

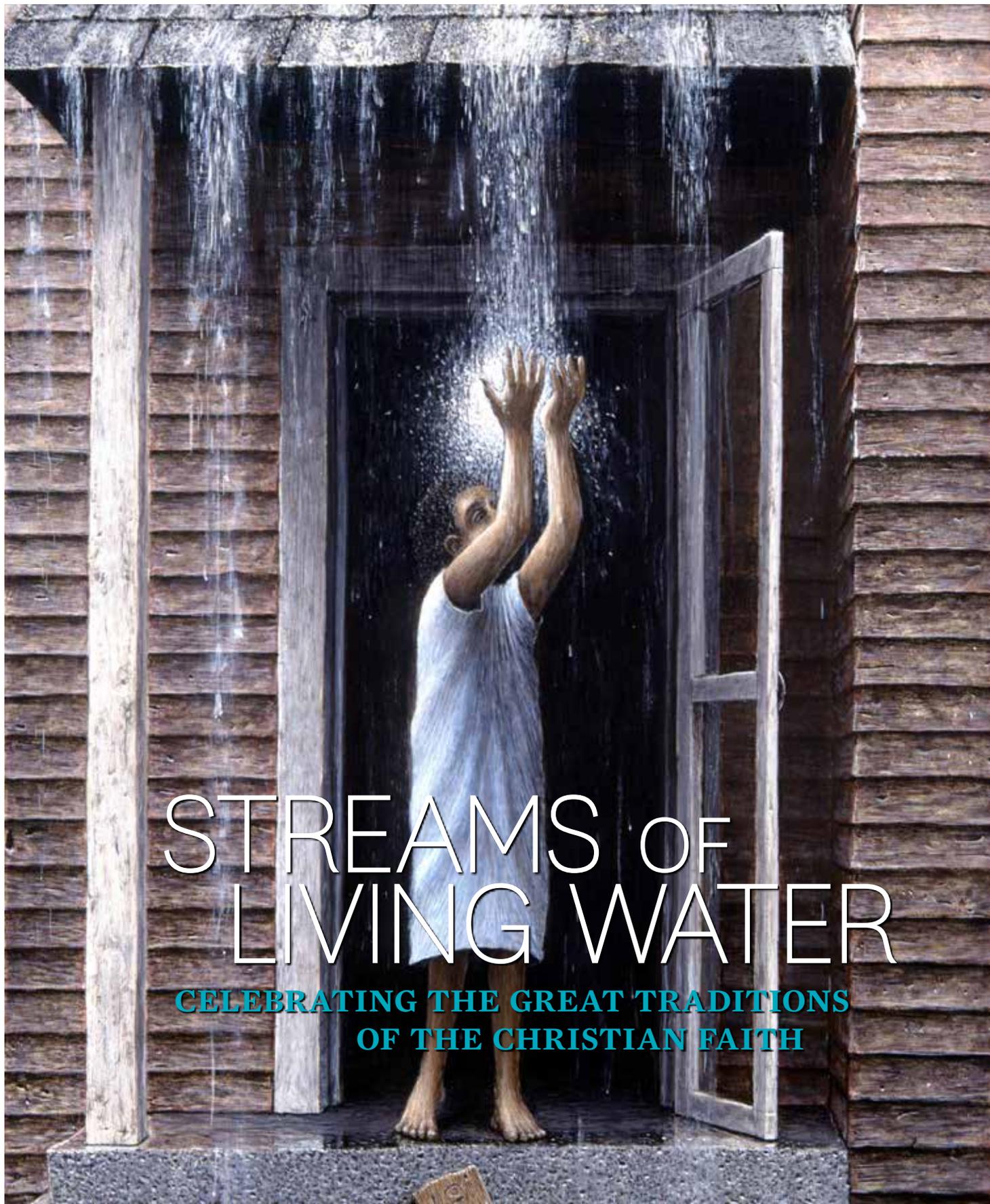
# CONVERSations

A FORUM FOR *Authentic* TRANSFORMATION SPRING | SUMMER 2013



volume

11.1



## STREAMS OF LIVING WATER

**CELEBRATING THE GREAT TRADITIONS  
OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

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A FORUM FOR *Authentic* TRANSFORMATION



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Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith.**

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# EDUCATING WAIST-DEEP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREAMS

BY KEN BREWER

**W**HEN I BEGAN MY JOB at Spring Arbor University, I was charged with the task of developing a master's program in the area of theological studies. I quickly dismissed the idea of starting a new seminary since there are already scores of good ones out there. However, I mused over the question, *What didn't I get while in seminary?* My mind gravitated toward spiritual formation.

Back in the 1980s, there was precious little attention given in seminaries to spiritual formation. Instead, I stumbled into spiritual formation as a pastor of a United

As Richard and I began to talk about a master's degree in spiritual formation, it was clear that the program needed to be Christ-centered in its focus and ecumenical in its scope. Renovaré's emphasis upon six major dimensions of the spiritual life rooted in the life of Christ and expressed in the historic Christian tradition was a logical foundation. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Christian faith, and the vast Christian tradition could be mined to supply the necessary materials from which to build a stable, reliable, and robust spiritual life. The Master's in Spiritual Formation and Leadership (MSFL) program, as a result, adopted as its foundation and structure Foster's concept of the Six Streams. This program is intentional about integrating each of the six dimensions of spiritual life through specific courses and textbooks, residency topics and practices, various spiritual exercises within each course, and by the speakers we invite to our annual residencies. Our intentional method of weaving the streams into our program resulted in a flow of life

Our intentional method of weaving the streams into our program resulted in a flow of life that was full of the Kingdom of God.

Methodist church in New Jersey. I was desperately seeking to restore my dry soul after several years of intellectual work in four different seminaries. In addition, my small church was either going to grow or close. As I implemented spiritual formation groups, renewal and transformation began to happen in my church and in my life.

Having transitioned back into an academic setting, I imagined what a program in spiritual formation would look like. My guiding question was, "How does one structure an academic program that is intentional about spiritual formation?" When I was pondering that question, Richard Foster was teaching at Spring Arbor University, and I was appointed professor of record for Richard's course. Who better to ask about a master's degree in spiritual formation than Richard Foster?

that was full of the Kingdom of God. I offer our model of educating in the Six Streams as a way of connecting how each stream might integrate intentionally into your church, ministry, program, or everyday life. Standing waist-deep in the streams hasn't just gotten our students all wet—it's produced transformation and a deeper life in Christ that I hope that readers can take hold of from our example.

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## THE STILL STREAM OF CONTEMPLATION

**S**olitude, meditation, and prayer are central to the development of the spiritual life. While this is true, people today find it very difficult to slow down, get quiet, focus their inner thoughts, and pray. There are so many things swirling around our lives externally and internally. The greatest hunger of the

human heart is for intimacy with God and others. That intimacy is spawned in the still stream of contemplation. We are invited into the warm fellowship of the Divine Life in places of quiet. Contemplation is essentially about being attentive to the Divine Presence rather than busying one's self with activity, even if that activity is "spiritual." Christian contemplation is intentionally creating sacred space to gaze upon God's beauty. Yes, Jesus was a busy guy. He came to heal and redeem a broken world. And yet, the Gospels record that he frequently found a solitary place to pray (Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 6:12).

We were intentional about including the Contemplative Stream within the MSFL program in a number of ways. First of all, while any master's program will certainly add additional hours to one's life, the MSFL program was designed for working people who had families. The pace of the program was intentionally aimed at not overloading these students and instead providing them the space they needed to live out the Contemplative life. Second, the first two courses, "Christian Spirituality" and "Disciplines of the Spirit," specifically emphasize the importance of solitude, meditation, and prayer. The course on "Formational Theology" also provides a basis for the contemplative life by studying the theology and practices of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Students read a classic text on contemplative prayer, *The Cloud of Unknowing*,<sup>1</sup> and practice contemplation in the course's weekly prayer exercises. In addition, students are required to go on a contemplative retreat for two to three days each semester. The overall goal is to learn the habit of beholding God's beauty in quietness and solitude and be transformed into God's likeness. Instead of heaping more things to do on top of students, we took a counter-cultural route and chose for the living practice of contemplation to become a stream flowing through the entire experience of education.

#### THE PURE STREAM OF HOLINESS

It is said that you become what you behold. This is true of married couples as they grow old together. It is even true of some people and their pets! The pure stream of Holiness flows organically from the still stream of Contemplation. The university from which this program sprung stands squarely in the Holiness Stream, which stretches back to John Wesley in the eighteenth century. Wesley emphasized holiness of heart and life. Holiness can be defined as the intentional

pursuit of the love of God and love of neighbor with one's whole being. This is more than simply willing to be good or pulling one's self up by one's bootstraps. We need God's grace and the Spirit's empowerment to change our desires and habits. Holiness is to want what God wants with single-minded purpose. Holiness is to take on the character of Jesus Christ. Holiness involves saying "No" to sin and temptation and saying "Yes" to life in the Spirit. Holiness is not a cherished concept these days. Wesley, however, taught that holiness produces wholeness and happiness. Spiritual virtues do not sprout overnight. Virtue is developed through cooperating with the Holy Spirit's activity in one's life and by attending to spiritual disciplines or "holy habits."

Our view of educating in the Holiness Stream attends to the life of virtue in four ways. First, the course on "Disciplines of the Spirit" not only introduces the student to spiritual disciplines as a means of grace, students actually practice a variety of disciplines throughout the course. Thereafter, a particular spiritual discipline is highlighted and practiced in each of the subsequent courses in the program. Second, developing holiness of heart and life is not a solo sport. We were created for community and accountability. The course "Introduction to Spiritual Direction" contributes to the Holiness Stream by teaching students the significance and benefits of having a spiritual director to the development of the virtuous life. Third, students are required to be under a spiritual director or mentor during their tenure in the program. They are encouraged to meet monthly with their spiritual director and give a report of their sessions. Fourth, students are placed in cohorts from ten to twenty persons, much like Wesley's small group model of class meetings. It is amazing how intimate cohorts become and how they foster growth, accountability, and holy virtue.

#### THE WILD STREAM OF CHARISMATA

It is the Holy Spirit who makes us holy. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the forgotten member of the Trinity. Many churches ignore, fear, or misunderstand the Holy Spirit. Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism and was empowered by the Spirit for mission and ministry. The goal of Pentecost was the formation of a community where God dwells and reproduces his character. The Holy Spirit also empowered and equipped the early disciples to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus. The goal of the gift of the Spirit is the formation of a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered community of disciples who are on mission

The greatest hunger  
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1 *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Ed. James Walsh. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981.

in the world just as Jesus was. God has given the Holy Spirit to all followers of Jesus (Romans 8:9). Congruent with the gift of the Spirit are spiritual gifts for every believer (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). Spiritual gifts are effective tools to minister the way Jesus did. It is unfortunate that many Western churches and Christians neglect the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. Experiencing the Spirit involves standing under an open heaven. Being “cautiously open” won’t get you there. The wind of the Holy Spirit is currently blowing revival around the world. The Charismatic tradition has now become the second-largest segment of Christianity on the planet.

The first program residency had a healing Eucharist service led by Richard Foster and the late Bill Vaswig. Bill was exemplary in the model of healing ministry that our program wishes to promote. Subsequently, most residencies have included a healing Eucharist service with a number of testimonies to divine healing. We also intentionally included a course on “Healing and Wholeness in Christian Spirituality.” This course not only introduced students to the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, but also incorporated practical exercises that include listening prayer, praying for at least forty sick people by the laying on of hands, and sessions of inner healing prayer. Many students have reported a renewed appreciation for the Charismatic Stream, and we have felt the flow of the Spirit breathe life into the entire study of the with-God life.

#### THE FLOWING STREAM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Contemplation produces holiness. Holiness is attained only by the Spirit’s power. Spiritual power is not only directed inward toward the soul, but also outward to name, unmask, and confront evil in society. John Wesley said that there could be no personal holiness without social holiness. Contemplation should lead the Christian to social engagement empowered by the Spirit. Contemplation without action can lead to stagnation and pious posturing. Action without contemplation can lead to bitter righteousness and cynicism. Jesus not only spent time in solitary prayer, but also cared for the lost and the least in society. According to Jesus, we will be judged by how we respond to those who are hungry and thirsty, strangers and those who lack clothing, those who are sick and in prison (Matthew 25:31–46). The Social Justice Stream flowed through Jesus as he cleared the temple grounds of the cashiers and commercial entrepreneurs who sought to cheat the common folk out of their hard-

earned money. Social justice and acts of compassion are concrete ways we seek to love our neighbor as our self. Social Justice and acts of compassion are vital pathways to spiritual formation.

In introducing students to the stream of Social Justice, we chose to craft a course called “Social Justice and Christian Spirituality.” This course explores the connection between being formed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and being involved in intentional justice work. In the midst of this course, we spend an intensive weeklong experience in Guatemala. Students see, smell, and encounter the serious needs for biblical justice in the

context of Latin America. We visit poverty areas like the city dump and various ministries to the poor in Guatemala City. Speakers from various ministries give testimony to the importance of combining spiritual formation to justice work. Pastor Erwin Luna (“Shorty”) was one of our favorite speakers. Shorty is an ex-gang member who now ministers six

Standing waist-deep in the streams hasn’t just gotten our students all wet—it’s produced transformation and a deeper life in Christ.

days a week in one of the worst sections of Guatemala City. We also have integrated the Social Justice Stream into our residencies by having Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne as speakers. One residency included a trip to Urban Promise, a ministry founded by Campolo for urban development and Christian ministry in Camden, New Jersey. It is important for students to see what others are doing about injustice so that they can catch a vision for what to do in their own communities. Encountering the life of Jesus through an encounter with the poor provides transformative experiences of God that aren’t simply academic, but create a flow of the stream of Social Justice through each student.

#### THE STEADY STREAM OF EVANGELICALISM

The Evangelical tradition is probably most familiar to our students. It focuses upon God’s revelation in Scripture, the person of Jesus Christ, and upon the proclamation of the gospel message to the whole world. Christians know they are called to a life of contemplation, purity, power, and compassion because these dimensions of the Christian life are rooted in the Bible. The Bible is the written Word of God. The Bible, however, is not an end in itself but a means to spiritual formation. The Word of God found in the Bible and embodied in Jesus is to be proclaimed in word and deed. The Bible is to be studied, lived, and shared with others. It is through the Word of God that lives are transformed and nurtured. We not only read the Bible, but the Bible reads us! In



spiritual formation, we do not read the Bible primarily for information but for transformation. The point of reading and studying the Bible is actually to do those things that are in the Bible and to encounter the God of the Bible. Authentic Christian witness is not merely having knowledge of the Bible but about embodying, living, and doing the Word of God.

Our grounding in the Evangelical Stream comes through two courses on Scripture. The first course is “Spiritual Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures.” A key aspect of this course is learning hermeneutical principles and practices that not only give us biblical knowledge, but also shape our lives in spiritually formative ways. Contemplative readings of Scripture such as *lectio divina* are explained and practiced. The second course on Scripture is “Jesus Christ and New Testament Spirituality.” We give special emphasis to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and Paul’s theological reflection on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In addition to learning about life with God from Scripture, we grow our students’ competence in listening to the living Word within the text. Throughout all of our courses, Scripture is studied, read, meditated upon, and prayed. We were fortunate to have Dr. Robert Mulholland help us understand the role of Scripture in spiritual formation at one of our residencies. Our emphasis is on reading the Word in such a way that we are transformed by the Word and embody the Word so that we can become the Word to those who may never read the Word.

#### THE SACRED STREAM OF INCARNATION

The Incarnational tradition is harder to identify as a broad tradition, ecclesiastical body, or denomination. Representatives might include the eighteenth-century Century Moravian Church founded by Count Zinzendorf, as well as working monastic traditions in Roman Catholicism—exhibited in the life of Brother Lawrence—and Eastern Orthodoxy. Perhaps more recent examples might be a community such as the Brothers and Sisters of Charity founded by John Michael Talbot, or the New Monastic movement lived out in such places as Shane Claiborne’s ministry in the inner city of Philadelphia. It is easier to cite particular individuals who live out this stream of faith. Richard Foster cites Susanna Wesley and Dag Hammarskjöld as historic and contemporary examples of the Incarnational tradition.<sup>2</sup> The main focus of the Incarnational tradition is the intentional merging of the sacred and the secular areas of life. It is the attempt to see all creation through a sacramental lens. Theoretically, the Incarnational tradition seeks to encounter the supernatural in the natural, the extraordinary in the ordinary, the infinite in the finite. On a more practical level, the Incarnational tradition finds the Divine

Presence in our job, family life, nature walks, housework, friendships, and sexuality. When we see all of creation as a sacred gift from God’s hand, then we are living out of the Incarnational tradition. When we allow the life of the Spirit to pulsate and permeate the ordinary rhythms of daily existence, then we have discovered living sacramentally. The Incarnational tradition takes all of the other traditions and puts flesh and blood on them.

In living the Incarnational tradition with our students, we intentionally seek a practical component to every course offered. Theory and praxis must go hand in hand for spiritual transformation to occur. You cannot simply read about spirituality, you must do spirituality. We too often confuse reading a book about prayer with actually praying. The Incarnational tradition is integrated into all our courses, but we also have a special course called “Spirituality and Everyday Life.” In this course, students learn to discern the possibility of the sacred in any moment, place, activity, and relationship. They are taught to apply a robust spirituality to one’s vocational life, to begin to practice some form of Sabbath, and to develop a healthy understanding of sexuality and of the temptations we face daily. At our first residency, we went to an Eastern Orthodox monastery where we learned about the monastic balance of work and worship. Our most recent residency featured John Michael Talbot (you can read an article by him on this very topic on page 82), who taught us how to be a monk in the world from the life and teaching of St. Francis and St. Benedict.

The Six Streams rooted in Jesus Christ and the ecumenical traditions of the church make a full-orbed foundation for spiritual formation. We were intentional at Spring Arbor University about building our entire curriculum around the Six Streams concept. Our students have not only experienced this formation themselves, they are taking what they have learned and experienced to their churches, organizations, workplaces, and homes. It is possible to educate and see this kind of formation in other arenas than an academic institution. Churches and other Christian organizations can adopt and adapt the Six Streams as a foundational curriculum as well. One must not be afraid to get one’s feet wet. Just like our students, you need to intentionally wade, float, or swim out waist-deep into each of the streams.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Brewer is the chair of the department of theology, associate professor of theology, and the founding director of the Master’s in Spiritual Formation and Leadership program at Spring Arbor University. He loves canoeing, kayaking, and fishing in all kinds of rivers, lakes, and streams.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Foster. *Streams of Living Water*. San Francisco: Harper, 1998: 237–60.