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1993

EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

PAST GLORIES PRESENT HOPES FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

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‘Spirituality’ is one of the most rapidly developing fields of Christian thought and practice. It has caught hold of the imaginations of many people, especially in the United States. The New Age movement is seen by many observers as a reaction against the spiritual aridity and barrenness of modern culture. There is a real thirst for the ‘spiritual’ element in life. Evangelicalism has not been immune from this development. Despite its many strengths, some sense that the movement can too easily become dry and cerebral, lacking any real spiritual vitality. The question of whether there are distinctively evangelical approaches to spirituality, which might enable us to consolidate still further the appeal and hold of the gospel proclamation, is clearly of some considerable importance.

For reasons that I shall explore presently, there is a real need to develop evangelical forms of spirituality that are faithful to the gospel on the one hand, and to the pressures of modern life on the other. The powerful thrust of the Decade of Evangelism runs the risk of being dissipated unless those who come to faith are kept in faith by every proper means of spiritual nourishment, encouragement and guidance. Some come to faith because of the power of an evangelistic sermon, delivered by a preacher skilled in the art of delivery and a master of the oratorical arts. Yet the content of that sermon may live on only in the presence and personality of the preacher. The sense of immediacy, of personal dynamism and excitement, is lost once the preacher moves on. The resulting believer is left on his or her own, to discover the full implications of that important decision to begin the Christian life and adjust accordingly. It is here that Christian spirituality has a vital role to play.

At the height of the Great Awakening in eighteenth-century Massachusetts, a young woman convert wrote a letter to Jonathan Edwards. She had come to faith; now she needed

guidance, as she put it, as to ‘the best manner of maintaining a religious life’. In that letter may be seen an anticipation of the modern realization of the need for follow-up in relation to evangelism. One of the most significant aspects of the Springboard initiative within the Church of England, headed up by Michael Green and Michael Marshall, has been the realization of the vital role of spirituality in a considered and realistic approach to evangelism. Michael Green has stressed the importance of apologetics prior to evangelism, and spirituality subsequent to it. Apologetics is seen as leading naturally into evangelism, which in turn naturally leads on to spirituality, as a means of keeping converts, and enabling them to grow in faith. An earlier emphasis upon evangelistic techniques has been supplemented with a recognition of the need for the long-term spiritual care of those who come to faith. Evangelism makes Christians; spirituality keeps them.

On December 11, 1989, James I. Packer was installed as the first Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology at Regent College Vancouver. The title he chose for his inaugural lecture, as much as its content, is telling: ‘An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality’. In that lecture, Packer spelled out the importance of spirituality to all concerned with the preaching and ministry of the gospel:¹

We cannot function well as counsellors, spiritual directors, and guides to birth, growth and maturity in Christ, unless we are clear as to what constitutes spiritual well-being as opposed to spiritual lassitude or exhaustion, and to stunted and deformed spiritual development. It thus appears that the study of spirituality is just as necessary for us who hope to minister in the gospel as is the study of physiology for the medical trainee. It is something that we cannot really

¹ James I. Packer, ‘An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality’, *Crux* 26 No. 1 (March 1990), pp. 2-8; quote at p. 3.

manage without.

My concern is that evangelicals have not paid anything like the necessary attention to this major theme of Christian life and thought. As a result, evangelicalism has become impoverished, where it ought to be rich; it has depended upon the insights of others, where it ought to be contributing to the life of the church. I wish to suggest that the time has come to throw off the cult of dependency, and move towards the development and rediscovery of spiritualities which will complement and nourish the great evangelical emphases upon the sufficiency of Scripture, the centrality of the death of Christ, the need for personal conversion, and the evangelistic imperative. Evangelism gets us started in the Christian life; but spirituality keeps us going, and refreshes us along the way.

I. Evangelicalism and the Call to Personal Faith

Evangelicalism is without question the powerhouse of the modern Christian church, in England and elsewhere. Time and time again, people put their discovery of the vitality and excitement of the gospel down to the witness of evangelicalism. Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, is but one of many recent writers from outside evangelicalism to pay tribute to its commitment and success in evangelization.²

In an increasingly secular age, evangelism is of

² Richard Holloway, 'Evangelicalism: An Outsider's Perspective', in R. T. France and A. E. McGrath (eds), *Evangelical Anglicans* (London: SPCK, 1993), p. 175.

decisive importance in reaching out beyond the bounds of the church, and bringing men and women the good news of Jesus Christ. There is a growing realization, even within the depths of a frequently rather complacent British church establishment, that the future existence and wellbeing of the churches depends upon a determined and principled effort to proclaim the gospel. The embargo on evangelism is over.

Let me illustrate this point with reference to events in the United States, some forty years ago. In the first quarter of 1954, the evangelist Billy Graham was invited to speak at Union Theological Seminary in New York. By that time, Graham had attracted considerable attention.³ The success of the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade had been widely reported in the secular press, giving Graham a high profile. Union Theological Seminary, a bastion of mainline Protestantism, would hardly be expected to receive him warmly. In the event, Graham spoke for forty-five minutes in the seminary chapel, and answered questions afterwards for another thirty minutes. When he had finished, he was greeted with one of the longest and most enthusiastic ovations that institution had known.⁴ It seemed to many that evangelicalism had suddenly become respectable.

But not everyone at Union Theological Seminary was pleased with this development. The noted theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who had joined the faculty of Union as professor of Christian ethics in 1927, was distinctly disgruntled about the growing enthusiasm for

³ For the background, see Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979); William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: Ronald Press, 1960).

⁴ See John C. Bennett. 'Billy Graham at Union', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 9 (May 1954), pp. 9-14.

evangelicalism. He wrote scathingly of Graham's theological incompetence and naivete.⁵

Billy Graham is a personable, modest and appealing young man who has wedded considerable dramatic and demagogic gifts with a rather obscurantist version of the Christian faith. His message is not completely irrelevant to the broader social issues of the day - but it approaches irrelevance. For what it may be worth, we can be assured that his approach is free of the vulgarities which characterized the message of Billy Sunday, who intrigued the nation about a quarter century ago. We are grateful for this much 'progress'.

Niebuhr's peremptory dismissal of Graham was seen by many of his readers as little more than sour grapes on the part of an academic theologian, fearful of being marginalized by the new enthusiasm for evangelical Christianity. None other than the president of this same Union Theological Seminary, Henry P. van Dusen, weighed in with a devastating response.⁶

Dr Niebuhr prefers Billy Graham to Billy Sunday. There are many, of whom I am one, who are not ashamed to testify that they would probably have never come within the sound of Dr Niebuhr's voice or the influence of his mind if they had not been *first* touched by the message of the earlier Billy. Quite probably five or ten years hence there may appear in the classrooms and churches of Billy Graham's severest critics not a few who will be glad to give parallel testimony to his role in *starting* them in that direction.

⁵ *Christianity and Crisis* 16 (March 5, 1956), p. 18. On Niebuhr, see Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

⁶ *Christianity and Crisis* 16 (April 2, 1956), p. 40.

As if that was not enough, it was followed up by a spirited attack on Niebuhr by E. G. Homrighausen, dean of Princeton Theological Seminary. Writing in the leading liberal journal *Christian Century*, Homrighausen, head of the National Council of Churches' Department of Evangelism, accused Niebuhr and his sympathizers of being 'hesitant and weak in calling persons to a positive faith'. Niebuhr could, he suggested, learn some useful lessons from Billy Graham. Why, he asked, was 'Niebuhrian neo-orthodoxy' so hesitant over calling people to conversion?⁷

I have, frankly, been disappointed in its inability to lead the way in the revival or rebirth or restoration of a relevant Protestantism in the local church. And if men like Graham have arisen, and are being heard by the thousands, it may be that what he is and says in sincerity ought to be said in a better way by the neo-orthodox with all their accumulation of intelligence about the Bible and history and personality in our times.

The point being made was clear. Evangelicalism was calling people to faith in a way that nobody else was. The most fundamental criticism made of Niebuhr in this respect was that he was parasitic, feeding off the fruits of the work of earlier evangelists without 'calling persons to a positive faith' himself. Many people who would not now regard themselves as evangelicals owe their Christian beginnings to evangelicalism — and, in our English context, I think of people such as John Habgood, John Hick, David Jenkins, and Maurice F. Wiles in making this point.

⁷ *Christian Century* 73 (1956), pp. 848-9. This response was provoked by an earlier article by Niebuhr in the same journal: *Christian Century* 73 (1956), pp. 640-2.

2. Spirituality, Evangelicalism, and Spiritual Growth

But having won people for the gospel, can evangelicalism keep them? In this lecture I want to address a serious anxiety which I know is shared by many within evangelicalism. The perceived lack of a credible, coherent and distinctive spirituality is one of the greatest weaknesses facing evangelicalism today. I do not in any way wish to be alarmist, and suggest that we are confronted with a crisis arising from a total lack of evangelical interest in spirituality.⁸ My concern is simply to identify what seems to me to be a serious weakness at present — but a weakness which can, given commitment and concern, become a future strength.

As we have seen, many people begin their Christian lives as evangelicals. They have been attracted by the power of evangelical testimony, and the obvious difference that faith makes to the lives of their evangelical friends and neighbours. But what happens next? I have seen the same pattern happen too often for comfort in my own ministry at Wycliffe Hall. Many students begin their ministries as evangelicals, yet end up — often after a period of many years — committed to a form of catholicism. And what has attracted these people away from evangelicalism?

⁸ There is a useful survey in Gordon James, *Evangelical Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1991). Although the volume includes much interesting material, the only writers to be dealt with in the period subsequent to the Second World War are Martin Lloyd-Jones and John Stott. A more perceptive analysis, drawing upon developments in the last two decades, may be found in David Parker, 'Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed', *Evangelical Quarterly* 63 (1991), pp. 123-48, and James Houston, 'Spirituality', in W. A. Elwell (ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 1046.

They seem to gain the impression that it is of relatively little help to those who are trying to deepen their understanding of God, and develop approaches to prayer and meditation which will enrich their faith, and sustain them in the Christian life. In short: it fails to take the pressures and realities of Christian living in the modern period seriously enough to devise spiritual strategies to allow new and struggling Christians to cope with them.

A case study from the United States will illustrate the importance of this point. It is generally recognized that the only churches that are growing in the United States are evangelical in orientation; indeed, for many secular observers, ‘evangelical’ has become synonymous with ‘active and growing’. But some — admittedly, very few — churches of a much more liberal orientation are also expanding. An example is All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena,⁹ which has received widespread media attention because it bucks the trend: it is one of the very few growing liberal congregations within the mainline denominations in the United States. Its liberalism is not in doubt; it is strongly pro-choice in its attitude to abortion, and it made international headlines in November 1990 when its rector announced that he would begin performing blessings in church of ‘same-sex’ couples.

So why is this church growing, when it is not evangelical? Just about every other church with such liberal social commitments is losing members in droves. Because the phenomenon is so unusual, it has been studied with particular care. Donald E. Miller, professor of religion at University of Southern California’s school of religion, puts his finger on the point at issue: although the church is liberal

⁹ Material here is taken from the *Los Angeles Times*, dated 12 December 1989, part B, p. 1.

in its politics, ‘it is also deeply conservative in its recognition of the importance of worship, pastoral care, and personal spiritual disciplines’.¹⁰ Attention to the personal spiritual needs and concerns of its individual members seems to have been the key in this situation. People need help with prayer, devotion and personal discipline — and if evangelicalism is not providing it, is it really surprising that they may turn elsewhere?

Evangelicals are often told by their catholic colleagues that they have no spirituality worth talking about. It is perhaps inevitable that this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that it brings about a sense of inferiority within evangelical circles. Many evangelicals, convinced that they have nothing to offer in this area, promptly draw on the resources of other traditions. It is little surprise to note that many who begin their Christian life as evangelicals end up on the more catholic wing of the church, on account of the perceived superiority of its spirituality.

I write as one who is deeply appreciative of the catholic tradition, especially within my own Church of England. I have no hesitation in declaring that I have learned much from my more catholic colleagues, especially concerning the need for personal discipline and the importance of community for spiritual development. I expect to learn more so in the future, when I finish my study of the great French spiritual writers of the late seventeenth century, such as Bossuet and Fénelon. My concern is clearly not to criticize catholicism, in any of its forms. It is simply to note that, for some evangelicals, catholic forms of spirituality can

¹⁰ Donald E. Miller, ‘Bucking a Powerful Trend’, in *All Saints Church Every Member Canvas '90* (Pasadena, 1990). See also his paper ‘Liberal Church Growth: A Case Study’, delivered at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, Utah, 27-29 October 1989.

be the thin end of a wedge. For some, Catholic spirituality leads to more catholic forms of theology. And why? Because there is something wrong with evangelical theology? No. It is, quite simply, that evangelicalism is seen to lack a spirituality to give its theology staying power in the modern period.

3. Clarifying Terms: ‘Spirituality’

Spirituality has become one of the buzz words of our time. It has been taken up with enthusiasm by many evangelicals. It is, however, a word with highly questionable associations, and a dubious historical pedigree. Let me indicate the anxieties which I have in mind. In a careful study, Owen Chadwick, until recently professor of modern history at the University of Cambridge, points out how the origins of the modern term ‘spirituality’ and many other related terms (such as ‘the inner life’ or ‘the interior life’) lie in the French spiritual writings of the seventeenth century.¹¹ From its beginnings, the term has strong associations with ‘a striving after the purely material’. Seventeenth-century French writers, deploring the development of negative attitudes towards the material order, were prone to lay the blame firmly upon la nouvelle spiritualité de Madam Guyon.¹²

¹¹ Owen Chadwick, ‘Indifference and Morality’, in P. N. Brooks (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press, 1975), pp. 203-30.

¹² Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Mothe, generally known as Madam Guyon (1648-1717), was a vigorous defender of the ‘Quietist’ doctrines of total indifference to everything, including the hope of salvation, and the practice of non-cognitive meditation, in which the believer refuses to focus on definite ideas, such as the nature of God or the life of Christ.

The word ‘spirituality’ thus appears to have been associated initially with a radical division between the spiritual and the physical, between the soul and the body, between contemplation and everyday life. It implies that its subject is primarily the interior nurture of the soul, undertaken in withdrawal from the distractions of ordinary life. The older vocabulary of the Protestant tradition reflects more faithfully a central aspect of its spirituality — the total integration of faith and everyday life.¹³

We can begin to neutralize this difficulty if we are more attentive to the Pauline idea, so faithfully echoed by Luther, of the ‘spiritual’ as life in the world orientated towards God, and move away from the unhelpful association of the term with the idea of ‘life undertaken in withdrawal from the world’. In its fundamental sense, spirituality is concerned with the shaping, empowering and maturing of the ‘spiritual person (pneumatikos anthrōpos)’ (1 Corinthians 2:14-15) — that is, the person who is alive to and responsive to God in the world, as opposed to the person who merely exists within and responds to the world. As Luther reminded us, the reference is to *totus homo* — the ‘entire person’, and not just the mind.¹⁴ Robert Banks expresses this holistic view of spirituality well when he speaks of it as ‘the character and quality of our life with God, among fellow-Christians and in the world’. Banks deliberately avoids two inadequate

Her concept of spirituality, especially as it is found in her *Moyen court et très facile de faire oraison* (1685), brings out the radically introverted associations of the term at this time.

¹³ Thus there is no entry on ‘spirituality’ in D. McKim (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); the material relating to this theme is to be found under the entry ‘piety’ (pp. 278-9).

¹⁴ Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien II: Disputatio de homine, Text und Hintergrund* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 31-43.

approaches to spirituality — a purely intellectual or cerebral approach, which engages the mind and nothing else, and a purely interiorized approach, which bears no relation to the realities of everyday life. Spirituality concerns our ‘spirit’ — yet, as Banks forcefully reminds us, ‘not only our spirit — also our minds, wills, imaginations, feelings and bodies.’¹⁵ There is no difficulty in reclaiming this authentic sense of the term within the evangelical tradition, with its vital concern — shaped and nourished both by Scripture and the Reformers — to map out the contours of responsible Christian living in the world.

4. Clarifying Terms: ‘Evangelical’

It may be helpful to pause at this point, and explore the contours of that elusive term ‘evangelical’. The term ‘evangelical’ dates from the sixteenth century, and is used to refer to catholic writers wishing to revert to more biblical beliefs and practices than those associated with the late medieval church. It is used especially in the 1520s, when the terms *evangelique* and *evangelisch* come to feature prominently in polemical writings of the early Reformation. In the 1530s, the term ‘Protestant’ came to become more significant. However, this term was imposed upon evangelicals by their opponents, and was not one of their own choosing. ‘Evangelical’ is the term chosen by evangelicals to refer to themselves.

Evangelicalism began to emerge as a movement of major public importance in the United States in the period

¹⁵ Robert M. Banks, ‘Home Churches and Spirituality’, *Interchange* 40 (1986), p. 15.

after the Second World War. Billy Graham, perhaps the most publicly visible representative of this new evangelical style, became a well-known figure in English society, and a role model for a younger generation of evangelical ordinands in England. His three-month crusade at Harringay during 1954 proved to have a major impact upon British Christianity. The public recognition in America of the new importance and public visibility of evangelicalism dates from the early 1970s. The crisis of confidence within American liberal Christianity in the 1960s was widely interpreted to signal the need for the emergence of a new and more publicly credible form of Christian belief.¹⁶ In 1976, America woke up to find itself living in what Newsweek magazine designated the 'Year of the Evangelical', with a born-again Christian (Jimmy Carter) as its President, and an unprecedented media interest in evangelicalism.¹⁷

These developments could not pass unnoticed and unheeded in England. The result has been a changing attitude towards evangelicalism, with even the British quality press discovering that there is more to evangelicalism than the mere playing of guitars in church. The older stereotypes have died. In 1955, Canon H. K. Luce of Durham complained that Billy Graham was being allowed to lead a mission to the University of Cambridge. Universities, he argued, existed for the advancement of learning; so why was Billy Graham being

¹⁶ Leonard E. Sweet, 'The 1960s: The Crises of Liberal Christianity and the Public Emergence of Evangelicalism', in Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, pp. 29-45.

¹⁷ There is a massive literature: see, for example, Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine Publishing, 1983); Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Judith L. Blumhofer and Joel A. Carpenter, *Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Sources* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).

allowed to speak at Cambridge?¹⁸

Is it not time that our religious leaders made it plain that while they respect, or even admire, Dr Graham's sincerity and personal power, they cannot regard fundamentalism as likely to issue in anything but disillusionment and disaster for educated men and women in this twentieth-century world?

Luce's prophecy of doom and gloom was unfounded, despite the widespread support it gained from older Anglicans, threatened by this new development. A single episode will illustrate the changing mood within the Church of England within my lifetime. (I was born in 1953, the year before the Harringay crusade.) In 1957, John Stott led a student mission at the University of Durham. This provoked a hostile and ill-tempered attack from Michael Ramsay, then bishop of Durham, who wrote scathingly of 'our English Fundamentalism' — referring to the views associated with John Stott.¹⁹ Just over thirty years later, it became clear that such wooden stereotypes now firmly belonged to the past; Robert Runcie, towards the end of his period as Primate, described this same John Stott as the greatest Anglican since William Temple.

It is still, sadly, true that some recent writers of an older generation still use the term 'fundamentalist' and 'evangelical' interchangeably, to mean little more than 'someone committed to the authority of Scripture'. As Clark Pinnock observes, the word 'fundamentalist' is 'more often than not a word of contempt, a theological swear-word'. This is certainly the case with James Barr's abusive and polemical

¹⁸ Letter to *The Times*, dated 15 August, 1955.

¹⁹ See his earlier letter to *The Times*, dated 20 August 1955, in which he spoke of the 'crudity' of the doctrines of evangelicalism, and its 'stifling of the mind'.

book *Fundamentalism* (1977).²⁰ As Pinnock observes, ‘the people Barr is sharply and vehemently criticizing, the British evangelicals, do not like the term being applied to them because they are not, in fact, fundamentalists’.²¹

In order to understand the essential differences between ‘evangelicalism’ and ‘fundamentalism’, it is necessary to turn to the North American situation, and the careful analysis of the relation between fundamentalism and evangelicalism presented by leading (non-evangelical) historians of American religion; most notably George Marsden (Duke University) and Martin E. Marty (University of Chicago). Fundamentalism arose as a religious reaction within American culture to the rise of a secular culture.²² It was from its outset, and has remained, a counter-cultural movement, using central doctrinal affirmations as a means of defining cultural boundaries. Certain central doctrines (most notably, the absolute literal authority of Scripture and the premillennial return of Christ) were treated as barriers, intended as much to alienate secular culture as to give fundamentalists a sense of identity and purpose. A siege mentality became characteristic of the movement; fundamentalist counter-communities viewed themselves as walled cities, or (to evoke the pioneer spirit) circles of wagons, defending their distinctives against an unbelieving culture.²³

²⁰ James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

²¹ Clark Pinnock, ‘Defining American Fundamentalism: A Response’, in N. J. Cohen (ed.), *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 38-55; quotes at pp. 40-1.

²² The definitive study remains George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²³ Martin E. Marty, ‘Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon’, in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 56-70.

The emphasis upon the premillennial return of Christ is of especial significance. This view has a long history; it never attained any especial degree of significance prior to the nineteenth century. However, fundamentalism appears to have discerned in the idea an important weapon against the liberal Christian idea of a kingdom of God upon earth, to be achieved through social action. 'Dispensationalism', especially of a premillenarian type, became an integral element of fundamentalism. Such dispensationalist views, it must be stressed, have had minimal impact within English evangelicalism of any shape during the twentieth century.

Evangelicalism centres upon a cluster of four assumptions. These are not 'doctrinal', if this term is understood to refer purely to a set of objectively-valid beliefs; they are 'existential', in that they affirm the manner in which the believer is caught up in a redemptive and experiential encounter with the living Christ.

1. The authority and sufficiency of Scripture.
2. The uniqueness of redemption through the death of Christ upon the cross.
3. The need for personal conversion.
4. The necessity, propriety and urgency of evangelism.

All other matters have tended to be regarded as 'matters of indifference', upon which a substantial degree of pluralism may be accepted.

I have stressed that evangelicalism is not characterised purely by a set of doctrines. If anything, it is more of an ethos, an approach to Christian thinking and living which centres upon a number of guiding principles, rather than specific doctrinal formulations. Scripture is treated as far more than a theological source; it is the basis of Christian living and devotion, personal and corporate. Evangelicalism

has always refused to treat ‘knowledge of God’ as something abstract; instead, it recognizes it to be strongly experiential and personal, capable of transforming both the heart and the mind. There is a sense in which evangelicalism is better defined as a devotional ethos than as a theological system. There is a creative intermingling here of the Reformed and the Pietist — an emphasis upon right doctrine, linked with a real concern for a ‘living faith’ — that is, a personally appropriated and assimilated faith, expressed in such terms as ‘a personal relationship with Christ’.

The devotional use of Scripture is thus of central importance to evangelicals. It must be appreciated that this approach involves reading Scripture in a certain manner — not as the basis of a theological system, nor merely for intellectual stimulation, but for the spiritual nourishment of the reader. The ‘knowledge’ of God which is aimed at is at least as experiential as it is cognitive, with its concern for a ‘deeply based consciousness’²⁴ of the Lord.

Again, evangelicalism is not committed to a specific theological theory of conversion, but to a recognition of the need for personal conversion.²⁵ Kern Robert Trembath, in a perceptive analysis of evangelicalism’s emphasis upon the experiential aspects of faith, comments that:²⁶

In defining as ‘evangelical’ members of a great range of denominations, evangelicalism discloses a greater implicit emphasis upon the experience of salvation in Jesus than upon cognitive, dogmatic and historical articulations of this experience. Such articulations are not valueless altogether,

²⁴ Houston, ‘Spirituality’, p. 1046.

²⁵ Note the emphasis placed on the idea by Max Warren, *What is an Evangelical?* (London: Church Book Room Press, 1944), p. 23.

²⁶ Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 4.

but are simply of less value than they are to a non-evangelical or 'denominational' mindset. Thus, considered ecclesologically, evangelicalism is Protestantism's clearest attempt to recapture the pluralist nature of the early church.

An evangelical spirituality will thus be bible-centred, and concerned more with the facilitation and enhancement of the personal redemptive encounter of the believer with Christ than with precise theological formulation, or with an emphasis upon the merits of one particular denominational approach to the matter. 'The test of Christian spirituality is conformity of heart and life to the confession and character of Jesus as Lord'.²⁷ Evangelical approaches to spirituality thus aim to resonate with these central concerns, while opening the way to serious engagement with personal discipline, spiritual formation, and the various difficulties that anyone trying to deepen the quality of their spiritual life routinely encounters.

Yet where evangelicalism ought to be devoting its enormous creativity and theological strengths to the forging of patterns of spirituality suited to the evangelical ethos, it appears instead to have been crippled by some form of lethargy in this vital area. This is a feature of evangelicalism worldwide, not simply in England. Australian evangelical John Waterhouse contributed a significant article to the April 1992 number of the leading Australian Christian magazine *On Being*, with the provocative title 'The Crisis of Evangelicalism'.²⁸

²⁷ T. R. Albin, 'Spirituality', in S. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 656-8; quote at p. 657.

²⁸ John Waterhouse, 'The Crisis of Evangelicalism', *On Being* 18 No. 2 (April, 1992), pp. 4-8. Quote at p. 4.

Ten years ago, I felt we were on the edge of an evangelical renaissance in Australia, a flowering of biblical scholarship that would touch secular society at its point of need and lead Australians to a new awareness of their creator. It even had a name: ‘a theology of everyday life’ or ‘incarnational theology’. We got out some books that seemed to do the job ... but then they stopped.

Waterhouse, the founder and publishing director of the New South Wales publishing house Albatross Books, did much to encourage this new spirituality.²⁹ But it dried up. For Waterhouse, part of the ‘crisis’ is that evangelicalism has suffered ‘a loss of spiritual energy, originality and creativity’. In short: evangelicalism has become spiritually derivative. Instead of falling back on its own distinctive approach to spirituality, evangelicalism has become lazy. It has borrowed other people’s.

In failing to give full attention to this network of issues centering upon spirituality, evangelicals fail the modern church. Evangelicalism owes that church the duty of ensuring that its distinctive approaches to spirituality remain alive, credible and available. It is shocking that evangelicalism should be so parasitic in this manner, exploiting the spiritual riches of other traditions, yet failing to make its own distinctive contributions available to the church at large. Evangelicalism has too often become blind to its own heritage, unable to discern this heritage itself, let alone share it with others. As a result, the modern church is being denied access to a resource which ought to be there — a spirituality which is radically and consistently grounded in Scripture, and orientated towards the cross. Modern

²⁹ An example of the works that Waterhouse has in mind would presumably be Robert M. Banks, *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross, 1987).

evangelicalism has a duty to ensure that this kind of spirituality remains a viable option in today's church. But how? In the remainder of this lecture, I want to identify the difficulties, and make some suggestions concerning the way ahead.

5. Evangelical Spirituality: Problems and Proposals

In the past, evangelicalism has been associated with certain quite definite approaches to the spiritual life, especially the personal 'Quiet Time'. However, these approaches to spirituality, which have worked well in the past and have a distinguished history of use behind them, do not seem to work as well as we might like today. Why not? I would like to suggest several reasons which allow us to understand the problem we are faced with today, and allow us to be realistic in planning for the future.

5.1. Ignorance of the heritage of the past

Evangelicals are often inattentive to or confused about their own spiritual heritage. In part, this difficulty arises from the circumstances of their conversion. Many evangelicals are 'born-again' Christians, who have come to faith from a secular context, sometimes at later stages in their lives. They have not been nurtured in the evangelical tradition from birth. It is something that they have to discover in later life, as part of the total package of reorientation which accompanies their conversion. Few have the time to become acquainted with the evangelical spiritual heritage of the past, when they have other matters which require to be given higher priority.

A colleague of mine, having just read a work on prayer by the well-known evangelical writer, Joyce Huggett, put the book down with intense irritation.³⁰ ‘Doesn’t she know anything about evangelical spirituality?’ he asked in utter exasperation. The medieval catholic spiritual tradition seemed to be well represented. But what of evangelicalism? What of the great Puritan writers, whose writings on prayer remain among the classics of Christendom?³¹ This lectureship is intended to celebrate the achievements of the ‘Puritan School of Divinity’; in pointing to that past spiritual greatness, I find myself embarrassed to turn back to the present, both in its state of spiritual impoverishment and its ignorance concerning the past. There is a powerful challenge to us here from the past. The Reformers and the Puritans — to name only two groups of people — have enormous spiritual resources to offer the modern church. Yet the Reformation work ethic — which is not the same as the secularized Protestant work ethic — seems to have had virtually no impact in modern evangelicalism.

In his recent survey of the outlooks of younger American evangelicals,³² James Davison Hunter pointed out that they had no real idea of the spiritual relevance of work. It had become something ordinary and humdrum. Something has been lost here. Yet this case is cited, not because it is of vital importance in itself, but because it points

³⁰ The work in question was Joyce Huggett, *Listening to God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986).

³¹ For an excellent introduction, see James I. Packer, *Among God’s Giants: Aspects of Puritan Christianity* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991). The potential of Puritan spirituality to the situation of the modern church is further explored in Packer’s 1991 St Antholin lecture, ‘A Man for All Ministries: Richard Baxter, 1615-1691’.

³² James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

to a seriously worrying trend: evangelicals are unaware of their own roots, and the riches that these have to offer the modern church.³³

One of the reasons for the considerable success of evangelicalism in recent years has been its willingness to relate to the issues of the day, rather than indulge in the luxury of nostalgia for the past. This has, however, often led to a devaluation of our heritage. The publication of the Library of the Fathers and Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology gave the nineteenth-century catholic wing of the Church of England a solid intellectual and spiritual foundation upon which it could build. We can learn from that example.

Some are learning already. Many younger evangelicals, especially in the United States, are rediscovering classic evangelical spiritualities, and are working towards refashioning them to meet the needs of our own day and age.³⁴ Jim Packer's *Among God's Giants* is an excellent example of a work by an older evangelical leader which conveys the relevance of this tradition to the needs of the modern church; others can be instanced without difficulty. The Puritans emerge as individuals with real insights for the spiritual difficulties and dilemmas which confront Christians in the modern period. But much more needs to be done. We need, as a matter of some urgency, to make past forms of spirituality — such as those linked with the Puritans —

³³ I explored this point with particular reference to the neglect of the spirituality of the sixteenth-century Reformation in *Roots that Refresh: A Celebration of Reformation Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992).

³⁴ An example is provided by Timothy Keller, 'Puritan Resources for Biblical Counselling', *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9 No. 3 (1988), pp. 11-44.

intelligible and accessible, as a duty both to evangelicalism and to the wider church at large. Current neglect of our heritage in no way precludes its rediscovery, along with other new approaches awaiting to be found and used. Just as the woman rejoiced at finding her missing coin (Luke 15:8-9), so we can share the joy of rediscovering spiritualities that our forebears knew, and which have since been lost. Yet there are surely other Christ-centred and Scripture-nourished ways of living the Christian life, waiting to be uncovered and developed! Our task is not simply to rediscover the past; it is to construct the future.

5.2. *Things have changed!*

Many of the classical evangelical approaches to the spiritual life were developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They reflect the periods of their origin. Often, they presupposed degrees of leisure and an absence of personal pressure which are totally unrealistic in the midst of the stress and tensions of modern western life. Whatever their past greatness, they have often proved unworkable in the modern era. For example, the classic 'Quiet Time' is a virtual impossibility for many of my colleagues in the highly stressed worlds of business and medicine, where personal space is a rare and cherished luxury. Echoing the received wisdom of the past, Billy Graham counselled new Christians to read their Bibles daily; without this 'daily spiritual nourishment', they could expect to starve and lose their spiritual vitality.³⁵ That advice, given forty years ago, has become increasingly problematic, with changes in the pace of living and modern lifestyles leading to many new Christians

³⁵ Billy Graham, *Peace with God* (Kingswood: World's Work, 1954), pp. 152-4.

finding themselves being presented with demands which prove to be quite unrealistic. Their faith comes to be made dependent upon something which cannot be sustained in the long term.

Yet evangelicalism has traditionally — and, it must be said, with considerable wisdom — reacted against any tendencies which could lead to the reification or the invalid objectification of spiritual practices, so that these become seen as an end in themselves, rather than the means to a greater end. Thus evangelicals prefer to speak of ‘praying to the Lord’ rather than ‘saying prayers’; the former focusses upon the end of prayer, which is an enhanced communion with the Lord, whereas the latter focusses upon a human activity. Indeed, one of the major evangelical concerns relating to ‘spirituality’ is that the emphasis often seems to fall upon human activities and practices as ends in themselves, rather than as a means to deepen a personal relationship with God. The evangelical will insist that emphasis falls upon the personal relationship between the believer and God, rather than upon spiritual disciplines in themselves.

The traditional Quiet Time must therefore not be allowed to become an end in itself. It falls to us to try to develop ways of reading Scripture or praying which are realistic in the modern period, are tailored to the personal rhythms of the individual, and yet retain a thorough grounding and immersion in Scripture. A respect for the past does not mean that we are wedded to that past; we owe it to our evangelical forebears to embody their vision in practices which are more suited to our changed situation. Above all, we need to take the sheer humanity of those to whom we minister much more seriously — a point which we may consider in more detail.

5.3. *The Evangelical Neglect of the Human Factor*

Many start the life of faith with great enthusiasm, only to discover themselves in difficulty shortly afterwards. Their high hopes and good intentions seem to fade away. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh proves weak. Fallen human nature all too often proves incapable of sustaining the high levels of enthusiasm and commitment which characterize the early days of faith. People need support, to keep them going when enthusiasm fades.

Catholic spirituality — as evidenced in the writings of Teresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence or Thomas à Kempis — has provided just such a support system for many in the past, precisely because it pays attention to the human side of the religious life, without neglecting the God-ward side of things. It is all very well to stress the total sufficiency of the gospel, and to focus on God as he has made himself known and available in Jesus Christ; but that gospel is addressed to sinful human beings, who need all the help that they can get to live by its precepts and harness its power in their lives. Evangelicalism, by too often stressing merely the God-ward side of the Christian life, has often been guilty of neglecting the human side of things.

Evangelicalism rightly insists that the quest for human identity, authenticity and fulfilment cannot be undertaken in isolation from God. But that is only half the story. What about ourselves? What about the needs and weaknesses of those to whom the gospel is addressed? Calvin states this principle with characteristic lucidity in the opening sentence of the 1559 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: ‘Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. And although they are closely

connected, it is difficult to say which comes first.’³⁶ Precisely the same point is made in Jacques Bénigne Bossuet’s *Traité de la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même* (published posthumously in 1722), and is a leading theme of that major catholic writer’s spirituality.

There are thus two aspects to the Christian life — knowing God, and knowing ourselves. (‘Knowing’ here designates ‘knowing and experiencing’, as one ‘knows’ a person). These cannot be separated, according to Calvin.³⁷ Thus any notion of spirituality as a quest for heightened religious experience as an end in itself is totally alien to the outlook of classic evangelicalism. ‘Feel good’ spiritualities are unacceptable, unless they are firmly grounded in Scriptural passages which give us reasons to ‘feel good’. The extensive appeal made to secular psychological and psychoanalytical disciplines in recent ‘inner life’ spirituality — such as Morton Kelsey’s *Christo-Psychology* and much New Age material — needs to be criticized.³⁸ To draw upon insights concerning the human condition is only half of the story that Christian spirituality is concerned to tell; indeed, if only half of that story is told, it has not been properly and authentically told at all.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), vol. 1, p. 37.

³⁷ For a full discussion, see W. Balke, ‘The Word of God and Experientia according to Calvin’, in W. H. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus ecclesiae doctor* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1978), pp. 19-31; Edward A. Dewey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* revised edition (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969).

³⁸ The uncritical use of such psychological material in evangelical contexts has been documented by James Hunter, in his *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, pp. 64-71, and also his *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 91-9.

But perhaps evangelicalism in its turn has only told half the story. It has neglected to give weight to the human weaknesses and needs which make certain forms of spirituality so attractive an option for so many people. David Powlinson, who teaches at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, explains the attraction of psychology to many evangelical pastors along the following lines.³⁹

The church has become weak in the domain of personal and interpersonal problems. Evangelical churches and theologians have typically not grappled with the problems in living that Christian people have. The church has either misconstrued, oversimplified, or avoided facing the existential and situational realities of human experience in the trenches of life.

Powlinson's analysis is highly suggestive. It points to a failure to address the realities of the human situation — the 'existential and situational realities of human experience in the trenches of life' which make spiritualities which centre upon human needs so attractive to many Christians, who feel that their spiritual lives are impoverished, and find evangelicalism unable or unwilling to offer them guidance.

Yet we have neglected our own heritage here. Calvin spoke of God 'accommodating himself to our abilities' — in other words God, knowing our needs and abilities, revealed himself in a form suited and adapted to us.⁴⁰ Powlinson points out how the Puritans knew this, and developed pastoral strategies and approaches to spirituality to cope with it. But not, it seems, any more. Now others outside

³⁹ David Powlinson, 'Integration or Inundation?', in M. Horton (ed.), *Power Religion: The Selling out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 191-218; quote at p. 200.

⁴⁰ Ford Lewis Battles, 'God was accommodating himself to Human Capacity', *Interpretation* 31 (1977), pp. 19-38.

evangelicalism have addressed this issue better than we have; the result is that, in the long term, we are losing people to Christian traditions which address this problem, or to secular psychotherapies in which the 'human factor' is given pride of place. If we cannot change human nature, then we must ensure that forms of spirituality which are authentically evangelical are on offer in the religious marketplace.

It was concern over these issues which led my wife and myself to write a book relating to a major area of modern concern - self-esteem. Alarmed at the uncritical incorporation of secular notions of human nature, value and destiny into influential works such as Robert Schuller's *Self-Esteem*,⁴¹ we decided to develop an approach to the issues surrounding self-esteem which was biblical, yet also responsive to helpful insights from psychology.⁴² My wife studied experimental psychology at Oxford, before going on to undertake further studies at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, and currently is principal clinical psychologist in Oxford. Together, she and I were able to bring together psychology and theology in a responsible and thoroughly Christian manner. That needs to be done more often!

5.4. *A Lack of Evangelical Role Models*

Many people genuinely feel the need for a 'spiritual director', someone who will offer them spiritual guidance, discipline and support over a long period. And, sensing that this is not a real option within evangelicalism, they will look for this kind of direction outside. The result? Some evangelicals end

⁴¹ Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982).

⁴² Joanna McGrath and Alister McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence* (Wheaton, Ill., and Cambridge, UK: Crossway Books, 1992).

up adopting both the theology and the spirituality of their more catholic colleagues. I have seen many of my students here in Oxford gradually lose sight of their evangelical roots in just this way. Yet in the past, evangelicals were aware of the vital role that experienced Christians could play in the spiritual formation of their younger colleagues. The ‘letters of spiritual counsel’ of great Christian pastors and leaders are a powerful reminder of the importance of this kind of nurturing and guidance in the past history of evangelicalism. Somehow, we seem to have lost sight of our heritage here.

I suspect that this situation will change as the years pass. However, at the moment, there are not enough active and credible practitioners of the craft of evangelical spiritual direction. One of the reasons why many seem to have lost confidence in evangelical spirituality is that there are relatively few individuals publicly available to embody that spirituality. We need national conferences, to identify resource people, books, approaches, methods and possibilities. We need international summer schools, to allow us to see what is happening at the global level in this field, in the hope that we may learn from what is going on elsewhere. We need local workshops, to allow all concerned with strategies for the deepening of faith to come together, and share our experiences, hopes and frustrations. In short: we need to get spirituality on the evangelical agenda, and make sure it stays there until we get this one sorted out.

5.5. *Spirituality is still not a Core Element in Evangelical Theological Training and Education*

Where are the evangelical institutions dedicated to promoting evangelical spirituality? Regent College, Vancouver, currently has two chairs of ‘spiritual theology’, occupied by the distinguished writers and speakers James M. Houston and Eugene H. Peterson. This development offers exciting

possibilities for the development and consolidation of evangelical spiritualities; yet sadly, it is an exception, rather than the rule. All too often, there is a massive blind spot here in evangelical institutions, which serves only to perpetuate the neglect and devaluing of evangelical spirituality.

Equally, where are the journals of evangelical spirituality? There is now no shortage of such specialist journals devoted to evangelical theology. Yet evangelicalism has always had its greatest strengths in the pulpit, on the mission field, and on its knees. As I stressed earlier, its distinctive feature is not so much a theology, as a devotional ethos. There is an obvious need for a journal devoted to this theme. Evangelicalism can draw upon a variety of resources — the Reformation, the Puritans, the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century, the holiness movement, and the charismatic movement — in seeking to confront and transform the future, aided and challenged by the resources of the past.

6. Rediscovering the Sacraments

One area of weakness in contemporary evangelical approaches to spirituality perhaps needs highlighting. This is the marginalization of the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, from our ways of thinking. Evangelicalism has always been prone to treat the sacraments with suspicion. In a thoughtful essay, my Oxford colleague Peter Southwell identifies a number of reasons for this devaluation of the sacraments, not least a fear of superstition and a concern that services with a sacramental emphasis may

hinder the proclamation of the gospel to outsiders.⁴³ Nevertheless, he concludes with a plea for evangelical attitudes to the sacraments to conform more closely to the characteristic evangelical reverence of Scripture and concern for evangelism:⁴⁴

The proclamation of the Lord's death for our salvation inherent in [the Holy Communion] serves well the varied pastoral, theological and evangelistic needs of those who witness or participate in it. Physical things matter; Christ's incarnation proves it. The ways in which God has invited us to use some of these — water, bread, wine and oil among them — are to our own souls' health as we meet him and he meets us, when we use them according to his command, according to scriptural principles, and with all the love, imagination and care to which the church's Spirit-taught mind can rise.

The modern evangelical suspicion of the sacraments contrasts sharply with the emphasis placed upon their kerygmatic, pastoral and spiritual role by leading writers of the Reformation, including Martin Luther and John Calvin.⁴⁵ While I do not have time to develop this point in this lecture, it seems to me to be imperative that we explore the enormous potential of the

⁴³ Peter Southwell, 'Evangelicalism and the Sacraments', in R. T. France and A. E. McGrath (eds), *Evangelical Anglicans* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 71-81.

⁴⁴ Southwell, 'Evangelicalism and the Sacraments', p. 80.

⁴⁵ I stress this point in *Roots that Refresh*, pp. 161-9 in which I explore the role of the sacraments for Reformation spirituality. For a more detailed analysis, see Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, second edition, 1993), pp. 159-87. For a recent study of reflection on the role of the Communion service by evangelical Anglicans, see Christopher J. Cocksorth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought In the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

sacraments, supremely the Lord's Supper, for personal devotion and reflection.

For example, Luther appeals to the communion service to bring home in a powerful and tangible way that God's promises are both real and costly. The death of Christ is seen as a token of both the trustworthiness and the enormous price of the grace of God. Luther develops this point by using the idea of a 'testament', understood in the sense of a 'last will and testament'.

A testament is a promise made by someone who is about to die, in which a bequest is defined and heirs appointed. A testament thus involves, in the first place, the death of the testator, and in the second, the promise of an inheritance and the naming of heirs ... We see these things clearly in the words of Christ. Christ testifies concerning his death when he says, 'This is my body, which is given' and 'This is my blood, which is poured out'. He names and designates the bequest when he says 'for the forgiveness of sins'. And he appoints the heirs when he says, 'for you and for many', that is, for those who accept and believe the promise of the testator.

Luther's insight here is that a testament involves promises which become operational only after the death of the person who made those promises in the first place. The liturgy of the communion service thus makes three vitally important points.

1. It affirms the promises of grace and forgiveness.
2. It identifies those to whom those promises are made.
3. It declares the death of the one who made those promises.

The mass thus dramatically proclaims that the

promises of grace and forgiveness are now in effect. It is ‘a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the son of God.’ By proclaiming the death of Christ, the community of faith affirms that the precious promises of forgiveness and eternal life are now effective for those with faith. The communion service thus reinforces both faith and devotion, by bringing home the reality and costliness of our redemption in a deeply evocative, memorable and moving manner. Perhaps we would do well to rediscover some of these approaches, which past fear and suspicion, however justified, have obscured.

7. Role Models for Evangelical Spirituality

One of the weaknesses which I pointed out earlier in this lecture is that there is something of an absence of role models for those concerned to foster evangelical approaches to the Christian life. This is not to say that there are none working in this area; it is to say there are not enough. But who are they? Last year, I decided to dip into the output of Christian publishing houses over the last few years, in search of writers whose approaches are genuinely evangelical. My selection is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is simply illustrative, to indicate the kind of material that is already there, and which might point us in helpful directions as we seek to develop skills, tools and methods to meet the challenges of what lies before us. My concern is to identify possible role models for all of us wrestling with the issues noted in this lecture, as, a stimulus to further reflection. The individuals whom I shall identify are like landmarks, identifying positions of importance to travellers who wish to move on beyond the regions that have thus been marked. I

must stress that many other individuals could be added to this list!

In the first place, such an evangelical spirituality will be Scripture-centred. However, this is a necessary yet not a sufficient condition. It is not simply that Scripture must be at the heart of evangelical spirituality; it must be approached and read in a certain manner. Scripture can be read with the cool critical detachment of the scholar, who treats this text ‘as if it were any other book’ (Benjamin Jowett). The distinction between a critical and a devotional commentary is well-founded. Scripture must be approached and read in the sure and confident expectation that God will speak to the reader. By meditating upon the scriptural text, the reader can deepen his or her relationship with God, forging a deeper bond of commitment, adoration, fellowship and love.

The importance of Scripture is easily stated. What is considerably more difficult, and arguably more important, is to develop methods of enabling readers to engage in a more satisfactory and fulfilling manner with the biblical text. One of the most satisfactory means of doing this, in my view, is that developed by Eugene Peterson. Peterson’s technique, developed in works such as *A Long Obedience* — reflections on the ‘Songs of Ascents’ (Psalms 120-134), is to engage the reader’s attention as he reflects on the meaning of biblical texts, and relates them to the situations of everyday life. He offers an extended meditation on the text, which makes a judicious appeal to the imagination - that vital human resource which has been so badly neglected by a generation of evangelicals who have soaked up the strongly rational spirit of the Enlightenment, and allowed such a rationalism to stifle our ability to imagine.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience In the Same Direction: Discipleship In an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1980).

In the second place, an evangelical spirituality will place considerable emphasis upon the transforming character of the knowledge of God. John Calvin stressed that ‘knowledge of God’ was no indifferent matter, but something which resulted in obedience on the one hand, and adoration on the other. This is a natural consequence of ‘devotional’ Bible study. ‘When the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have affected our lives in such a way, our, transformed desires will immediately witness to the change within us.’⁴⁷ However, people need help and guidance as to how such study can transform their relationship with God, or their feelings and emotions.

James Houston has offered us invaluable guidance on how to address these issues in two recent works, *The Transforming Friendship* (1990) and *The Heart’s Desire* (1992). In each case, Houston explores the way in which meditation and prayer can change our perception of God, our relationship with him, and our experience of him. Each work is richly illustrated with helpful quotations from the great writers of the past, and brief case studies of individuals to whom readers can relate. Throughout the works, there is a persistent and persuasive affirmation of the way in which knowing God changes things. Houston is perhaps one of the most lucid exponents of the dangers of allowing head and heart to go their separate and unrelated ways. Thus he writes of those whose experience of Christ is restricted to ‘the top of their heads, with no substance to it at the bottom of their hearts.’⁴⁸

And in the third place, evangelicalism — here drawing upon its Reformed roots — insists that spirituality must rest upon a solid and reliable foundation in the self-

⁴⁷ James Houston, *The Heart’s Desire: A Guide to Personal Fulfilment* (Oxford: Lion, 1992), p. 156

⁴⁸ Houston, *The Heart’s Desire*, p. 151.

revelation of God. There is thus the closest of connections between spirituality and theology. This organic relationship prevents spirituality from degenerating into little more than a human-centred quest for heightened religiosity, by insisting that our spiritual lives rest securely upon the foundation of God's self-revelation. It also keeps a check on theology, inhibiting it from becoming abstract speculation about God, without any appreciation of the importance of 'knowing God' for human devotion and personal fulfilment.

One of the finest exponents of this point is to be found in Jim Packer, whose *Knowing God* is a masterpiece of its kind. I wish, however, to consider here his seminal 1989 lecture 'An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality', noted earlier, in which he points out the utter impossibility of separating theology and spirituality:⁴⁹

I question the adequacy of conceptualizing the subject-matter of systematic theology as simply revealed truths about God, and I challenge the assumption that has usually accompanied this form of statement, that the material, like other scientific data, is best studied in cool and clinical detachment. Detachment from what, you ask? Why, from the relational activity of trusting, loving, worshipping, obeying, serving and glorifying God: the activity that results from realizing that one is actually in God's presence, actually being addressed by him, every time one opens the Bible or reflects on any divine truth whatsoever. This ... proceeds as if doctrinal study would only be muddled by introducing devotional concerns; it drives a wedge between ... knowing true notions about God and knowing the true God himself.

In particular, Packer draws attention to the need for 'more biblical and theological control' of spirituality, regretting the

⁴⁹ Packer, 'An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality', p. 6.

‘egocentric perspective’ of many spiritual writers, who use radically subjective criteria in developing and commending spiritual practices. ‘As I want to see theological study done as an aspect and means of our relating to God, so I want to see spirituality studied within an evaluative theological framework; that is why I want to arrange a marriage, with explicit exchange of vows and mutual commitments, between spirituality and theology.’⁵⁰ There is much wisdom to be gleaned from this great contemporary expositor of the Puritan ideal, just as there is much to be gained from the Puritan heritage which he so capably expounds.

8. Conclusion

Evangelical spirituality remains in its infancy. If there is any long-term threat to evangelicalism, this is it. Unless we can develop or rediscover forms of spirituality which are thoroughly evangelical in their roots and outlook, today’s evangelicals may be tomorrow’s ex-evangelicals. This is one of the most urgent tasks facing us today. We owe it to evangelicalism to get it right. And we owe it to the church at large, which is painfully aware of a gaping hole left by our failure.

Unless something is done to promote evangelical spirituality, the present growth of the movement may not be sustained in the longer term. It may be seen like a plant which goes through an initial surge of growth but thereafter needs to be supported. Yet I end on a note of justified optimism. In the past, evangelicalism has shown itself capable of rising to great challenges, and turning perceived

⁵⁰ Packer, ‘An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality’, p. 7.

weaknesses into opportunities to develop, grow and expand. I have every reason to suppose that the present weakness in spirituality will lead to a dedicated and sustained quest within evangelicalism to meet this deficiency. Evangelicalism is the slumbering giant of the world of spirituality. It needs to wake up. If it does, the new millennium could see some very exciting developments. We owe it to our future to do that right now.

For Futher Reading

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St Antholin's Lectureship Charity

In or about 1560 the Parish of St Antholin (Antholin being a medieval corruption of Antony, in this case Antony of Egypt), now absorbed into what is the parish of St Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside and St Mary Aldermary, within the Cordwainers' Ward in the City of London, came into possession of certain estates known as the "Lecturer's Estates". These were, it is believed, purchased with funds collected at or shortly after the date of the Reformation for the endowment of lectures of the Puritanical School of Divinity. The first mention of the charity was an Indenture dated 24 June 1616 made between Richard Vane of the first part, the Churchwardens of the Parish of St Antholin of the second part, and certain parishioners of the said parish on the third part.

Over the centuries the funds were not always used for the stated purpose, and in the first half of the nineteenth century a scheme was drawn up which revived the lectureship, which was to consist of 40 lectures to be given three times a year on the Puritan School of Divinity, the lecturer to receive one guinea per lecture. A further onerous requirement was that the lecturer had to be a beneficed Anglican, living within one mile of the Mansion House in the City of London.

Under such conditions the lectureship fell into disuse a long time ago, and it was not until 1987 that moves were put in hand with the Charity Commissioners to update the scheme. The first lecture under the new scheme was given in 1991.

George Cassidy

Archdeacon of London

Chairman of the St Antholin's Lectureship Charity Trustees

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