

AN EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL EDUCATION MODELS THROUGH THEOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL LENSES

Santoso Hutagalung^{1*}

¹Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Pantekosta Sumut Aceh

*Email: santosohutagalung81@gmail.com

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Abstrak: Dalam era yang dimediasi secara digital saat ini, pembentukan spiritual Kristen menghadapi tantangan sekaligus peluang yang unik. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tiga model pedagogis—Model Ziarah (*Pilgrimage Model*), Model Transformasi Batin (*Inner Transformation Model*), dan Model Aturan Hidup (*Rule of Life Model*)—untuk memahami bagaimana pendidik Kristen dapat menumbuhkan pertumbuhan spiritual yang autentik dalam konteks digital. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang didukung analisis teologis, teori pendidikan, dan penelitian empiris, setiap model menawarkan kontribusi yang khas. Model Ziarah memandang pembentukan spiritual sebagai perjalanan seumur hidup yang dipandu anugerah ilahi, dengan penekanan pada narasi dan refleksi pengalaman iman. Model Transformasi Batin menyoroti perubahan kehidupan batin—meliputi pikiran, emosi, kehendak, hati nurani, dan kesadaran diri—yang dipimpin Roh Kudus, serta diintegrasikan dengan identitas Kristiani (*Christlikeness*) melalui disiplin spiritual seperti doa, meditasi firman, dan keheningan. Sementara itu, Model Aturan Hidup mengintegrasikan spiritualitas dalam rutinitas melalui ritme yang disengaja, seperti doa harian, pembacaan Alkitab, refleksi diri, praktik sabat, dan keterlibatan komunitas yang akuntabel, sehingga iman diwujudkan dalam kebiasaan hidup. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketiga model, jika dikontekstualisasikan secara tepat, mampu mendukung pembentukan spiritual yang mendalam dan holistik dalam lingkungan digital. Pedagogi spiritual digital dipahami sebagai desain pembelajaran berbasis teknologi yang menumbuhkan dimensi spiritual melalui refleksi daring, komunitas virtual, dan praktik kontemplatif. Penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka konseptual bagi pendidik Kristen untuk membentuk identitas iman dan pemuridan yang tangguh di tengah era distraksi.

Kata-kata kunci: pembentukan spiritual, pendidikan Kristen, ziarah, transformasi batin, aturan hidup

Abstract: In today's digitally mediated era, Christian spiritual formation faces both unique challenges and opportunities. This study explores three pedagogical models—the Pilgrimage Model, the Inner Transformation Model, and the Rule of Life Model—to understand how Christian educators can nurture authentic spiritual growth in digital contexts. Using a qualitative approach supported by theological analysis, educational theory, and empirical research, each model offers distinct contributions. The Pilgrimage Model views spiritual formation as a lifelong journey guided by divine grace, emphasizing narrative-based pedagogy and reflective faith experiences. The Inner Transformation Model highlights the transformation of the inner life—including thoughts, emotions, will, conscience, and self-awareness—led by the Holy Spirit and integrated with Christian identity (*Christlikeness*) through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Scripture meditation, and silence. Meanwhile, the Rule of Life Model integrates spirituality into daily routines through intentional rhythms, including daily prayer, Bible reading, self-reflection, Sabbath practices, and accountable community life, enabling faith to be embodied in habitual practices. The findings indicate that, when appropriately contextualized, these three models can support deep and holistic spiritual formation even within digital learning environments. Digital spiritual pedagogy is understood as the intentional design of technology-mediated learning experiences that cultivate spiritual growth through online reflection, relational virtual communities, and contemplative practices. This study contributes a conceptual framework for Christian educators to foster resilient faith identity and discipleship amid

a highly distracting digital age.

Keywords: spiritual formation, Christian education, pilgrimage, inner transformation, rule of life

INTRODUCTION

Christian spiritual formation holds a foundational role in shaping the moral character, theological understanding, and spiritual maturity of believers. It encompasses far more than the transmission of religious knowledge; rather, it seeks a transformative process that engages the whole person—mind, heart, body, and soul—in a dynamic relationship with God and the community of faith. As Abolarin asserts spiritual formation involves “the intentional, multi-faceted process of spiritual development” that integrates theological truth with lived experience¹.

Christian spiritual formation is widely understood as the ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in the context of community². Dallas Willard defines spiritual formation as “the process

by which the human spirit or will is given a definite ‘form’ or character”³. Similarly, Addington describes it as a journey toward “being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others”⁴. These definitions emphasize that spiritual formation is both individual and communal, internal and external, and deeply theological in nature. Estep argues for a multi-faceted model that incorporates cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of the learner, affirming that spiritual growth must be nurtured through an integration of theological knowledge, spiritual experience, and moral practice⁵. This holistic understanding provides the foundation upon which classical models of formation—such as pilgrimage, inner transformation, and rule of life—are explored pedagogically.

The metaphor of pilgrimage is one of the most enduring symbols of Christian

¹ Isaiah Abolarin and Jame Toyin Babalola, “Christian Religious Education and Integrity: A Case Study of Babcock University, Nigeria,” *Koers* 85, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.85.1.2494>.

² David Setran and Jim Wilhoit, “Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: Recent History and Future Prospects,” *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320937463>.

³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of*

Disciplines (San Fransisco: Harper Row, 1988).

⁴ Bethany Addington, “Book Review: Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 14, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131701400124>.

⁵ J. R Estep, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

spirituality. Rooted in biblical narratives such as Abraham’s calling (Genesis 12), Israel’s exodus, and Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, the Christian life is depicted as a path of continuous movement toward God. John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) remains the quintessential literary expression of this motif. Bunyan’s allegory has been interpreted as both a spiritual map and a pedagogical device—guiding readers through stages of conversion, struggle, perseverance, and sanctification. Theologically, pilgrimage embodies the already-but-not-yet tension of Christian existence—highlighting both divine grace and human agency. Pedagogically, it affirms experiential learning, narrative identity, and moral formation over time ⁶. Modern educators such as James K. A. Smith have re-emphasized the idea of Christian education as the shaping of desires and longings—what he calls “liturgical formation”—in which life is understood as a journey toward a telos (ultimate end) ⁷.

The theme of inner transformation is central to Christian mysticism and personal piety. Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ* and John Climacus’s *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* exemplify the inward journey toward union with God, marked by humility, repentance, and contemplative discipline. These texts present spiritual growth not as a linear achievement, but as a process of surrender, renewal, and alignment with divine will. Richard Foster’s (1998) *Celebration of Discipline* popularizes this tradition in the modern era, categorizing classical spiritual disciplines—such as prayer, fasting, solitude, and study—as practical tools for inward change. Theologically, this model reflects Pauline anthropology: “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Educationally, it affirms reflective practices, spiritual exercises, and character education that go beyond cognitive instruction to include affective and volitional dimensions of learning ⁸.

The Rule of Life—originally

⁶ Dan Carroll, “Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices, Second Edition, by Craig Dykstra,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 11, no. 3 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1103092013>.

⁷ Karyn L. Wiseman, “James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*,” *Homiletic* 37, no. 2 (2012),

<https://doi.org/10.15695/hmltc.v37i2.3744>; Robert S. Covolo, “Book Review: *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 3, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091000300114>.

⁸ T Palmer, *Fifteen Characteristics of a 21st-Century Teacher*, *Edutopia (Online)*, 2015.

developed in monastic contexts—is a structured set of spiritual commitments designed to order daily life around God. The Rule of St. Benedict (6th century), arguably the most influential, offers a rhythm of prayer, work, study, and rest that continues to shape many Christian communities today⁹. Later rules, such as those of the Methodist Society and Anglican religious orders, adapted this pattern for lay and communal use. Peterson emphasizes that such practices “train us in attentiveness to God” through habitual rhythms¹⁰. Marchinkowski has further adapted the concept for contemporary use, arguing that a rule of life can help Christians resist the fragmented pace of modern living by fostering intentionality, community accountability, and spiritual sustainability¹¹. In pedagogical terms, this model supports the formation of habitus—that is, the embodied disposition to live

faithfully and consistently in relation to Christian values¹². It aligns with educational theories of situated learning and communal apprenticeship, where formation occurs within a shared narrative and practice-based context¹³.

In the contemporary era marked by rapid digital transformation, educational paradigms have shifted, presenting both opportunities and challenges for spiritual education. The proliferation of online platforms, social media, and instant information access has revolutionized the way people learn and interact, yet it has also introduced phenomena such as spiritual disconnection, cognitive overload, and the erosion of sustained reflection¹⁴. While the theological richness and formative potential of these three models are well documented in classical and modern writings, few studies have examined their integration into structured educational frameworks—

⁹ Agusthina Siahaya and Jenri Ambarita, “Eksistensi Guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Pembelajaran Di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19,” *EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan* 19, no. 1 (2021): 67–84, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.32729/edukasi.v19i1.851>.

¹⁰ Steven Paschold, “Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading,” *Christian Librarian* 50, no. 3 (2007).

¹¹ George W. Marchinkowski, “Where ‘the Unbelievable and the Obvious Collide’: Spiritual Practices and Everyday Life,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2654>.

¹² Jenri Ambarita and Agusthina Siahaya, “Pengembangan Kelas Virtual Interaktif Satu Lembar (KVISL) Pada Materi Indahnya Mengampuni,” *EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan* 21, no. 1 (2023): 1–16, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32729/edukasi.v21i1.1210>.

¹³ Maurice Bloch, Jean Lave, and Etienne Wenger, “Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.,” *Man* 29, no. 2 (1994), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2804509>.

¹⁴ Sherry Turkle, “Reclaiming Conversation.,” *Camping Magazine* 89, no. 2 (2016).

particularly in digitally mediated contexts. The rise of online theological education, virtual church communities, and digital spiritual resources has challenged traditional modes of formation, often emphasizing access over depth and connection over communion. Alventosa and Caldeira caution that digital culture may encourage fragmented attention, superficial relationships, and reduced capacity for contemplation—all of which run counter to the goals of Christian spiritual formation¹⁵. This reality underscores the urgency of reclaiming intentional, theologically grounded pedagogies that resist disintegration by fostering rootedness, resilience, and relational depth.

Furthermore, while many educators employ spiritual metaphors in pastoral or devotional settings, fewer have operationalized them as structured pedagogical tools within formal education. Research is still developing around how such models can effectively counteract the spiritual fragmentation and disengagement often observed in digitally native generations. Therefore, a noticeable gap remains in the integration

of these classical models with contemporary educational strategies, especially in digital or hybrid learning environments.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth exploration of three time-honored models of Christian spiritual education—the pilgrimage journey, inner transformation, and the rule of life—which function both as theological metaphors and pedagogical frameworks. Each model embodies distinctive dimensions of Christian spirituality: the pilgrimage emphasizes faith as a lifelong journey toward God; inner transformation highlights the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's character; and the rule of life underscores communal practices and rhythms that shape spiritual habits. These models are not merely illustrative but serve as actionable frameworks that offer insight into how spiritual education can be thoughtfully structured and meaningfully experienced.

The central research questions guiding this inquiry are:

How do the pilgrimage, inner transformation, and rule of life models

¹⁵ J. Pere Molina Alventosa, "The Shallows. What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains," *RUSC Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v9i1.1134>; Pedro

Zany Caldeira, "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains," *Ensaio Pesquisa Em Educação Em Ciências (Belo Horizonte)* 12, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1590/1983-21172010120312>.

shape theological understanding and pedagogical implementation of Christian spiritual formation?

What practical applications do these models offer for Christian educators seeking to cultivate deep spiritual formation in an increasingly digitalized world?

Theologically, this study draws upon an integration of classical Christian spiritual thought—including biblical theology, patristic insights, and Reformation traditions—with contemporary theories of spiritual formation. Pedagogically, the study is grounded in holistic learning theories, particularly Lee’s relational epistemology, which underscores the importance of authenticity, integrity, and community in the learning process¹⁶. Moreover, Hoare’s emphasis on spiritual disciplines as tools of formation offers a practical lens for examining educational practices that lead to deep, inward change¹⁷.

By engaging in theological reflection, literature analysis, and practical synthesis, this paper seeks to

offer a meaningful contribution to the field of Christian education. It aims to bridge the gap between historic spiritual models and the pressing demands of contemporary pedagogy—proposing spiritually grounded, pedagogically informed, and contextually relevant frameworks that empower Christian educators to nurture faith formation in the 21st century.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive methodology, grounded in both theological inquiry and pedagogical analysis, to explore the enduring relevance of three central models of Christian spiritual formation: the pilgrimage journey, inner transformation, and the rule of life. The objective is to investigate how these classical models—rooted in centuries of Christian tradition—can inform contemporary educational practices and contribute to a holistic, spiritually formative pedagogy in an increasingly digital and fragmented world.

The research process is structured around document analysis and interpretive

¹⁶ Young Hwan Lee, “To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey,” *Korean Medical Education Review* 19, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.17496/kmer.2017.19.3.175>.

¹⁷ Brian Hoare, “Celebration of An exploration of Christian Spiritual Education Models through Theological and Pedagogical Lenses | 116

Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth By Richard Foster,” *Evangelical Quarterly: An International Review of Bible and Theology* 54, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1163/27725472-05403014>.

inquiry. Primary data sources include classical spiritual texts that exemplify each model: *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, and *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (representing the pilgrimage model); *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus, and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (representing inner transformation); *The Rule of St. Benedict*, the *Rule of the Society of St. John the Evangelist*, and *The General Rule of the Methodist Society* (representing the rule of life).

These texts are analyzed not only for their symbolic and theological meanings, but also for their pedagogical implications—particularly their potential to guide curriculum design, formation practices, and educational environments in Christian institutions today. To enrich and contextualize the analysis, secondary sources such as theological commentaries, spiritual formation literature, and contemporary Christian education research are used to trace how these models have been interpreted and applied across time.

Two key analytical frameworks structure the study: **Theological Lens:** This lens interprets each model in terms of its doctrinal foundations, biblical resonance, spiritual anthropology, and

historical-theological context. It draws on theological traditions from Scripture, early Church Fathers, medieval mysticism, and Reformation spirituality to provide a robust account of each model's spiritual significance. **Pedagogical Lens:** This lens identifies the educational strategies embedded within each model and evaluates their applicability to modern teaching contexts. It engages theories such as Palmer's relational epistemology (1998), holistic education, experiential learning, and spiritual pedagogy. Emphasis is placed on how these models can support relational, transformative, and contextual faith formation—particularly in digital or hybrid learning environments.

The analysis is organized thematically, with each model presented in three phases: Symbolic framework and historical origins; Theological interpretation and spiritual dynamics; Pedagogical application in contemporary Christian education.

Additionally, this study incorporates an autoethnographic element to bridge the academic with the experiential. The researcher offers personal reflections on how these models have shaped their own spiritual journey and educational practice. This reflective methodology, while subjective, serves as

a form of theological praxis, illustrating the lived application of spiritual formation theories in real-life teaching and learning contexts.

Through this multi-dimensional approach, the study not only investigates the theological depth of classical spiritual models but also evaluates their pedagogical adaptability in the digital age, addressing the spiritual fragmentation and educational disengagement identified in the introduction. In doing so, it aims to offer a scholarly yet practical contribution to the development of spiritually formative education that is both theologically rooted and contextually responsive.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Pilgrimage Model

Theological Insights:

The pilgrimage model portrays Christian spiritual formation as a lifelong journey oriented toward union with God. This journey is marked by both movement and transformation, reflecting a core biblical narrative wherein the people of God are constantly “on the way”—from Abraham’s call to go to an unknown land

(Genesis 12:1), to Israel’s wilderness journey (Exodus 13–14), and culminating in the Church’s call to follow Christ in discipleship (Matthew 16:24). The motif of pilgrimage thus becomes a theological metaphor for the Christian life: a path of sanctification shaped by grace, suffering, growth, and ultimate hope.

Theologically, the pilgrimage model captures the dynamic tension between the “already” of salvation—received by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8)—and the “not yet” of full eschatological fulfillment, when believers are finally united with God in glory (Romans 8:23; Revelation 21:1–5). In this view, spiritual formation is not a finished product but a process—what theologian Dallas Willard refers to as “the transformation of the inner self to conform to Christ,” a journey sustained by divine grace and intentional human participation¹⁸.

In his classic allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan illustrates this pilgrimage through the journey of “Christian” from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City¹⁹. Along the way, Christian faces trials,

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*.

¹⁹ Andy Draycott, “Iconoclasm, Iconophobia, and Graphic Novel Adaptations of

John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 12, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2020.1810089>.

temptations, companionship, and growth—all of which mirror the Christian's path of spiritual maturation. Bunyan's work reflects Reformation spirituality, particularly the emphasis on personal faith, perseverance, and the inward journey of the soul.

In contemporary theology, Covolo reimagines this journey using the language of "liturgical formation," arguing that humans are fundamentally desiring beings (*homo liturgicus*) who are shaped not merely by beliefs, but by the habitual practices they engage in²⁰. This implies that the pilgrimage of faith is not just doctrinal, but deeply affective and embodied—shaped by communal worship, liturgies, and spiritual disciplines that orient the heart toward God.

Support for the pilgrimage model is also found in Eastern Orthodox theology, where the concept of theosis—the process of becoming more like God—is central. Here, pilgrimage is understood not only as movement through space or

life stages, but as mystical ascent, a progression into deeper union with God²¹. This aligns with the biblical idea of sanctification (Hebrews 12:14) as a journey requiring continual repentance and renewal.

From a research perspective, studies in Christian education and spiritual formation affirm the value of the pilgrimage metaphor. For example, Klink emphasizes that adolescents interpret their spiritual lives through narrative frameworks, and the metaphor of pilgrimage allows them to view struggles as meaningful parts of their faith journey rather than as signs of failure²². Parks also highlights the developmental importance of seeing faith as a maturing journey, especially in young adults seeking coherence, identity, and purpose²³.

Moreover, research on adult spiritual development by Hoehn presents stage-based models that resonate with pilgrimage. Their work outlines transitions and thresholds—such as the

²⁰ Covolo, "Book Review: Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation."

²¹ Danny A. Schieffler and Joshua Genig, "The Orthodox Church and the Mental Health Burden of a Pandemic: A Narrative Mini-Review," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01326-2>.

²² Aaron Klink, "Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the

American Church – By Kenda Dean," *Religious Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-0922.2011.01509_8.x.

²³ Mary Greenan, "Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith by Sharon Daloz Parks," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 2, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1163/24055093-90000210>.

"wall" or "dark night"—that parallel difficult waypoints along a spiritual path²⁴. These models affirm that spiritual formation includes both progress and setbacks, clarity and confusion, emphasizing resilience and transformation over time.

Pedagogical Implications:

Pedagogically, the pilgrimage model provides a transformative framework for reimagining spiritual formation not as a product to be achieved, but as a process to be lived and accompanied. Rather than emphasizing short-term behavioral compliance or knowledge acquisition, this model prioritizes ongoing engagement, inner transformation, and faith integration across life stages. It encourages educators to design learning experiences that are process-oriented, experiential, and deeply contextual—mirroring the developmental arc of a pilgrim's journey.

According to Dykstra, faith formation must move beyond instruction to practical wisdom (phronesis), which is cultivated through practices embedded in everyday life and nurtured over time²⁵.

The pilgrimage model aligns well with this, as it invites learners to explore, struggle, and reflect—stages essential for meaningful transformation. These stages reflect James Fowler's theory of faith development, which suggests that individuals pass through various levels of faith consciousness shaped by personal experience, social contexts, and critical reflection²⁶.

From an educational theory perspective, this approach resonates with constructivist pedagogy, where learners build knowledge through personal meaning-making and social interaction²⁷. Applied to spiritual formation, this means creating learning environments that support narrative exploration, vulnerability, and authenticity—hallmarks of the pilgrim's path.

Narrative and experiential learning methodologies are particularly well-suited for this purpose. When learners are invited to situate their faith within their personal and communal stories, they begin to see their spiritual journey as part of a larger

²⁴ Richard A. Hoehn and James W. Fowler, "Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning," *Review of Religious Research* 25, no. 1 (1983), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511314>.

²⁵ Carroll, "Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices, Second Edition, An exploration of Christian Spiritual Education Models through Theological and Pedagogical Lenses | 120

by Craig Dykstra."

²⁶ Hoehn and Fowler, "Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning."

²⁷ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society, Mind in Society*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4>.

divine narrative²⁸. Practices such as spiritual journaling, life mapping, testimony sharing, and ritual participation offer concrete ways to embody this journey and reflect upon it.

Furthermore, mentorship and spiritual companionship become essential pedagogical tools. The Christian tradition has long emphasized the value of spiritual direction, where a seasoned guide accompanies another on their faith journey²⁹. Educators and mentors serve not merely as instructors, but as fellow pilgrims who walk alongside learners—sometimes offering wisdom, sometimes simply listening and holding space.

In digital contexts, the pilgrimage model invites creativity and flexibility. Virtual retreats, online spiritual formation cohorts, storytelling platforms, and guided meditative apps can reimagine sacred space and spiritual time in the midst of digital overload. Michaelson argue that digital spiritual practices—if intentionally designed—can foster contemplative awareness, relational engagement, and adaptive faith resilience³⁰.

Importantly, the pilgrimage model

also aligns with trauma-informed pedagogy, recognizing that many learners carry wounds, questions, and doubts. The model allows room for lament, detours, and waiting—acknowledging that spiritual growth often emerges through suffering and perseverance (Romans 5:3–5).

The Inner Transformation Model

Theological Foundations:

At its core, the inner transformation model is grounded in a pneumatological and Christocentric theology of sanctification, where the renewing work of the Holy Spirit conforms the believer into the image and likeness of Christ (*imago Christi*). This process is not merely moral improvement but a profound metamorphosis—a transformation of being that begins in the heart and mind. As Paul states in Romans 12:2, believers are to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” and in 2 Corinthians 3:18, he elaborates that “we are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Theologically, this echoes the

²⁸ Daniel S Mynatt, “Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21, no. 2 (1994).

²⁹ José Luis Gutiérrez, “The Practice of Spiritual Direction,” *Journal of Religion & Health* 31, no. 4 (1992).

³⁰ Valerie Michaelson, “Developing a Definition of Spiritual Health for Canadian Young People: A Qualitative Study,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 26, no. 1–2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2020.1856048>.

doctrine of progressive sanctification, where transformation is both initiated and sustained by divine grace, yet requires human cooperation through spiritual disciplines. Classical spiritual writers such as Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* (15th century) emphasized daily practices of self-examination, repentance, humility, and detachment from worldly desires as necessary pathways toward inward renewal. These themes were revitalized in the modern era by authors like Richard Foster (1998), who identified disciplines such as prayer, fasting, solitude, and service as concrete means by which the Holy Spirit forms the believer from the inside out.

Importantly, the inner transformation model affirms that true spiritual formation begins with the renovation of the heart, as emphasized by Williard³¹. He argues that spiritual growth is not about behavior modification but about “the transformation of the inner being,” particularly the will (volition), thoughts (mind), and emotions (affections). Without this interior change, external actions remain superficial or

performative rather than fruit-bearing (cf. Matthew 7:17-20).

Empirical studies in Christian education and spiritual formation support this theological stance. For instance, Addington in *Invitation to a Journey* presents spiritual formation as “the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others,” thereby showing that inner transformation is not an end in itself but a foundation for missional living³². Similarly, a qualitative study by Dalton and Lee on adult spiritual development affirms that transformative learning is often catalyzed through practices that engage the whole person—cognitively, affectively, and spiritually³³.

Thus, the inner transformation model affirms that authentic spiritual growth emerges not from external performance or doctrinal knowledge alone, but from the Spirit-empowered reorientation of the self toward God. This inward transformation is the source and sustainer of faithful action, moral discernment, and relational integrity in both personal and communal spheres of Christian life.

³¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*.

³² Addington, “Book Review: *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*.”

³³ Jenny J Lee, “Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education

(Review),” *The Review of Higher Education* 28, no. 3 (2005),

<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2005.0019>; Jon C. Dalton, “Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education (Review),” *Journal of College Student Development* 44, no. 6 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0065>.

Educational Practice:

From a pedagogical standpoint, the model of *inner transformation* calls educators to prioritize reflective, experiential, and formative practices that engage the whole person—intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Research by Lee underscores that spiritual development in adult learners is deeply connected to identity, story, and embodied knowing, suggesting that transformative learning must honor the inner narratives and lived experiences of students³⁴. This aligns with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which posits that deep learning occurs through critical reflection that leads to a shift in perspective, allowing individuals to reinterpret their beliefs and behaviors in light of new insights.

Curriculum designs that support inner transformation should thus integrate contemplative exercises, spiritual disciplines, and guided self-assessment tools to foster self-awareness, moral imagination, and a deepened dependence on God. According to Lee, "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good

teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher"³⁵. Therefore, educators must also embody spiritual authenticity and model disciplines such as prayer, silence, solitude, and fasting as part of the educational culture.

A study by Vundi found that students who regularly engaged in structured spiritual disciplines within coursework reported higher levels of spiritual vitality, moral clarity, and a sense of vocational calling³⁶. These findings support Hoare's categorization of the disciplines as inward, outward, and corporate practices that lead to lasting transformation³⁷. Educators can incorporate these through structured learning modules, spiritual journaling, liturgical rhythms, and group reflections to move learners beyond mere intellectual assent into experiential knowing.

In digitally mediated learning environments, the potential for spiritual growth remains significant but requires intentional design to mitigate the risks of fragmented attention and superficial engagement³⁸. Emerging research suggests that digital spiritual tools—such

³⁴ Lee, "Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education (Review)."

³⁵ Lee, "To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey."

³⁶ Nason Vundi, "Interrogation of the Influence of Christian Higher Education Institutions on Spiritual Formation and Liturgical

Alignment on Their Staff and Students in Kenya," *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research* 7, no. 2 (2022).

³⁷ Hoare, "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth By Richard Foster."

³⁸ Turkle, "Reclaiming Conversation."

as apps for Lectio Divina, virtual Examen, and online guided retreats—can facilitate deep spiritual reflection when integrated purposefully³⁹. However, space for silence, deep listening, and embodied engagement must still be preserved.

Therefore, educators must intentionally design digital spaces that resist distraction and cultivate contemplative presence. This includes asynchronous reflection periods, prompts for offline spiritual practice, and relational mentoring via digital platforms. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework—which emphasizes cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence can be adapted to spiritual formation by replacing "cognitive presence" with contemplative presence, where spiritual attentiveness becomes the goal⁴⁰.

In sum, from a pedagogical perspective, fostering inner transformation in the context of Christian education—especially in a digital age—

requires an intentional, theologically grounded, and experientially rich curriculum that forms the heart as well as the mind. It is not only about *what* learners know, but *who they become* in relationship to God and others.

The Rule of Life Model

Theological Meaning:

The Rule of Life offers a rich theological framework that integrates spirituality into the ordinary patterns of daily existence through intentional practices, communal accountability, and ordered rhythms of prayer, work, and rest. Rooted in ancient Christian traditions, particularly in the Regula Benedicti of the 6th century, it reflects a vision of the Christian life as holistic, embodied, and relational. According to Benedict, the spiritual life is not separated from the material or mundane but is precisely lived out through them, where “ora et labora” (prayer and work) are woven into a sacred rhythm⁽⁴¹⁾.

Theologically, the Rule of Life affirms the incarnational nature of

³⁹ Joshua L. Mann, “Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture, Written by Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner,” *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 7, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00702008>; Jana M. Bennett, “Book Review: Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture,” *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/000332861709900421>.

⁴⁰ D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson,

and Walter Archer, “Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education,” *Internet and Higher Education* 2, no. 2–3 (1999), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516\(00\)00016-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6).

⁴¹ Michael Henry Kennedy, “Fayol’s Principles and the Rule of St Benedict: Is There Anything New under the Sun?,” *Journal of Management History (Archive)* 5, no. 5 (1999), <https://doi.org/10.1108/13552529910282259>.

Christian discipleship. As Paul exhorts in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, believers are called to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” These imperatives suggest a spirituality that permeates all aspects of life—not confined to sacred moments but unfolding within the ordinary and habitual, thereby affirming that God’s grace operates not only in crises or epiphanies but also in disciplined faithfulness.

Furthermore, the Rule reflects a trinitarian anthropology—where human beings are formed not in isolation but in relational interdependence. The communal nature of monastic rules points to the ecclesial dimension of sanctification, where spiritual maturity is nurtured in relationship with others. As Bonhoeffer (1954) argues in *Life Together*, life in community is a divine reality, and the Rule provides the structure for that reality to be lived out faithfully. This is especially relevant in a modern context where individualism can hinder the formation of spiritual habits that require accountability and mutual encouragement.

Recent research in spiritual

formation supports this theological vision. Mills notes that Christians who adopt a Rule of Life experience greater consistency in spiritual practices, enhanced vocational clarity, and increased resilience in faith amid life challenges⁴². Moreover, Kinsey describes spiritual formation as “the intentional communal process of being conformed to the image of Christ,” emphasizing that formation requires both personal commitment and corporate structures like the Rule of Life to sustain growth⁴³.

In summary, the Rule of Life theologically signifies a sacramental rhythm of existence—where daily acts, governed by grace and intention, become channels of divine formation. It helps believers embody the faith not merely as abstract doctrine, but as a lived reality shaped by patterns of holiness, communal belonging, and attentiveness to the Spirit in everyday life.

Formation Strategies:

Pedagogically, the *Rule of Life* model offers a practical and adaptable framework for cultivating spiritual habits that progressively shape one’s identity, behavior, and moral imagination. This

⁴² Stella Mills, “Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun,” *Implicit Religion* 12, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.v12i1.119>.

⁴³ Andrew D. Kinsey, “Spiritual

Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community – By John C. Wilhoit,” *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 16, no. 3 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9418.2009.00431_4.x.

model provides educators with a structured-yet-flexible pathway to integrate formation into the rhythms of learners' everyday lives, thereby promoting spiritual resilience in both personal and communal dimensions.

In educational practice, instructors can guide learners in crafting personalized or communal Rules of Life that incorporate key spiritual practices—such as daily prayer, scripture meditation, acts of service, study, Sabbath rest, and hospitality. These practices function not as legalistic routines but as intentional rhythms that help orient the believer's life toward God and others. The Rule acts as a scaffolding for discipleship, cultivating attentiveness to God's presence in ordinary life and grounding learners in sustainable habits amid the chaos of modernity⁴⁴.

From a cognitive and behavioral standpoint, this strategy is aligned with habit formation theory, particularly the idea that identity is shaped through repeated embodied practices⁴⁵. The work of Bloch on situated learning emphasizes that

transformation occurs in communities of practice, where learners absorb values and behaviors through social participation, shared rituals, and embodied repetition⁴⁶. When learners internalize spiritual practices as daily rituals, they begin to reorient their desires, develop moral agency, and live out their theology in concrete actions.

Empirical research in Christian education confirms this. Parry argues that sustained engagement with spiritual disciplines within a communal and accountable setting fosters long-term faith formation⁴⁷. Similarly, Graham emphasizes the pedagogical importance of ritualized learning environments and narrative identity formation in shaping spiritual maturity⁴⁸. These findings support the Rule of Life as not just a monastic or historical concept, but a transformative pedagogy that is highly adaptable to contemporary learners.

In digital and hybrid learning contexts, Rule of Life formation can be supported through: 1) Structured online accountability groups (e.g., spiritual formation cohorts via Zoom or group

⁴⁴ Marchinkowski, "Where 'the Unbelievable and the Obvious Collide': Spiritual Practices and Everyday Life."

⁴⁵ Tanya Prewitt, "The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business," *The Sport Psychologist* 26, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.26.3.470>.

⁴⁶ Bloch, Lave, and Wenger, "Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation."

⁴⁷ Marilyn Parry, "Book Review: Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life," *Theology* 105, no. 828 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571x0210500620>.

⁴⁸ Elaine Graham, "Book Review: The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach," *Theology* 111, no. 861 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571x0811186127>.

chats); 2) Habit-tracking tools and apps (e.g., Lectio 365, Rule of Life digital planners); 3) Interactive platforms that provide prompts for reflection, mutual encouragement, and spiritual check-ins (e.g., Discord servers, Slack spiritual formation channels)

These technologies, when used intentionally, foster digital liturgies—rituals of engagement that form rather than fragment the soul. However, to resist digital distraction and superficiality, educators must also design tech-free contemplative spaces (e.g., silent retreats, journaling assignments, analog prayer walks) that invite students into deeper attentiveness and contemplative pedagogy⁴⁹.

Thus, the *Rule of Life* becomes both a stabilizing and adaptive pedagogy—rooted in ancient Christian tradition yet responsive to the demands and opportunities of modern and postmodern life. It shapes learners not only what to believe, but how to live, forming enduring spiritual habits that integrate knowledge, character, and mission.

Integrative Discussion: Addressing Contemporary Challenges through Classical Models

The findings show that the pilgrimage, inner transformation, and rule of life models provide complementary perspectives that together address the complexity of Christian spiritual formation. Each model highlights essential theological truths and pedagogical strategies, which are highly relevant for educators confronting the challenges of the digital age.

Specifically, these models provide: A narrative framework that supports meaning-making amid fast-paced and fragmented digital experiences (pilgrimage). A deep, reflective practice that counters the superficiality common in online spaces (inner transformation). A habitual, community-based rhythm that sustains formation despite virtual isolation (rule of life).

In my role as a Christian educator navigating digital pedagogies, these models have offered a valuable framework for designing formation programs that are both rooted in tradition and responsive to current realities. I believe the integration of these models is essential to cultivate spiritual maturity that withstands the distractions and challenges of digital culture. This study reinforces my conviction that Christian spiritual

⁴⁹ Lee, “To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey.”

education must balance timeless theological wisdom with innovative pedagogical approaches to remain transformative today.

Implications For Christian Spirituality Education In This Era

The findings of this study carry several important implications for Christian spirituality education amid an era marked by digitalization, cultural pluralism, and shifting values among younger generations. First, Christian spirituality education can no longer rely solely on cognitive approaches; it must transform into a process that touches the inner and practical dimensions of students' lives. Models such as spiritual pilgrimage, inner transformation, and rule of life offer relevant approaches to address this need, as they emphasize personal experience, spiritual discipline, and communal connectedness.

Second, the presence of digital technology presents both challenges and opportunities. Christian spirituality education must be able to harness digital media to create learning spaces that continue to engage the spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of formation. Spiritual formation can take place not only in physical spaces but also

in intentionally designed digital environments—such as virtual prayer communities, online retreat applications, and interactive reflective practices. This demands new levels of creativity and skill from Christian educators in designing holistic learning experiences.

Third, another equally important implication is the need for training and equipping Christian teachers or lecturers—not only as conveyors of theological content, but as spiritual companions who can nurture the faith and character of their students in an integrated way. This points to the necessity of theological and Christian education curricula that bring together intellectual, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Finally, in a global and interdenominational context, Christian spirituality education must be contextualized by taking into account the cultural backgrounds of learners without losing the essence of the Gospel. A living and impactful Christian spirituality does not emerge from uniform approaches, but from a willingness to listen, understand, and respond wisely and relevantly to diverse spiritual needs. Thus, Christian spirituality education in this era is challenged to become more transformative, inclusive, and relationally

grounded—both vertically in relation to God and horizontally in relation to others.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored three classical models of Christian spiritual education—the pilgrimage journey, inner transformation, and the rule of life—through theological and pedagogical lenses. Each model offers profound insights into the nature of spiritual formation and presents practical frameworks for faith development in both traditional and modern educational contexts.

Theologically, these models draw from deep wells of Christian tradition: the pilgrimage model emphasizes the journey of faith as a lifelong process guided by God; inner transformation highlights the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in reshaping the believer's character; and the rule of life provides a structured approach to integrating faith into daily rhythms of living. Pedagogically, these models encourage experiential, reflective, and habit-forming practices that are highly

adaptable for contemporary learners—including those navigating digital spaces.

Amid the challenges of spiritual distraction, disconnection, and cognitive overload prevalent in the digital age, these models offer not only theological depth but also strategic resilience. They serve as timeless guides for educators and spiritual leaders seeking to nurture holistic, authentic, and sustainable spiritual growth.

As a Christian educator deeply engaged in both theological formation and pedagogical innovation, I have found that these classical models are not relics of the past but living frameworks that still speak powerfully today. They have shaped my own spiritual journey and have proven effective in my efforts to guide others—especially young people—toward deeper faith in the midst of a rapidly changing cultural landscape. This study has reinforced my belief that faithful Christian education must hold together the rich wisdom of the tradition with the demands of contemporary life, especially in digital environments.

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