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Lewis and His Spiritual Classics: Lessons for Congregational Leaders

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Background and Strategy of SRTM

The Sacred Roots Thriving in Ministry (SRTM) Project aims to serve bivocational urban/rural congregational leaders by equipping them to carry out their works of ministry with excellence. SRTM had its tangible beginnings in 2019 and seeks to equip eight hundred congregational leaders with deep ministerial friendships and theological resources by 2023. Friendships will be achieved through structured mentoring and cohort development while a curriculum of “spiritual classics” will be created for theological education. SRTM defines “spiritual classic” as “a writing that is clearly attributable to a follower of the Lord, focuses on a biblical understanding of sanctification, and a multitude of voices across Church history attest to its value for Christian living” (Porter).

A.W. Tozer once said that the reason he stayed passionate for God was because of the influence his teachers had on him (Voss). However, these “teachers” were not his pastor or a spiritual mentor in his life. Rather, they were the authors of some thirty-five spiritual classics which he read and allowed to shape his life. In the same way, one of the goals of SRTM is to create a way for congregational leaders to learn from prominent Christian leaders and thinkers from centuries past through interaction with their works.

The SRTM Project uses a single strategy, the practice of friendship, to help congregational leaders thrive in challenging ministry contexts. This strategy is applied practically through five tactical activities: Conversations, Consultations, Conferences, Cohorts, and Classics (Voss).

Conversations

A Conversation involves 2-10 people and generally ranges from 2-3 hours in length. The purpose of a Conversation is to gather information related to the larger SRTM objectives (Voss). Throughout the summer of 2019, I participated in a variety of Conversations held between SRTM team members and others regarding the SRTM Project. To provide an example, one Conversation I participated in was held at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana and involved the STRM team members Dr. Hank Voss, Prof. Dan Howell, Dr. May Young, Prof. Jenny Collins, Mr. Lucas Hagen, and Mr. Isaiah Swain, as well as the Concordia Theological Seminary faculty Prof. Robert Rothemeyer and Dr. Don Wiley (See left picture below).

Consultations

A Consultation involves 10-100 people and is less than 8 hours in length. Consultations can be used to gather information related to larger SRTM objectives or to communicate the presence of the Project to new audiences (Voss). During July 2019, I participated in a Consultation in Vancouver, British Columbia between SRTM team members and Regent College faculty with the purpose of gathering critical feedback on the Series 1 Spiritual Classics selections (see right picture below). I also participated in a Consultation in Los Angeles, California hosted by Rev. Robert Vasquez, where approximately two dozen bivocational urban congregational leaders learned about the SRTM Project, with many expressing interest in becoming involved (see middle picture below).



Figure 1

Figure 1: Authors Influential in Lewis’s Life						
Spiritual Classic Author	Year of Death	Sample Work	In Books	In Letters	In Essays & Other Writings	Total
Aquinas, Thomas	1274 C.E.	<i>Summa Theologica</i>	27	35	24	86
Athanasius of Alexandria	373 C.E.	<i>On the Incarnation</i>	3	14	4	21
Augustine of Hippo	430 C.E.	<i>Confessions</i>	35	26	24	85
Baxter, Richard	1691 C.E.	<i>The Reformed Pastor</i>	2	1	1	4
Bernard of Clairvaux	1153 C.E.	<i>On the Love of God</i>	7	6	1	14
Boehme, Jakob	162 C.E.	<i>The Way to Christ</i>	2	4	4	10
Boethius	524 C.E.	<i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>	27	15	14	56
Brother Lawrence	1691 C.E.	<i>The Practice of the Presence of God</i>	2	3	0	5
Browne, Thomas	1682 C.E.	<i>Religious Meditations</i>	14	15	4	33
Bunyan, John	1688 C.E.	<i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i>	16	43	12	71
Butler, Joseph	1752 C.E.	<i>The Works of Joseph Butler</i>	2	2	5	9
Cloud of Unknowing	~1375 C.E.	N/A	1	0	0	1
Dante Alighieri	1321 C.E.	<i>The Divine Comedy</i>	107	88	47	242
Francis of Assisi	1622 C.E.	<i>The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi</i>	3	7	1	11
Herbert, George	1633 C.E.	<i>The Temple</i>	18	13	6	37
Hilton, Walter	1396 C.E.	<i>The Scale of Perfection</i>	2	5	0	7
Hooker, Richard	1600 C.E.	<i>Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity</i>	31	13	15	59
Johnson, Samuel	1784 C.E.	<i>Dr. Johnson’s Prayers</i>	63	86	57	206
Julian of Norwich	1416 C.E.	<i>Revelations of Divine Love</i>	6	9	6	21
à Kempis, Thomas	1471 C.E.	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i>	0	28	1	29
Law, William	1761 C.E.	<i>A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life</i>	4	13	3	20
MacDonald, George	1905 C.E.	<i>Phantastes</i>	19	118	15	152
Milton, John	1678 C.E.	<i>Paradise Lost</i>	126	147	89	362
Pascal, Blaise	1662 C.E.	<i>Pensées</i>	13	9	9	31
Spenser, Edmund	1599 C.E.	<i>The Faerie Queene</i>	100	78	54	232
Taylor, Jeremy	1667 C.E.	<i>Holy Living and Holy Dying</i>	17	12	5	34
Theologia Germanica	~1450 C.E.	N/A	3	7	3	13
Traherne, Thomas	1674 C.E.	<i>Centuries of Meditations</i>	9	11	6	26
Vaughan, Henry	1695 C.E.	<i>The Works of Henry Vaughan</i>	1	0	2	3
Von Hügel, Friedrich	1925 C.E.	<i>Eternal Life</i>	4	7	3	14
Total	N/A	N/A	664	814	415	1893

Classics

Although I participated in Conversations and Consultations, most of my work pertained to the tactic of Classics, as seen to the left. To reiterate, the term “spiritual classics” refers to sacred texts which have proven useful to congregational leaders across both centuries and cultures (Voss). Within the SRTM Project in particular, the tactic Classics refers to the sixteen spiritual classics in *Series 1* of the *Sacred Roots Collection* published by TUMI Press (2020-2023). While “Lewis and His Spiritual Classics” makes unique contributions to Lewis scholarship and suggests four ministry implications for congregational leaders, another broader purpose of my research is to offer a case study that demonstrates the power and effectiveness of spiritual classics in the realm of spiritual development.

Explanation of Figure 1

”Lewis and His Spiritual Classics” is structured into two parts. The first is entitled ”The Influence of Christian Spiritual Classics on Lewis.” Within this section, the influence of reading spiritual classics on Lewis is described in terms of the effect they had on his fifteen-year-long conversion, how they informed his theology, and how they impacted his devotional life. The second part of the article is entitled “Ministry Implications for Congregational Leaders.” This section suggests four implications for ministry based upon how reading spiritual classics formed Lewis into a Christian leader (Swain).

Figure 1 is presented in the first part of “Lewis and the Spiritual Classics.” It identifies thirty spiritual classics authors most quoted by or influential to Lewis and quantifies the amount of references to each author within three categories: Lewis’s books, his letters, and his other writings. While citations must be weighed and not merely counted, the sheer quantity of references shown here demonstrates the immense effect that spiritual classics had on Lewis (Swain).

Bibliography

Porter, Steve L. “Why Should We Read Spiritual Classics?” In *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals*, edited by Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, 15–30. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013.

This chapter contains the definition for a spiritual classic used by SRTM. The author of this chapter, Steve Porter, is an associate professor of theology and philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University. He is interested in spiritual formation and contributes to many scholarly journals, serving as the managing editor for the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*.

Swain, Isaiah A., and Hank Voss. “Lewis and His Spiritual Classics: Lessons for Congregational Leaders,” 2019.

This currently unpublished work is the product of several months of intensive research on C. S. Lewis, spiritual classics, and Lewis’s interaction with spiritual classics. Our hope is that it will achieve publication soon.

Voss, Hank. “SRTM Report #1: The Sacred Roots Thriving in Ministry Project.” Taylor University, August 1, 2019.

This report defines the strategy and tactics of the SRTM Project and was presented August 1, 2019.