

EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY: A CHURCH HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

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About three decades ago, as I began to study movements of spiritual awakening in Protestantism, I had a scholarly awakening. I woke up to the fact that spirituality was a drastically neglected subject among scholars. Christian experience was treated as an optional dimension of Christian life, a sort of flavor additive that had its place in personal devotion and pastoral work but was marginal as a subject of serious reflection. Scholars focused on the outward shell of the Church's theology and structures but overlooked the vital force that helped make the shell and determine its forms.

Evangelicals did not even have a category of spiritual theology, as Roman Catholics did, dealing with the historical theology of Christian experience. New life in Christ was supposedly the core of our tradition. Where had we mislaid our central heritage?¹

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, produced mounds of pious literature but not much in the way of solid critical analysis and reflection. One might have expected Thomas Merton to trigger a movement of renewed interest in spirituality. But this did not happen immediately. Merton's own spirituality became increasingly (and healthily) engaged with worldly issues, but the Christian world did not respond by giving greater attention to spirituality.²

Now, a generation after Merton, there is a growing crescendo of practical and scholarly reflection on this subject. In the last decade scores of works have appeared in spiritual theology from every perspective: Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, anabaptist, Wesleyan, evangelical, Jungian, liberationist,

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¹I have reflected more extensively on this problem in the preface to *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979).

²This is not to minimize the solid contributions of P. Pourrat, L. Bouyer and a few others who have explored the history of Christian spirituality from a Roman Catholic perspective. But in 1980 when I surveyed Roman Catholic educational institutions, most seemed unaware of spiritual theology, and few even had functioning analogues in the disciplines of pastoral theology, evangelism and spiritual formation. It appears that Thomas Merton was able to make the transition from a kind of ascetic, pietistic, Catholic chauvinism to the keen observation of world events through the lens of a well-developed ecumenical sensibility, which we see in works like *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, without losing his spiritual rootage in the Augustinian contemplative tradition. But a whole generation of Catholics seems to have attempted to dive into the world without maintaining any transcendental airhose. Perhaps one of their motivations in exploring the world has been their annoyance with asceticism and other toxic residua in the received tradition. Mainline Protestants and evangelicals after 1960 have had much the same experience in reacting to weaknesses in their own spiritualities.

and even liberal. Spirituality is finally getting the scholarly attention it deserves.

As a Church historian and spiritual theologian, I look at the values and the needs of modern evangelical spirituality against the background of its historical development from the Reformation onward. I see tremendous strengths in this heritage that we ought to recover, along with grievous current weaknesses that we should try to correct.

I. REFORMATION SPIRITUALITY

The spirituality of Luther and Calvin is a reaction against western Catholic spirituality. Let me first point out the features that aroused reaction.

The absence of justification as a theological category separate from sanctification is a dominant factor shaping pre-Reformation spirituality. Luther felt that the spiritual lives of all Catholics, from the monks and nuns to the most retiring layperson, were affected by this justification gap. He also believed that this missing spiritual dimension virtually determined the whole shape of the medieval Church: "Ah, if the article on justification hadn't fallen, the brotherhoods, pilgrimages, masses, invocation of saints, etc., would have found no place in the church. If it falls again (which may God prevent!) these idols will return."³

This is an interesting comment on the vital force of theology and spirituality in shaping structures. The core doctrines of spiritual theology determine the shape of spirituality. But spirituality then amplifies the force of these doctrines, and it energizes and projects their shape on the whole of theology and Church structure.

How did the absence of justification lead to dysfunction in medieval spirituality? Catholics believed that they were justified in the process of being sanctified. Since sanctification is never perfect and always in peril during our lifetime, they were imperfectly assured of their salvation. Serious believers could cure this uneasiness by martyrdom, or by the bloodless martyrdom of ascetic spirituality.

Sanctification, bearing an unnatural weight because it was expected to pacify the believer's conscience, was a subject of extraordinary concern. But the ascetic method of sanctification was by amputation, not by healing. If the believer is having trouble with sex, give up sexual relations. If he or she is having difficulty with covetousness, give up private property. If he or she is tempted by power, give up independence. The monastery and the nunnery are sanctification machines that guarantee the surest victory over the sinful use of money, sex and power.⁴

Monasteries are an eastern religious instrument, not a Biblical format. And the medieval view of sanctification was subject to other eastern intrusions. The desert fathers are typically Hellenistic, if not Buddhist, in their

³Martin Luther, *Table Talk* (ed. T. G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 340.

⁴My favorite analysis of the problems and provisional advantages of asceticism is still H. B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (Boston: Beacon, 1962).

assumption that spirit and matter—and especially soul and body—are enemies. "The body kills me," says Macarius, "so I will kill it!"⁵

The western mystical tradition, from Augustine through Bernard and the Rhineland mystics, moved beyond this spiritual masochism to see that mortifying sin was the goal of sanctification and that this was not usually helped by punishing the body. But ascetic mysticism characteristically views spiritual growth as the result of hard work. A central image of this literature is the ladder. One starts at the bottom, and there are thirteen steps that must be climbed, for instance, to move from pride to humility.⁶

Or, at the very least, there are the three steps of the Triple Way: the purging of sin from one's life, then the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and then union with God. There are important lessons for Protestants in this structure, but we must make two observations: (1) that first step (purgation of sin) is a big one; (2) faith in Jesus Christ, and even the mention of the Redeemer, are scarce commodities in this literature. It is overwhelmingly theocentric rather than Christocentric, and it is full of nervous instructions to believers trying to cross the gap between man and God on their own footpaths.

This is not to agree with the common Protestant prejudice that nothing deeply spiritual can be going on among mystics and in monasteries. The problem is somewhat different: Spiritual experiences which for the Catholic doctors seem rare and hard to come by—the awesome summits of acquired or infused contemplation—appear to evangelical Protestants as common and routine possessions found among the laity, part of the birthright acquired by faith in Christ.

And this is the genius of Reformation spirituality. It assumes that the simplest believer leaps to the top of the spiritual ladder simply by realistic faith in Jesus Christ. Consistent Protestants start every day at the top of the ladder, receiving by faith what only God can give and what cannot be achieved by human efforts: assurance of salvation, and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. They may slip down a few rungs during the course of the day, but the way up again is not by climbing. It is by the vault of faith.

Similarly Luther stands the *via triplex* on its head. Union with Christ, received by faith, is the foundation of evangelical spirituality, not the final achievement. The illumination of the Holy Spirit then comes in to break up our darkness and show us our sins. Purgation of sin, finally, is a sanctification process in which we are led by the Spirit to recognize, confess and put to death the particular patterns of sin that are present in our characteristic fallen nature.

It seems obvious to evangelicals that this is a Biblical way to look at spiritual growth. The disciples, after all, were not Essene monks any more than Jesus was. They did not wear animal skins and eat locusts, like John. They were clumsy learners and listeners on the track of faith, not chanting monks pursuing solitude. They were annoyingly dense in their spiritual

⁵Palladius: *The Lausiac History* (Westminster: Newman, 1965) 58-67.

⁶The reference here is to Bernard's *Thirteen Steps*.

response throughout the gospels. They were cured, however, not by keeping spiritual disciplines but by an infusion of the Holy Spirit, a whirlwind restructuring their minds, imparting a spirituality that they could never have achieved. As Paul puts it: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? . . . Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (Gal 3:2-5).

Luther's teaching cut through the Roman Catholic spirituality of achievement by stressing the thing that was most important to Jesus: Christ-centered faith. Evangelical piety is first of all a spirituality of faith as opposed to one of achievement. Responding to an ascetic model of Christian experience, Protestantism adopted an essentially pentecostal or charismatic model. Spirituality comes not through laborious cultivation of the human spirit but through the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a spirituality that flourishes in the atmosphere of faith. It is not worked up through ascetic exercises but infused directly, as at Pentecost. In Roman Catholic terms, infused contemplation is thus the common inheritance of all laity and clergy and not the private prerogative of those with ascetic vocations.⁷

P. T. Forsyth summarized Luther's approach:

Perfection is not sanctity but faith. . . . It is a perfection of attitude rather than of achievement, of relation more than of realization, of truth more than of behaviour. . . . It is not a matter of our behaviour before God the Judge, but of our relation to God the Saviour. . . . It is a fatal mistake to think of holiness as a possession which we have distinct from our faith. . . . Every Christian experience is an experience of faith; that is, it is an experience of what we have not. . . . Faith is always in opposition to seeing, possessing, experiencing. A faith wholly experimental has its perils. It varies too much with our subjectivity. It is not our experience of holiness that makes us believe in the Holy Ghost. It is a matter of faith that we are God's children; there is plenty of experience in us against it. . . . We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the Love we trust.⁸

Luther believed that Catholic spirituality imposed a barrier between the believer and God. Because it leaves the believer in partial darkness, unaware of the imputed righteousness of Christ, the theology of Trent leaves weak Christians feeling distant from the Holy Spirit. It discourages the laity, and wherever it prevails in modern Catholicism the result is spiritual deadness, as Henri Nouwen has stated.⁹

⁷Sister M. Murphy, a Catholic charismatic who has worked closely with George Gallup in recent years, comments that charismatic renewal is simply infused contemplation made available to everybody in the Church. Note that Leo Cardinal Suenens, early in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, stood up against the traditional teaching that the charismatic gifts had ended with the apostolic era on the grounds that without spiritual charisms broadly available among the laity the priesthood of believers could not be achieved.

⁸P. T. Forsyth, *Christian Perfection* (London, 1899) 56, 7-9, 73.

⁹H. J. M. Nouwen, *Gracias* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983).

The Catholic critique of this pentecostal model of spirituality, on the other hand, is that it too often seems to lead Christians to that life of casual disinterest in spiritual growth that Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined as "cheap grace."¹⁰ "Things are admirably arranged," as Heinrich Heine said. "God likes forgiving sins, and I like committing them."

Catholics could point to another text in Paul that sets up a complementary ascetic model of spirituality: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? . . . Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. . . . Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor 9:24-27). Initial experience of the Spirit may be a gift and not an achievement. But continued fellowship with him may require effort.

The Reformers shied away from spiritual exercises as a road to growth, though they did stress the need to hear and read Scripture in order to nourish faith and the need to pray in order to express faith. John Calvin also balanced Luther's emphasis on justification by an intensive treatment of sanctification. Out of the material in the application sections of Paul's letters, Calvin carefully drew an understanding of spiritual growth through mortification of sin and vivification of every aspect of the personality by the Spirit's releasing work. Calvin's later disciple, John Owen, went so far as to say that "the vigor and power of spiritual life are dependent upon mortification of sin."¹¹ The Reformed tradition thus made a strong effort to rule out cheap grace.

II. PURITANISM, PIETISM AND THE EVANGELICAL AWAKENINGS

The quotation from Owen brings us to a second stage in the development of evangelical spirituality: the efforts of Calvinist Puritans and Lutheran pietists to "complete the Reformation" through "reforming our lives as well as our doctrines." These movements appear to be an ascetic movement within Protestantism reacting against cheap grace. Puritans wanted congregations of "visible saints" who were not simply "notionally orthodox" but were spiritually alive.¹²

Puritans continued to develop Calvin's emphasis on sanctification. Regeneration, the first stage of sanctification, was accented. The "born again" theme of the anabaptists was integrated into evangelical spirituality.

Gordon Wakefield comments that Catholic spirituality had treated regeneration as a brief baptismal overture to the three-act play of lifelong sanctification. But Puritans identified regeneration with conscious conversion and made conversion into a long first act, to which the rest of Christian growth was almost an epilogue. They insisted on a preliminary "law-work"

¹⁰D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959) 35-47.

¹¹J. Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works* (ed. T. Russell; London: Richard Baynes, 1823), 7. 350.

¹²Cf. E. S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York, 1963).

that marinated the sinner in prolonged reflection on personal sin. Potential converts were searched out and almost pre-sanctified by the time they had found their way to justifying faith.¹³

Assurance of salvation was a crucial focus for Puritans and pietists, a precious gift that could not easily be attained and could easily be lost. Not that salvation itself could be lost, as in the Roman Catholic approach. But Protestants persisting in serious sin were virtually required to lose their assurance.¹⁴

More legalistic Puritans taught assurance through the inspection of works. More evangelical ones opted for assurance through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Though both approaches have Biblical warrant, Luther would probably have been uneasy with both if pursued apart from an outward-gazing reliance on Christ, grasping salvation through faith alone. Puritans were so unsure that this original thrust of the Reformation was sufficient to guard against cheap grace that they might have called Luther an antinomian if he had appeared among them.

This points to the fact that Puritanism was leaning toward ascetic legalism as it sought to compete with Counter-Reformation piety and to create a distinctive Protestant spirituality that would rule out cheap grace. Puritanism sought to graft patristic and medieval spirituality on to the Reformation base of justification by faith. And there were times when that base was obscured. Max Weber is correct in calling Puritanism “innerweltliche Askese” (inner-worldly asceticism), an effort to turn ordinary Protestant laypersons into married, unenclosed monastics practicing Scriptural mysticism.

There were problems with this venture. Modern fundamentalist spirituality has inherited some of the Tertullianesque casuistry of the Puritans, which ruled out stage plays, cosmetics, dancing, and games of chance.¹⁶

On the other hand, there was a certain grandeur in the effort to develop a laity as dedicated to religious knowledge and prayer as the better sort of monks and nuns. Modern evangelical spirituality has retained many instruments pioneered during this era. The “quiet time” at the outset of the day springs directly from the Scripture reading and reflection prescribed for Puritan laity. The Puritans added graces at meals, prayer with spouses, and household devotions at the evening meal. Beyond this they recommended continual short prayers during the day, and also “occasional reflections”—mystical insights drawn from the symbolic meaning of events and objects, a devotion tracing back to the medieval Victorine theologians. Puritans invented the use of spiritual diaries as a kind of Protestant substitute for the confessional.

¹³G. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (London, 1957) 160–161.

¹⁴*Westminster Confession of Faith* 20.4.

¹⁵Thomas Shepherd is the most famous Puritan favoring assurance through inspection of works. John Cotton and Richard Sibbes exemplify the more evangelical strand who grounded assurance on faith and the internal testimony of the Spirit.

¹⁶For a good account of the roots of modern fundamentalism’s dos and don’ts see T. Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: SPCK, 1952) 64.

It is not surprising that Puritan writings are saturated with references to patristic authors. There are more references to the fathers than to Luther and Calvin. Puritanism is thus a bridge movement in which modern evangelicals and Roman Catholics may find spiritual common roots. Cotton Mather's omnivorous spiritual appetite smuggled in many Catholic devices: short ejaculatory prayers, vows and intentions of piety, and day- and night-long vigils. Mather also promoted new instruments of Protestant spirituality such as small group meetings for prayer and religious conversation.¹⁷

Puritanism pioneered the exploration of the neglected field of pneumatology in the massive treatises of John Owen and in Jonathan Edwards' theology of spiritual illumination. The flavor of Puritan spirituality is conveyed in titles like Owen's *The Christian's Communion with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost* and Robert Bolton's *Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*.

Both Puritanism and pietism define mystical communion with God as a normal occurrence among and for all Christians. Nicholas Byfield says of the Puritan believer:

The Holy Ghost at some time falls upon him, & sets him all on a fire . . . both of sudden and violent indignation at sinne . . . as also the fire of holy affections. . . . He doth feele his heart oftentimes on a sudden surprised with strange impressions, sometimes of sorrow, sometimes of feare and awefull dread of God; some times of fervent desires after God; some times of strong resolutions of holy duties to be done by him. . . . He feeles at some times the unspeakable and glorious ioyes of the Holy Ghost . . . such as by effect make him more humble, and vile in his owne eies, and doe inflame him to an high degree of the love of God and goodnesse, which illusions can never doe.¹⁸

This is not a mysticism that is transintellectual in the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition. It is anchored in conscious reflection on Biblical texts. Still, no one can read this literature without thinking immediately of Teresa and John of the Cross. Thomas Goodwin even has a Biblicist version of *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, a treatise of "divine desertions."

The goal of Puritan spirituality was "the power of godliness" in opposition to "a form of godliness denying the power thereof." Puritan "live orthodoxy" was equally opposed to lifeless traditionalism on the right and heterodoxy on the left. (Puritans, and especially Lutheran pietists, got attacked from both sides and felt sure they were on the right track when this happened.¹⁹)

This ethos is carried over into the evangelicalism of the first and second awakenings, which are Puritanism and pietism on the march, replicating their vision of individual spirituality through the conversion of the masses. Awakening spirituality was not simply the perfecting of saintly individuals, however. It involved waiting on God in corporate prayer for pentecostal

¹⁷For an account of Mather's surprisingly ecumenical piety see R. F. Lovelace, "The Machinery of Piety," in *American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (Grand Rapids: Christian University, 1979).

¹⁸N. Byfield, *The Marrow of the Oracles of God* (London, 1630) 172-174.

¹⁹See Lovelace, "Live Orthodoxy," in *Dynamics*.

outpourings of the Holy Spirit, to energize the Church and form it into troop movements assaulting the kingdom of darkness.

Awakening spirituality was consciously ecumenical, recognizing that God has more important goals than refining the perfect theology through this or that small group of elect theorists. Discernment of the Spirit at work across the boundaries of Calvinism, Lutheranism and Arminianism is a mark of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelicalism.

Count Zinzendorf enlarged the spiritual dimension of community far beyond the anabaptist and Puritan experiments in this area. Corporate prayer for Church-wide spiritual awakening and worldwide missionary outreach was the core of Zinzendorf's Herrnhut community. Herrnhut was an intentional community deliberately designed as an ecumenical symbol, bringing together Lutherans, Moravian Hussites, Calvinists, Catholics and sectarian Protestants in a kind of recapitulation of Acts 1, in which all the types of Christians then existing were gathered for prayer in the upper room. Small groups for mutual confession of sin and intercession broke down the theological partitions between different kinds of Christians, and a round-the-clock prayer—a Protestant equivalent of the monastic canonical hours—paved the way for Herrnhut's experience of "baptism in the Holy Spirit" on August 13, 1727.

Zinzendorf called this event "Herrnhut's Pentecost," and after this the community exploded in mission, producing tentmaking teams for foreign missions and renewal teams visiting the historic denominations. These included Rome, for alone among the Protestant leaders of his time Zinzendorf viewed Catholicism not as antichrist but as just another disordered denomination in need of renewal.²⁰

A dimension of evangelical spirituality enlarged during the awakenings was concern for moral and social reform. The Wesleyan movement reached the poor in England and articulated their concerns to the "Evangelical United Front," which included Anglican leaders like John Newton. Evangelical laity—leaders who spent three hours daily in intercessory prayer—sought not only to evangelize individuals but also to change society, to abolish slavery and wage-slavery. A socially progressive mindset, an awakened sensitivity to information, and extensive prayer drove the transforming impact of the second awakening in England and America.²¹

A further development of the Wesleyan impulse was the rise of pentecostal spirituality in the early twentieth century. This continued the characteristic thrust of evangelical spirituality: the activation of the laity. Belief that every believer has supernatural gifts for building the whole body accented the lay activism of post-Moodyan fundamentalism. Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality kept alive the radical concern for experiencing contact with God that had characterized Puritans and awakeners. More than any other part of

²⁰For the best study of Zinzendorf as awakener and ecumenist see A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer* (London: SCM, 1962).

²¹For the best accounts of the English phase of the second evangelical awakening see E. M. Howse, *Saints in Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1952); C. I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1960).

modern evangelicalism, this tradition has continued to promote corporate prayer for spiritual awakening in the Church. David Du Plessis continued Zinzendorf's concern for unitive spiritual awakening in the whole visible Church, though few charismatics seem to have understood his concerns.²²

III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF MODERN EVANGELICALISM

Against this historical background we can make some evaluation of the current state of evangelical spirituality.

Like American liberalism, the modern evangelical movement has a weakened sense of the holiness of God and the depth of personal sin. The Reformation stress on justification has been retained, and also the Puritan motif of the need for regeneration. But the process of being born again is much easier than the Puritans made it: a simple immediate response of faith and commitment, often after a very short presentation of the gospel. The possibility of losing the assurance of one's salvation is not even intimated. In fact, converts are urged to believe they are saved as though this were one of the main doctrines of the faith. The themes of holiness and continued sanctification are very much muted compared to the Puritan and awakening eras. Evangelicals are once again suffering from a sanctification gap.²³

Modern fundamentalism inherited and emphasized one of the weaker sides of the Puritan tradition, its sectarian legalism. Fundamentalists talk about the authority of Scripture, but their spirituality is captive to revivalist traditionalism.²⁴

Neo-evangelicals have developed a better theology of culture, but they generally reflect a rationalistic de-emphasis on spirituality, or even in some cases an active distrust of Christian experience as a source of liberalism. In evangelical parachurch groups and congregations, however, a simplified lay spirituality involving Scripture study and prayer is vigorously promoted.

The charismatic renewal continues to express the mystical spirituality of the Puritan and awakening eras, but often without the rational and theological checks against error and credulity maintained by evangelicals. As a consequence, charismatics have some of the problems of the radical spiritualists in the anabaptist and Puritan left wing. Gifts of the Spirit are more prominent than the call to sanctification. The charismatic garden has a luxuriant overgrowth of theological weeds, including the health-and-wealth gospel, the most virulent form of the American heresy that Christianity guarantees worldly success. A fuzzy and unstructured ecumenism lives side by side with rampant sectarianism.

²²A good account of pentecostal spirituality from within this tradition is V. Synan, *In the Latter Days* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1984).

²³See Lovelace, "The Sanctification Gap," in *Dynamics*.

²⁴The best witness to this is an attempted defense of modern fundamentalism, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, ostensibly by J. Falwell but actually by E. Hindson and E. Dobson (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981).

The division of the evangelical mind in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy has left modern evangelicals with a depressed consciousness of social sin and a weakened prophetic emphasis compared to mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics. Evangelicals are captivated by conservative economic ideologies. The funding structure of the movement is tied to a laity that is not socially progressive, does not pray three hours a day, and does not donate its resources with the generosity of the lay leaders in the second awakening. What was a movement of Christian humanism has become anti-intellectual. The expensive tasks of forming new Christian universities is neglected, and Christian educators, as my readers surely know, are underpaid and overworked.

This limits the spiritual force of evangelicalism in social reform and cultural transformation. Some important moral issues are being addressed by right-wing evangelicals. But the kind of impact made by evangelical Protestants in the nineteenth century is mainly visible in Catholic circles today. Evangelical missionary Guillermo Cook comments that in Latin America, Catholics and Protestants have traded places. Evangelicals are cozying up to dictators and vending a wholly spiritual salvation, while Catholics are breaking the Church's alliance with wealth and military power and developing a Biblical spirituality that stands up against structural injustice.²⁵

The sanctification gap has been publicized during the last year through the scandals among media leaders. This election year will continue to expose every spiritual weakness in our movement, as Americans see a reflection of the divided mind of American Protestantism in the campaigns of Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson. Humanist counterattacks on the religious right are producing the worst public-relations situation the evangelical movement has ever endured—much worse than the discrediting of fundamentalism during the 1920s, of which George Marsden has recently reminded us.²⁶

Under these pressures, what can we do to reinvigorate evangelical spirituality? I have three suggestions.

1. *We may need to move back toward the ascetic model of spirituality.* The great spiritual awakenings have come when both the ascetic and pentecostal models have been in force—where there is a balance in the stress on faith and works, on justification and sanctification. During almost every awakening Catholics and Protestants have drawn closer to one another as they are doing now, because they have been moving toward one another's partial models of spirituality to recover Scriptural balance. It now appears evident that Protestant evangelicalism has drifted off course into cheap grace. The new interest in spiritual disciplines shows that we are trying to recover balance. This will be most fruitful if we also begin to explore the little-known areas of holiness and continued sanctification.

2. *We may need to challenge more, and comfort less, in our evangelism and discipleship.* We need to make it harder for our people to retain assurance

²⁵See G. Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor*.

²⁶See G. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1980).

of salvation when they move into serious sin. The Roman Catholic and Wesleyan models would call for announcing that they have forfeited their salvation. The Reformed model that prevails among evangelicals calls for us to remind them that some plants appear to bear fruit in bad soil but ultimately wither because they had no deep rootage, because there was no real conversion in the first place. We need to tell some persons who think they have gotten saved to get lost. The Puritans were Biblically realistic about this. We have become sloppy and sentimental in promoting assurance under any circumstances.

3. *We need to listen hard—because God is speaking to us loudly and clearly about the road to recovering the spiritual depth of classical evangelicalism.*

We need to listen carefully to one another. Fundamentalists, evangelicals and charismatics all have preserved parts of the genetic pool of the evangelical tradition, although usually the good genes are bonded to bad genes. If we speak the truth in love and listen in humility, we can chip away one another's deformities and recover some measure of the spiritual depth our movement used to have.

We need to listen carefully to other kinds of Christians. Mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and Orthodox believers have preserved Biblical values that we lack. And they often have clear insights about our faults that could help us toward repentance.

We need to listen to history—the history of our own movement, and the body of tradition that has nourished other movements. The early fathers, the medieval mystics, the spiritual doctors of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the leaders of the awakening eras, the uneven prophets of liberal social reform—all of these can force us back toward Biblical balance and authentic spirituality.

We need to listen to Scripture against this background. Our own stale and partial contextualizations of the Biblical text need to be broken up as we discover new implications of truth that our own orthodox self-satisfaction may have obscured.

Finally, we need to listen to the unfolding record of current events. Every day may bring new insight into our need for repentance and renewal, or an encouraging sign of spiritual vigor in places we might not expect it. Evangelicals have experienced an amazing resurgence in the past several decades in terms of the multiplication of our leadership. Now God is calling us to get serious in our spiritual lives. I am sobered by our recent failures, but I am still confident that we will respond to that call.