Spirituality and Lay Formation for Empowerment

For any transformative model of ministry to influence and impact empowerment, it must seek grounding and be rooted in spirituality. The lay state, therefore, should not be precluded from this critical ferment. The phenomenon of spirituality for transformation will gain currency, interest and momentum only when the lay are motivated to look at their own spiritual transformation and view it as the essence of this renewed approach to training and empowering them for partnership in incarnational mission and ministry.

Spirituality is highly regarded as an important entry and medium that transforms followers into discipleship. It serves to provide meaning and connection on an otherwise disjointed and disoriented psychological and spiritual experience. The local environment becomes an important channel through which the individual processes their spiritual encounters based on what exposure and/or experience is available within the diverse social and moral fabric of daily life.

Spirituality is evoked from the individual’s theological interpretation of faith expressed in God, which in turn finds effective representation in the day-to-day expression of that faith through the person’s spiritual encounter with the world. Consequently, this experience is shown in ministry though service and interaction with other people and the environment.

The christian person experiences spirituality as an enlightenment proceeding from the spirit of Jesus which, when modified by the word “Christian,” speaks about the incarnation of Jesus. Keenan Osborne sees it as “nourishment”, receiving its energy from the “Spirit of Jesus.”¹ It assumes a life of its own as it is given room and space to develop and inspire every possible

area of the believer’s life. For both the non-ordained and the ordained, it would mean recognizing distinctive changes taking place within their respective states of life. It is presupposed by certain fundamental expressions, which Osborne alluded to as faith formative encounters that “center around one’s belief in God, one’s belief in Jesus and one’s belief in the enscriptured word of God.”

Spirituality takes on an intimate and personal quest by those who desire to involve their lives in a more intimate relationship with God. It ultimately becomes a discipline embodied within the lifestyle of those wishing to become more than nominal church members and to become more intentionally involved with the gospel praxis of service to neighbor the expression of love for God.

The internal transformation is a significant step in the individual’s personal decision to become fully immersed within the life of intentional ministry among the “community of believers”. The role of spirituality goes a long way in stimulating this religious component embodied within the peculiarity of every human being. The point is made to the effect that, “spirituality may be considered as the essence of the religious phenomenon for it is concerned with the nature and content of the relationship between an individual and God.” This understanding moves us even closer to more clearly appreciate the diversity of God’s creation and the locus of each individual’s faith within the universal spirituality of God’s purpose for our lives. One of the fundamental principles of spirituality that needs mentioning is that it is a primary experience, that which the individual encounters personally with God.

Spirituality that informs the personal and spiritual life of the believer can assume

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2 Ibid.
efficacious proportions with transformative consequences when the believer is given opportunities for regular interactions with the primary sources of spiritual formation. It is for this reason that I wish to offer three fundamental sources of Christian expression that the have collaborated to contribute to the meaningful articulation of the lay spiritual transformative process. Developmentally, they continue to provide ongoing spiritual ferment and nourishment, supplied through regular and committed interaction with Jesus through the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Effective Christian lay formation has the capacity to foster and encourage each person in their development into the biblical invitation to be saint. St. Paul refers to it as “equipping saints for ministry” (Ephesians 4: 12). Through this method the affirmation of spiritual gifts present in the body of believers receives recognition. in all forms or varieties. The foundation of collaborative ministry is the discernment of these gifts. Creating a climate for these gifts to be effected within the ecclesia.

However, we must be cognizant of Christ’s role in this formation and the fact that he takes the initiative. As St. Paul cautions, if “we are assuming the stature of Christ (Rom 12:1f), it is a process of putting on Christ (Gal 3:27), a solidarity in Christ, a sharing in his dying and rising.”4 Formation helps people achieve unity of life and overcome polarity. Christian spirituality, as an inevitable and quintessential constituent of lay formation, can become a mundane and secular exercise in the absence of the Holy Spirit. Lay formation becomes the “ground of our meeting” and the Holy Spirit, as the elemental energy of communion and the third party who stands between us and the other person, makes us mutually aware of each other’s sacred value. Engendered within the spiritual transformative process is that it compels the individual to look beyond self and search for God through service to man.

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Lay formation is an ongoing exercise in the ecclesial life, empowering and equipping laity for sustained ministry. Parochial leadership is also fundamental and congruent to any confirmation of lay incorporation. Practical involvement in the nuances of lay formation has seen encouraging signs of decentering coming from the laity in its move from the periphery of ecclesial participation to the acknowledgment of their fundamental locus in the ecclesia. The church must continue to reflect Christ in the world and be the “salt”, the “light”, and the “leaven”, undergirding the social transformation of societies and families.

**Liturgical Spirituality for Lay Transformation**

The distinctive characteristic that distinguishes this particular expression of spirituality operates primarily within the confines of the church’s liturgy. The Eucharist is the principal act of worship in the believing community. It is the critical engagement and openness to the Holy Spirit in which the story of our faith is articulated in community through Word and Sacrament. The basic structure of Word and Sacrament is intertwined into a wonderful tapestry characterized by a high degree of creativity. In our ecclesiology, it is essentially voiced through public and communal witnessing and institutionalized by human institutions and traditions operating in the ecclesia, “public preaching is ministry and liturgy (Rom 15:16)”\(^5\). Liturgy is the corporate experience of the spirituality of the community of faith. In this regard, Edward Yarnold would argue, “No one’s spirituality is entirely individual. Spirituality is shaped by public worship and conversely forms and styles of public worship are conditioned by the spirituality of the worshipping community”\(^6\).

Corporate spirituality has the potential of being expressed within the liturgical setting of the church or the home. The celebration of the liturgy could provide a spirituality that arouses the

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6 Jones, Wainwright, and Yarnold 1986, 39.
sense of God’s presence. Architectural designs of a church are also said to effect spiritual appreciation of believers insofar as it focuses the attention of the worshipping community upon the sacred ornaments of altar, fonts, eucharist, tabernacle and other sacred icons. The architectural icons work to connect the nuance dimensions of sacred action, baptism, eucharist and the word into one symmetrical order of communal worship and spiritual nourishment. However, spirituality confined to this particular emphasis within the ecclesia risks the danger of being restrictive and self-deceiving in that it reduces the individual’s personal search for his/her authentic spirituality. The focus should be on the structural ambience and iconic manifestations of God, whose preference is to reside in the spiritual being of God’s children.

Liturgical spirituality manifests an even deeper and more far reaching transformational component. This particular worshipping atmosphere has the immense potential of encouraging the individual to use liturgical spirituality as a springboard for personal or ascetic spirituality. Within this setting, the clergy act as the spiritual directors, and officiate as critical links between the believers and God as they attempt to sort through the many idiosyncrasies and innuendoes involved in spiritual formation. The assistance offered by the spiritual directors in this particular blend of spirituality is spiritual friendship and companionship. Because God is generally viewed as illusive, there is a constant need for discernment. This, invariably, lies at the heart of the spiritual director. Kenneth Leech articulates the spiritual director’s role as that which points the believer to a sense of discernment when he states that, “the spiritual director is concerned with the attainment of spiritual discernment.”

The practice of liturgical spirituality would keep the believer under the constant purview and focus of the clergy, thereby, allowing for a healthier and more coordinated spiritual formation through regular discernment of the person’s spiritual progress. It also offers a means

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7 Leech 1989, 70.
through which the People of God can transform, through interaction and discernment, their spirituality from spiritual encountering to discipleship. This divine commission mandates the faithful to examine baptism as an affirmation of everyone’s locus in God’s call and anointing. The exclusion of some in preference for others is difficult to accept, particularly if the spiritual thrust were aimed toward the transformation of established patterns and practice. When we can view it through this lens, then our appreciation of the Eucharist becomes more relevant and concretized in action.

The Christ in us becomes the strength and sustaining power through which we do ministry, seeking to transform the world with him. This ministry, however, begins at the altar and is reflected in our reconciliatory life lived with others. St. John of Chrysostom affirmed the power of reconciliation integral to the Eucharist and believed it should be shared within the fellowship,

No one can receive God’s pardon and peace in the Eucharist without also becoming a person of pardon and peace. No one can take part in the Eucharist feast without becoming a person prepared to share.\footnote{John Chrysostom quoted by Oliver Clements, \textit{The Roots of Christian Mysticism} (New York: New City Press, 1995), 119-120.}

The element of prayer is embodied both within all liturgical acts and outside the context of liturgical expression in the believer’s private moments. It has sufficient warrant to stand on its own as a separate vehicle for lay spiritual transformation. However, its place in the liturgy serves the purpose of continuing the connection of worshippers to the infinite will of God. Communication is fundamental to any relationship, and prayer is the link with God in a relatively formal and informal setting.
Biblical Spirituality for Lay Empowerment

The spirituality of the Bible is incarnational; apart from it transformative manifestations, it embodies our call to action, as we engage with eschatological reservation the transformation of world. We do not realize the reign of God for it is God’s doing. Although we may engage our co-creatorship by tilling the soil, casting seeds, fertilize, seek the lost, yet we are incapable of creating the sun and water. This incarnational motif is ultimately God’s, as are the harvest and products.

Biblical spirituality creates the opportunity for the faithful to receive spiritual nurture and enables the baptized to become more responsible citizens of God’s resources on earth. This in essence transforms them into facilitators of the Kingdom of God. We work with the Holy Spirit to prepare the world for the utopic reign of God, and include us in working for social justice. The process of biblical spirituality addresses the spiritual needs of all Christ followers, even providing an entry to transformation for people in all states and condition of life, the marginalized, imprisoned, sick, hungry and disadvantaged. Every believer shares Christ’s incarnation by being the human proclamation of the kingdom through identification with the cause of those rendered by society as social “mendicants” and “outcasts.”

New Testament spirituality is presented as being fundamentally formative in intent and encouragement, preparing the People of God for life in the kingdom and for spiritual growth in self-actualization, as seen in the lives of the apostles. A spirituality of such invaluable moral and social dimension should have similar effect on all laity. To love humanity is to love and act as Christ does, and allow the events of his death and resurrection becomes the language for the transformation of self. Incorporated through baptism and in faith, the Christian dies and rises with Christ, to live and act his/her virtue in the lived experience of Christian discipleship.
Finally, as clergy and bishop, it has been a privilege to witness several opportunities of personal spiritual transformation in the lives of the faithful. It is seen as an essential ingredient for effective ministry. In rural multi-station parishes clergy, as in so many other disciplines in parish ministration continue to maintain the role of spiritual leader. It is imperative for the laity to witness the clergy living and pioneering spirituality because of its transformative influence to the ordained life, as Leech stresses, “is a lived theology of holiness and liberation.” The spirituality of clergy compels them to be “restless” for participation in renewal, recommissioning, reconciliation, social justice and rededication. Without its manifestation, there is the danger of, “sinking into the zone of comfort and shelter.” It is this desire to express, in tangible way, a level spirituality that grounds the clergy’s pursuit to lead all the people of God in a spirit of mutual cooperation to share their gifts for collaborative ministry that became one of the fundamental motivations for this thesis-project.

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9 Leech 1989, 136
10 Ibid.