) and in the mortification of sin (Rom 8:13). But the corporate dimension of spiritual renewal is often under-emphasized. Small groups become first and foremost (and sometimes only) Bible studies, valuable for learning, discussing and applying biblical truth, but not communities of believers seeking to foster the kind of mutual encouragement, exhortation, burden-bearing and spiritual friendship that leads to holistic spiritual transformation. Reformed pastors tend to see themselves first and foremost as preachers and teachers of God’s truth in Scripture, and the care of souls that leads to the sanctification and spiritual formation of the flock is far down on the priority list. Now to be fair, both the Kewsick and the Wesleyan models can also be quite individualistic. The nature of the crisis experiences central to sanctification in these two models

truth alone is not sufficient to form and nourish the Christian soul. What the inner man longs for is knowledge of God that comes from encountering, grappling with, participating with God in all levels of human experience – mind, body, and spirit.” [BD, 52 – emphasis original.]

⁵⁸E.g. Sinclair Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality*, 72-73.

are inherently individualistic. Wesleyans understand the work of entire sanctification, graciously accomplished by the Holy Spirit, to be a work he accomplishes in individuals. And while others may pray for this, the preparation for this experience through “moment-by-moment obedience to the will of God”⁵⁹ and the ultimate experience of it is necessarily individual. Equally so, the Keswick understanding of the crisis of surrender that is central to a believer’s return to a victorious Christian life is necessarily individual and personal. And even though the Keswick approach to sanctification was promoted through large annual Keswick conventions in England and the U.S.,⁶⁰ the goal of these conventions was to facilitate the making of large numbers of such individual, personal decisions at the same time.

While all of these models of sanctification do well to highlight the crucial reality of the individual and the personal in the process of sanctification, the danger of over-emphasis is clearly great. And Demarest’s rediscovery of the crucial role of the Christian community and the body of Christ in Christian spirituality during his sabbatical retreat at Pecos and his emphasis on the varied and multi-faceted ministries of soul care, especially that of spiritual direction, provides a helpful counterbalance. Willard’s insistence that spiritual transformation must necessarily impact the social dimension of our lives can minimize an over-emphasis on an individualistic approach to the process of growth. And his insistence that “the exclusive primary goal” of the local bodies of believers is to be the spiritual formation in Christlikeness of its members [DW, 235] can help churches as Christian communities commit to work together toward this goal for

⁵⁹Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 19.

⁶⁰McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 152-156.

one another. And while I would wish that both Demarest and Willard would devote more attention to the mutual ministry of all believers to one another as a crucial means of grace that God uses in the process of spiritual transformation (thus seeing the social dimension of spiritual formation not only as a necessary outcome but also a necessary means), they do make considerable advances, in my opinion, from what has gone before.

The point of all this is that even within the Reformed tradition they most closely approximate, the views of evangelical spiritual formation expressed by Dallas Willard and Bruce Demarest do represent, in many ways, significant advances over traditional discussions of sanctification. Those who preach, and teach the doctrine of sanctification, in Reformed as well as in Wesleyan and Keswick models, will do well to pay close attention to and to profit from the views of Demarest and Willard (and others like them).

Yet at the same time, the mutually nourishing and mutually beneficial relationship between the spirituality of spiritual formation and the theology expressed in these models of sanctification goes the other way as well. Writers and practitioners in the ministry of spiritual formation have much to learn from theologians of sanctification. They need to be challenged to consider some of the issues that the various models of sanctification do grapple with. While proponents of the various models do not agree among themselves as to the most biblical answers to these questions, these issues are indeed significant ones that need to be grappled with. A short list of these issues include:

(1) Union with Christ. While many of the models of sanctification join with both Willard and Demarest in highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of spiritual transformation (and rightly so in light of texts like Rom 8:13; Gal 5:16-25; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet

1:2), several theologians of sanctification, in the Reformed tradition especially, point to Christ and to the central role of our union with him. Hoekema, for example, argues for the fundamental principle that we as Christians are “sanctified in union with Christ.” He cites 1 Cor 1:30 and argues, “Christ not only brought about our sanctification; He *is* our sanctification. If we are one with Christ, we are being sanctified; and the only way we can be sanctified is through being one with Christ.”⁶¹ Sinclair Ferguson is perhaps even stronger in this conviction,⁶² and indeed he spends seven pages of his essay exegeting Rom 6:1-14, arguing that our sanctification comes as by God’s grace through faith, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁶³ The point is that the centrality of Christ and the foundational role of our union with him needs to be accentuated. Christ relates to our sanctification and spiritual formation not only as the goal or pattern to which we are increasingly conformed,⁶⁴ but also as the one who is our sanctification,

⁶¹Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 63-64.

⁶²Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality*, 48.

⁶³Ibid., 52-58. Neither Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart* nor Demarest’s *Satisfy Your Soul* deal with Rom 6:1-14 in any substantive manner. Demarest does expound on this passage in “Transformed into His Likeness,” 409-410.

⁶⁴The three models of sanctification we are considering in this paper are all agreed on this, though they emphasize different components of this conformity to Christ. Reformed thinkers tend to emphasize moral obedience to Christ as we follow his example; Wesleyans stress the crucial role of love – to God and to our neighbor; and Keswick advocates stress victory

the one to whom we must be united throughout our spiritual transformation. Writers on spiritual formation would do well to highlight our union with Christ at deep spiritual levels (the Rom 6 kind of union with Christ in his death and resurrection) and not only at the experiential level of soul satisfaction and intimacy.

(2) The nature of sin. All of the models understand sanctification in its progressive and lived-out sense to involve the overcoming of sin so as to live in ever greater conformity to Christ. If that is the case, then the nature of the sin that is to be overcome is crucial. This is clearly the case in the Wesleyan model, which follows John Wesley's definition of actual sins as willful, voluntary transgressions of known laws of God.⁶⁵ This understanding enabled Wesley to affirm "Christian perfection" in the life of the believer who has experienced the Spirit's gracious work of entire sanctification, but not absolute or total or angelic perfection. Reformed thinkers, on the other hand, argue that whatever legitimate distinction can rightly be drawn between actions done intentionally and willfully and those done unintentionally, Scripture does refer to the reality of hidden and unintentional sins (e.g. Ps 19:12). And the dichotomy between motive and behavior postulated by Wesleyans (in which you can be free from all sin motivationally, yet still transgress the law of God unintentionally) seems, they argue, to be neither biblical nor realistic. But the point for our purposes is that whatever debates may rightly be had concerning the nature of sin, the issue is an important one. Now, to his credit, Dallas

over substandard Christian living and the freedom from inner conflicts that would keep us from the victorious Christian life.

⁶⁵See Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 14-15.

Willard does devote an entire chapter to what he calls “Radical Evil in the Ruined Soul,”⁶⁶ which he helpfully defines in terms of its foundation in idolatry and the absence of the fear of the Lord. This is a good beginning, for which I am grateful, yet I would still urge writers in spiritual formation to continue and intensify their discussion of the reality and dynamics of human sin.

(3) The nature and dynamic of faith and its operation in the process of sanctification is another area that needs discussion. In Acts 26:18, Paul says that Christ sent him to the Gentiles to “turn them from darkness to light . . . so that they may receive . . . a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” All three models of sanctification highlight the role of faith in sanctification. Dieter says that the Wesleyan view understands that we are sanctified by grace through faith.⁶⁷ Hoekema also argues that we are sanctified “by faith,” understanding faith to be one of God’s primary means of sanctification.⁶⁸ McQuilkin

⁶⁶Chapter 3 of *Renovation of the Heart* [DW, 45-61].

⁶⁷Dieter writes, “This relationship of perfect love [i.e. entire sanctification] could be accomplished, not by excellence of any moral achievements, but by the same faith in the merits of Christ’s sacrifice for sin that initially brought justification and the new life in Christ.” (“The Wesleyan Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 17.) “For Wesley, God’s sovereign grace through saving faith becomes an active principle of holiness with the hearts of believing men and women.” (Ibid., 20-21.)

⁶⁸Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 65. He argues that by faith (a) we continue to grasp our union with Christ and continue to live in the reality of

understands “the root cause of subnormal Christian experience” to be unbelief,⁶⁹ and thus the necessary cure is to be experienced “not by long prayers and laborious effort but by a deliberate and decisive act of faith.”⁷⁰ McQuilkin understands biblical faith to be two-sided – “including the more passive aspect of reliance and trust and the more active aspect of obedience.”⁷¹ Now it is clear that for McQuilkin and other Keswick advocates the passive role predominates. “For Christians who are experiencing a subnormal life, reentry into normal, supernatural Christian living is through the gate of surrender.”⁷² While there is much activity encouraged and expected from victorious Christians in the Keswick model (especially in the area of missions and evangelism), it is designed to be a consequence of the decisive experience of surrender to Christ in a faith that is passive first and foremost. There is much biblical richness in the Keswick emphasis on the need for surrender and upon faith as passive reliance on God and his grace, a

th is union; (b) we accept the fact that in Christ sin no longer has mastery over us (Rom 6:6, 14); (c) we grasp and appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to overcome sin and live for God (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:16, 22-23; Eph 6:16); and (d) we live out the spiritual fruit of love (Gal 5:6; 1 Tim 1:5) and fruitful good works (1 Thess 1:3; James 2:26), for faith is inherently “an operative power.” (Ibid.)

⁶⁹McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 160.

⁷⁰Ibid., 154.

⁷¹Ibid., 163.

⁷²Ibid., 171.

biblical emphasis that guards against the cancer of self-reliance. And this concept of surrender is also important to Dallas Willard, especially as he speaks about the call of Christ to lose our lives for his sake that we may find them in him. Christians must “give up the project of being the ultimate point of reference in their life,” or in other words, “they must surrender” [DW, 65]. Yet the relationship between the passive and active dimensions of faith is an area that is worthy of deeper discussion in evangelical thought on spiritual formation, lest we drift into the errors of either a self-reliant activism on the one hand or an overly-passive quietism on the other.

(4) The nature of the synergy between God’s grace and human action also needs to be explored. We have already seen that both Demarest and Willard affirm a fundamentally synergistic relationship between purposeful human actions involved and the gracious, initiatory work of God in the process of spiritual formation. But the precise nature of that action is not explored. Hoekema, on the other hand, explores this issue, citing the crucial text Phil 2:12-13. Vs. 12 speaks of what Hoekema calls our “responsible participation” in that it calls believers to “work out” the saving grace which God has so graciously worked in them. But the basis of that activity is spoken of in vs. 13 (note the introductory γάρ); it is the work of God in us to will and to act according to his good pleasure. Hoekema says, “God works in us the entire process of our sanctification – both the willing of it and the doing of it. The harder we work, the more sure we may be that God is working in us.”⁷³ He shies away from using the word “cooperation,” lest we conceive of the work of sanctification being ultimately divided – God doing some and we doing the other parts. Rather we work precisely because God is at work in us. Hoekema sums up,

⁷³Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 71.

We may say that sanctification is a supernatural work of God in which the believer is active. The more active we are in sanctification, the more sure we may be that the energizing power that enables us is God's power.⁷⁴

This is clearly different from the Keswick model. In Keswick thought, when we truly trust in God to sanctify us, we stop working and surrender in passive faith. In the Reformed model, trusting that God is at work in us moves us and motivates us to work all the harder. Again, advocates of the Keswick view tend to be very active. Witness, for example, the high activity levels of a ministry like Campus Crusade for Christ, that is based in large part on a Keswick understanding of sanctification.⁷⁵ But in Keswick thought, the key to spiritual victory is surrender and yielding to Christ, and the activities of Bible reading, prayer, and evangelism follow as consequences. In the Reformed understanding, on the other hand, those activities are the means and indeed the pathway to victory and spiritual transformation.

While Bruce Demarest does communicate a Reformed view of divine/human synergy similar to Hoekema as he writes on sanctification,⁷⁶ neither he nor Dallas Willard

⁷⁴Ibid., 72.

⁷⁵See Bill Bright's booklet "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?"

⁷⁶Demarst writes, "Sanctification is a cooperative venture; the Spirit blesses believers with sanctifying grace, but the latter must faithfully cooperate therewith. Faith alone justifies; but faith joined with our concerted efforts sanctifies. . . . The biblical pattern is not that God does some of the sanctifying and we do the rest. Rather, believers strive for holiness in every area of

emphasize the nature of the synergy when they write on spiritual formation. Now I'm sure Demarest would tell us that we just need to read all of what he has written. And no doubt that is true. Yet not all writers on spiritual formation are equally committed on writing on this and other issues of sanctification. And it is their writings on spiritual formation that are making the greatest impact on the church. I would encourage them to consider seriously the nature of the divine/human synergy.

(5) A final area to be explored is the necessity of sanctification and the consequences of failing to make progress in it. Does a failure to make substantial progress in sanctification or spiritual formation cause one to forfeit the obtaining of full and final salvation, or does it merely cause one to forfeit eternal rewards? Is significant effort towards growing in experiential holiness a necessary component of a legitimate assurance of salvation? Or would it result in a loss of God's blessing and soul satisfaction in this life now, but nothing more? Both Reformed and Wesleyan theologians argue that experiential holiness is a necessary condition for obtaining full and final salvation. Texts like Heb 12:14; Rom 6:22; 8:13; 1 Cor 6:9-10; and Gal 5:9-21 argue in that direction. Now clearly the two views differ as to whether the lack of progress in sanctification and the continuation in an unrepentant life of sin causes one to forfeit a salvation they initially possessed or whether that kind of life gives evidence that one never truly was regenerated in the first place. That truly is a significant debate. But both views are

life through the enabling Spirit. . . . Sanctification, then, results from the initiative and grace of God to which is joined the diligence of believing people. According to the biblical order, our actions are a response to the prior, sanctifying action of God in us." ("Transformed into His Likeness," 425.)

convinced that there are indeed eternal consequences of failing to make substantial progress in sanctification or spiritual formation. Those in the Keswick movement are less clear. McQuilkin argues that it may be possible to be an unsundered Christian (the so-called ‘carnal Christian’),⁷⁷ but he also affirms that there is “no biblical basis for any assurance of salvation” for those who “continue to reject the known will of God and are comfortable in that condition.”⁷⁸

Dallas Willard does speak to the necessity of spiritual formation, saying that

Spiritual formation is not something that may, or may not, be added to the gift of eternal life as an *option*. Rather, it is the path that the eternal kind of life ‘from above’ naturally takes. It is the path one must be on if his or hers is to be an eternal kind of life. [DW, 59 – emphasis original].

Yet, the emphasis that can come through is that one’s soul satisfaction and one’s experience of intimacy in relationship to God are all that is at stake in the issue of spiritual formation.

Important as these realities are, the issue of whether issues of eternal consequences are at stake needs to be explored.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined two important contemporary evangelical treatments of spiritual formation – Dallas Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart* and Bruce Demarest’s *Satisfy Your Soul*. After comparing and contrasting them, we looked at their relationship to three crucial theological models of sanctification – the Reformed, Wesleyan, and Keswick models. We have seen that both spiritual formation and sanctification speak of the

⁷⁷McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,” in *Five Views on Salvation*, 170.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 162.

same spiritual reality – the Christ-centered, Spirit-directed process of transformation of disciples as whole persons into an ever-greater conformity to the likeness of Christ. And we have seen that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the spirituality of spiritual formation and the theology of these models of sanctification. The views of Willard and Demarest fit most closely into a broadly Reformed model. And within that tradition, we have seen significant advances that have come from these evangelical examinations of spiritual formation. Clearly those who preach, teach, and write on the theology of sanctification have much to learn and to profit from Willard, Demarest, and the like. But the theological and spiritual benefit goes in the other direction as well. Theological models of sanctification do address issues and topics that are perhaps neglected in contemporary treatments of spiritual formation. Those who labor in the field of spiritual formation will do well to stand on the shoulders of those who have thought deeply on issues of sanctification. The point has been made, I trust. Spiritual formation and sanctification need each other. Sanctification is not an old wineskin that must be discarded in order to profit from the new wine of spiritual formation. Neither is spiritual formation a new and weird departure from tried and true discussions of sanctification. No, both spiritual formation and sanctification need one another. So, to quote the words of Jesus from another context, What God has joined together, let no one separate.