

David Parker

Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed

Dr. Parker, whose article on 'Original Sin: A Study in Evangelical Theory' appeared in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY in January, 1989, now turns his attention to an analysis of the theology and structure of evangelical spirituality and reviews its present practice in the light of contemporary trends.

I. Introduction

The current interest in retreats, the popularity of books on spiritual subjects and the search for spiritual directors confirms the view of Richard Lovelace that spirituality is now 'a growth industry'.¹ This is true even amongst evangelicals who in the past have generally been opposed to many of these practices because of their intimate association with Catholicism. But now evangelicals are just as likely as any other Christians to be found fasting, using meditation or enjoying liturgical worship.² This trend towards neo-monasticism is said to be a 'restoration of historic spirituality',³ re-discovery of values and practices from a tradition which earlier generations neglected to their own loss. But many of today's evangelicals apparently with a more broad-minded outlook than some of their forebears believing there is value in these practices, are determined to make up the deficiencies. They have also looked with interest on other spiritual traditions as well, including Quaker mysticism, the activism of Liberation Theology, 'health and wealth' teaching and the charismatic movement. They have also turned to the social and human sciences to gain insights from those areas.

It may well be the case that in the past, over-reaction has resulted in the loss of valuable practices. It should, of course, be remembered that movements such as the Reformation, Puritanism and Pietism (which have been the most influential in shaping evangelical spirituality), were meant to correct abuses, not to destroy valid and useful Christian practices or even to pioneer

¹ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1985), 15.

² E.g., see Bruce Wilson, 'Eremos: Desert of Life' *Interchange* 40, 1986, 26-32.

³ R. E. Webber, *Common Roots* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1978), 219.

new forms of the faith. But in the enthusiasm for reform, worthwhile traditions may have been inadvertently rejected along with the undesirable, to the detriment of Protestantism as a whole. In these circumstances, it is argued, there is wisdom in evangelical spirituality strengthening itself by the revival of long neglected but still potentially useful disciplines.

But now there is the danger of allowing the pendulum to swing back too far in the opposite direction by de-emphasising practices which have served so well in the past, or by embracing uncritically elements from other traditions which may not be compatible with evangelicalism.

Several reasons may be advanced to explain why there is a noticeable trend among evangelicals to abandon such distinctive elements as the personal 'Quiet Time', the family altar, and 'Sabbath observance'.

For example, one possible reason is that while these practices may have had value in their time, they were too closely related to the period of their origin or development and were without substantial theological basis. Thus, they suffered greatly from changes in context, external pressures and internal fatigue and have therefore become irrelevant in the modern era.

Another possibility may be traced to the personal element—*viz.*, that evangelicals do not clearly understand their own spirituality, do not practice it diligently or find few good examples of it any more amongst themselves to use as models. In other words, they have lost confidence in their own historic traditions, and under the pressure of the modern secular world have been attracted by other disciplines which appear to have greater strength and resilience.⁴

Some of these difficulties may easily be overcome (at least in principle) by counselling, education and discipline. But there may also be more serious underlying causes which need attention. One such possibility is the existence of a fundamental confusion in the scheme of evangelical spirituality due to the imperfect integration of the various traditions contributed by its multiple historical sources. These are quite varied, including the Reformation, Puritanism, the Evangelical Revival, the Holiness Movement, the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movement and Radical Discipleship. If these somewhat diverse traditions are not fully appreciated or positively related to each other (as Lovelace indicates has been the case), it is not surprising that, when

⁴ James Houston, 'Spirituality', W. A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (EDTh) (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1984), 1046.

evangelical spirituality is subject to the kind of stress it is now facing, signs of weakness are revealed. This is even more likely to be the case because evangelical spirituality is often presented in a highly popularized and fragmented manner, subject to the idiosyncrasies of a variety of different exponents.

These factors need to be taken into account before evangelical spirituality is substantially modified, in favour of other systems. Hence there is value in carrying out a critical review of the existing practices to bring out their essential structures and principles. Such a procedure would show the strengths and weaknesses of evangelical spirituality, and would serve as a basis for determining whether other traditions of spirituality were compatible with it, and how they might be employed to enrich it.⁵

II. Evangelical Spirituality Identified

1. Spirituality

However, the concept of 'evangelical spirituality' itself is perhaps the first problem, since it is not at all well developed or defined, at least in comparison with other traditions, such as the Roman Catholic with its rich treasury of explicit spiritual theology and discipline.

Even the concept of 'spirituality' is more difficult to define than might be anticipated. For example, Gordon Wakefield describes it as the 'attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them reach out towards supersensible realities.'⁶ Similarly, Geoffrey Wainwright speaks of it as 'existence before God and amid the created world.'⁷

These are general definitions, but Wainwright goes on to qualify the idea in more specifically Christian terms by adding, 'It is a praying and living in Jesus Christ. It is the human spirit being grasped, sustained and transformed by the Holy Spirit.' Similarly, Croucher notes that spirituality is that which 'concerns the life of God's Spirit within us.'⁸ One definition that takes spirituality in a

⁵ For a good example, see Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life*, 162, 195–200 (charts) where a fully integrated model of spirituality falling within the Reformed tradition is presented.

⁶ Gordon Wakefield, 'Spirituality', Alan Richardson and John Bowden (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology (NDCth)* (London, SCM, 1983), 539.

⁷ Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Christian Spirituality', Mircea Eliade (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, (New York, Macmillan, 1987) 3:452.

⁸ R. Croucher, *Recent Trends Among Evangelicals* (Sutherland, Albatross, 1986), 58.

narrow sense is found in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia*⁹ viz., 'Christian life lived with some intensity.' This seems to be somewhat elitist in tone, but it should be noted that such an attitude is not restricted to this source. Thus, James Houston describes spirituality as 'a state of deep relationship with God.'¹⁰

Writing from an evangelical point of view, Robert Banks takes a much broader view when he refers to spirituality as

the character and quality of our life with God, among fellow-Christians and in the world. This is primarily a work of the Spirit, though our own spirit is obviously drawn into it. But not only our spirit—also our minds, wills, imaginations, feelings and bodies.¹¹

As he points out, he is equating spirituality with the older and more familiar terms 'piety' and 'godliness'.

It is, therefore, clear that 'spirituality' is a broad concept including conscious and subconscious elements, and formal and informal aspects. It covers the state and condition of a person as well as attitudes, beliefs and practices. But it should not be defined so broadly that it loses its distinctiveness. For example, it is not the same as salvation, morality or sanctification, even though it is related to these.

R. Cant¹² sees it as a 'real, effective apprehension of Christian truth in the human consciousness.' It is to be noted, however, that in this case the word 'truth' cannot mean mere conceptual truth, as the Catholic term 'spiritual theology' might suggest, but the total experience of being a Christian. Thus Wainwright can speak of 'the combination of praying and living which is spirituality.'¹³ With this in mind, Balthasar's definition quoted by Cant may be more adequate than others:

the way a man understands his own ethically and religiously committed existence, and the way he acts and reacts habitually to this understanding.¹⁴

While traditions and practices of spirituality are affected by personal temperament and historical context, as Cant indicates,

⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1967) 13:598.

¹⁰ James Houston, 'Spirituality', *EDTh*, 1046; see also Gordon Wakefield, 'Spirituality', *NDCTh*, 549.

¹¹ Robert Banks, 'Home Churches and Spirituality', *Interchange* 40, 1986, 15.

¹² R. Cant, 'Spirituality', Alan Richardson (ed.), *Dictionary of Christian Theology (DCTh)* (London, SCM, 1969), 328.

¹³ C. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold, *The Study of Spirituality*, (London, SPCK, 1986), 592.

¹⁴ *DCTh* 328. Questions may be raised, however, about his placing of the word 'ethical' before 'religious' and his gender specific language.

the importance of the underlying theological conceptions cannot be minimized. Despite the influence of other factors, ultimately it is the theology of salvation in particular that determines spirituality. Thus, the clear lines of Catholic sacramental theology are reflected in the unified spirituality of that church, whereas for Pietism, it is the concept of the divine image in humanity (*Imago Dei*) which is distinctive.¹⁵ Hence, typical Catholic treatment focuses on the religious life of sacraments and spiritual practices including set forms of prayer, the interior life and disciplines such as spiritual direction, meditations, retreats and fasting; Protestantism on the other hand concentrates on the personal appropriation of grace through faith. Thus Bouyer can emphasise that

... our spiritual life will be Catholic to the extent to which our personal relationship with God is developed in the Church. For the Word of God is spoken to us in the Church, and it is inseparable from the Church to the point that we cannot truly receive it except as it is communicated to us by the Church. If the Word of God is to be for us not a dead letter but a vivifying Spirit, it must be brought to our understanding in the living light of the magisterium of the Church. But, according to the golden phrase of Pius XI, the principal instrument of the ordinary magisterium of the Church is its liturgy.¹⁶

He contrasts this with Protestantism:

But Protestantism, insofar as it is opposed to Catholicism, only admits this present actuality as being wholly interiorized, and to that extent individualized. . . . Thus Protestantism tends to produce a spirituality which springs entirely from the co-presence and mutual relationship between the Person of God revealed in the Christ of the Gospels and the individual person of the believer.¹⁷

2. *Evangelical Spirituality*

If the use of the term 'spirituality' in the current context is comparatively recent even for Catholicism, it is quite an innovation for evangelicalism.¹⁸ But, as James Houston observes, even if interest in the concept is new for evangelicals, 'spirituality' is itself

¹⁵ Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality* (Collegetown, Ma, Liturgical Press, 1961), 10–17, 105; Trond Enger, 'Pietism', Gordon Wakefield (ed.) *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (DCS)* (London, SCM, 1983), 300.

¹⁶ L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 25.

¹⁷ L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 10, 11.

¹⁸ For the dating of the term, see 'Spirituality', in Sinclair Ferguson (ed.) *New Dictionary of Theology (NDTh)*, (Leicester and Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity, 1988), 656.

a familiar reality and a matter of great concern. It is, to use Houston's words, 'a deeply based consciousness.'¹⁹ It is presented as a strongly compelling ideal and a model to be realized in practice. So, to be a 'spiritually minded' person, as distinct from the 'carnal' or 'worldly' person as taught in 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:3 is an honour, not because one is elevated to the level of an elite, but because one is living 'the normal Christian life' (to use a popular book title²⁰) which is the heritage and standard for all Christians by the presence of the risen Lord and by the power of Spirit within. As J. O. Sanders states,

This is for every Christian in everyday life. It is the normal Christian life depicted ideally in the New Testament. Not reserved for a select few saintly souls, it is not for extraordinary conditions and circumstances.²¹

In practice, of course, 'the higher Christian life' is emphasized as a somewhat rare achievement.²²

Therefore, despite the peculiarities of terminology, the distinctive marks of evangelical spirituality, such as daily personal and family devotions, prayer meetings, Sunday observance, witnessing, holiness and surrender to the will of God in daily vocation, personal morality and Christian service, are clearly recognizable. They are tirelessly advocated by word and example, and have been transmitted from generation to generation just as effectively as those of classical Catholic spirituality, forming a more or less coherent and influential body of tradition.²³

While there is a wide variety of practice amongst evangelicals, there is unanimity on the view that spirituality is a 'living growing relationship between ourselves and God'²⁴ and that 'the test of Christian Spirituality is conformity of heart and life to the confession and character of Jesus as Lord.'²⁵ Thus there is an emphasis on grace, not the 'reaching out' by mankind to God as Wakefield suggested. With grace there is also a 'givenness' and a 'working out'²⁶ which accounts for the variety and ambiguities which exist.

¹⁹ *EDTh*, 1046.

²⁰ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (London, Victory Press, 1957).

²¹ J. Oswald Sanders, *The Pursuit of the Holy* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1972), 93.

²² Compare the attitude within Catholicism: *NDCTh*, 549; L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 188ff.

²³ Michael Hennell, 'Evangelical Spirituality', *DCS*, 138–140.

²⁴ *The Lion Handbook of Christian Belief* (Tring, Herts, Lion Publishing, 1982), 377.

²⁵ *NDTh*, 657.

²⁶ *Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*, 377.

The heavy emphasis found in evangelicalism on personal relationships with God means that there is a strong bias against tendencies that would result in reification or the invalid objectification of spiritual practice, e.g., there is a strong preference for praying to God, not saying prayers; repenting before God, not doing penance; having fellowship with God through worship and Bible study, not listening to the service; preaching the Word, not giving a homily. Robert Banks sums this up by speaking of 'spirituality' as 'centring on the human spirit rather than the activity of God's Spirit within us and as emphasising self-oriented introspection at the expense of self-sacrificial conformity to God's will.'²⁷

Accordingly, for evangelicals, spirituality itself as a discipline to be studied, researched or practiced for its own sake is de-emphasised in favour of efforts to stimulate faith, devotion and love for God personally on the part of the believer.²⁸ This does not mean that matters such as prayer, worship and faith are not studied objectively, but the context and purpose of such study is distinctive. As Donald Bloesch notes,

Biblical faith does not deny the place for spiritual disciplines but stresses that those have no value apart from the secret inward work of the Holy Spirit, and they are designed to bring our actions into conformity . . . with the will of God, which is perceptible only to the eyes of faith.²⁹

This is why evangelical spirituality prefers dynamic concepts such as holiness, holy living, godliness, walking with God and discipleship, because as Houston notes, they emphasize

a formal commitment, a deepening relationship with Christ, and a life of personal obedience to the Word of God.

Yet he also acknowledges that

the decline of the sacred even among evangelical Christians and the deep penetration of secularism into every aspect of life are causing alarm and the need to reconsider devotion to Christ more seriously.³⁰

We can now propose a analysis of the principles of evangelical spirituality carried out in such a way as to reflect the distinctives of the evangelical theology of salvation.

According to its theology, Evangelicalism focuses on the

²⁷ R. Banks, 'Home Churches and Spirituality', 14–15.

²⁸ *EDTh*, 1046.

²⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* vol. 2 (New York, Harper & Row, 1979), 64.

³⁰ *EDTh*, 1046.

Christian life as a personal relationship between the believer and God, through the indwelling, regenerating power of the Holy Spirit by virtue of the merits of Christ's atoning death and resurrection, appropriated by faith. Thus, God's sanctifying power works within believers in a personal way to make them more godly. Therefore, believers enjoy an intimate personal fellowship with God, expressed in praise and prayer, and they receive guidance and spiritual power for daily life and witness. As a result they are to be totally surrendered to God's purposes and to live only for his glory.

Thus fellowship with God is direct and personal; it is not mediated indirectly by church, liturgy or sacrament. Such a fellowship is only possible because of the *Imago Dei* (the divine image), bestowed on mankind at creation, but lost (or marred) in the fall and now restored in Christ. As John Tiller notes, 'The essence of spirituality for all Christians, and certainly for evangelicals, is a matter of being 'conformed to the image of God's Son' (Rom. 8:29).'³¹ This highly distinctive feature of evangelicalism stems from its pietistic roots,³² and it places evangelical spirituality at the opposite end of the spectrum from the sacramental spirituality of Roman Catholicism which relies so heavily upon the church and the quasi-material idea of grace and its channels.³³ As L. Bouyer puts it when setting out the role of the sacraments in relation to the gospel and prayer, 'It is for the sacraments to apply to us this permanent presence and actuality of the Mystery.'³⁴

This helps to explain why evangelical spirituality has not developed a universal system of spiritual disciplines in the way Catholicism has. For evangelical spirituality, the system is more fluid because the focus is on the personal faith-relationship with God and on his glory, rather than the disciplines *per se*, or even believers and their spiritual development. Thus it is open for every practitioner and spiritual guide to develop the basic principles in a way that seems appropriate to their own needs and context.

It also explains why evangelical spirituality places so much

³¹ John Tiller, *Puritan, Pietist and Pentecostalist: Three Types of Evangelical Spirituality* (Bramcote, Grove Books, 1982), 3. This same idea is found elsewhere in the NT—see Colossians 3:10, Romans 5:1–12.

³² DCS, 300.

³³ As Thomas Boland remarks, 'Roman Catholic religion is essentially sacramental, linking action with spiritual formation and the Christian life entered in Baptism and fostered in the Eucharist and other sacraments.' T. Boland, *James Duhiq* (St Lucia, Univ. of Queensland Press, 1986), 212.

³⁴ Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 105.

emphasis upon its distinctive elements—conversion, holiness (or spiritual mindedness) and service. Humankind is oriented primarily towards God as a beings created in the divine image and therefore made for fellowship with him. But this fellowship is not the normal or birth state, due to the effects of the fall, or original sin.³⁵ Restoration of the divine image can only be achieved by a decisive divine/human act, referred to as conversion. Therefore, the indispensable starting point for Christian spirituality is conversion, whether it is an emotional, datable experience or not. This contrasts strongly with sacramental spirituality which takes all baptised people as already able to develop and grow in their spirituality.³⁶

Then, from conversion, onwards, the Christian life is one of 'knowing God,' walking by faith in harmony with his will, seeking his glory and serving his purpose. In common with other forms of spirituality, evangelicalism makes use of a variety of means to further these ends, whether it be prayer, pastoral guidance or witnessing through evangelism. But these means of grace are regarded in a fundamentally different manner in evangelical spirituality for they are strictly secondary to the ultimate end, rather than being of merit in themselves.

The Christian life itself is one of pilgrimage, with the believer walking humbly as an alien in this world, answering to the Lord from heaven, and looking towards the final hope which is the consummation of all in God's Eternal Kingdom. This spirituality is 'world denying' in the sense that it does not credit this life and this world with ultimate autonomy. However, it is also 'world-affirming' in that it confesses that this world is God's creation and therefore not to be abused or ignored, but to be used carefully and sensitively for his glory. It also affirms that this world is the medium and context of salvation and Christian service, and is to be ultimately redeemed.

III. The Practice of Evangelical Spirituality

These principles have been expressed by evangelicals in a wide variety of ways. However, this variety can be reduced to a simple pattern which reveals the essential structures of evangelical spirituality and serves as a basis for evaluating it.

³⁵ David Parker, 'Original Sin: A Study in Evangelical Theology', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, LXI:1, January 1989, 51–69.

³⁶ Cf. Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1982), 42, where he uses the term 'change of heart' to apply to baptised people.

1. Life

Perhaps the most basic of all spiritual disciplines for evangelicals has been the 'Quiet Time'—a private daily session of personal prayer and devotional reading of the Bible—which is the means of knowing and hearing God, and receiving his guidance and power. Because of its importance for spiritual wellbeing, the Quiet Time has been regarded as indispensable, and accordingly has been advocated with almost monastic discipline. For example, in his advice to new Christians, Billy Graham wrote

In order to grow properly certain rules must be observed for good spiritual health. First, you should read your Bible daily . . . If you fail to partake of daily spiritual nourishment, you will starve and lose your spiritual vitality . . . Prayer combined with Bible study makes for a complete and glorious life.³⁷

The Quiet Time is closely linked to the Family Altar (the equivalent for the family group), the mid-week prayer and Bible study meeting (for the church) and more broadly, the sermon or other types of Bible teaching, whether at regular weekly worship or at special occasions like a convention.

The Quiet Time is based upon a concept of prayer as petition or intercession and as a channel of spiritual nourishment in which meditation, thanksgiving and praise are the means of drawing on the power of God. Another way of putting this is to say that in daily prayer the Christian is surrendering the will to Christ and by faith allowing Christ's life to indwell and live through the believer, in accordance with Galatians 2:20, 'It is no longer I, but Christ.'

Prayer in the Quiet Time is typically private, silent and extempore. It is also often highly systematic using lists, guides and reminders extensively; books of devotional and inspirational readings are also employed.

The Quiet Time is also based on the Bible in its role as the Word of God which is able to build believers up in the faith (Acts 20:32), provide understanding of God and his ways, and serve as the main channel for discerning God's will and hearing his voice. This type of reading leads to and is supported by prayer, and is an evangelical equivalent of the *lectio divina* of classical spirituality.³⁸ A good example is the method of Bible reading promoted by the organization known as the Scripture Union (established 1867), which has branches in most parts of the world. It uses a

³⁷ Billy Graham, *Peace with God* (Kingswood, The World's Work, 1954), 152–4.

³⁸ L. Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 45; R. Croucher, 'Towards a Spirituality for Ministry', *GRID* (Melbourne, World Vision), Spring 1987.

roster of readings covering most of the Bible over a period of time (*lectio continua*) and a series of questions as a focus for meditation and action; printed notes at various levels of maturity are also available to assist in understanding and application.

This devotional use of Scripture is so universal and influential among evangelicals that it often causes problems for those nourished on it when they encounter critical biblical scholarship for the first time. The terms 'Bible teaching' and 'Bible study' are also apt to be most misleading since they do not imply conceptual or intellectual discourse, especially of a critical kind, but experiential knowledge, designed not for the stimulation of the mind or the building of a theological system, but for growth of spirituality. Thus competence in the scholarly study of Scripture is not a sufficient qualification for effective Bible teaching. Whatever its problems in these areas, this method of 'spiritual criticism'³⁹ has the potential to achieve what is now being sought by some critical scholars (and long advocated in some spiritual traditions), *viz.*, the integration of heart and mind.⁴⁰ However, traditional evangelical spirituality has difficulty in realizing this potential, at least on a popular level, because of unreconciled differences between excessive individualism and subjectivity on the one hand, and didactic legalism on the other.

2. Fellowship

The corporate aspects of some of these methods of nurture direct attention to the second group of spiritual practices, *viz.*, those associated with fellowship. Despite criticism that evangelical spirituality is excessively individualistic and introspective, the injunction of Hebrews 10:25 about regular meeting together and the example of the early church in meeting in temple and home (Acts 2:46) have usually been taken seriously by evangelicals. Hence great importance is placed upon contact with other believers, especially attendance at worship services, local church activities, corporate prayer and occasions of public witness. This extends also to inter-denominational fellowship where particular interest is shown in such activities as missions, evangelism, Bible teaching and revival. Indeed, this extra dimension is often considered more important than denominational fellowship because it reflects in a unique manner the characteristic evangelical theology of the church.

³⁹ Arthur T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1970 reprint).

⁴⁰ Canon Martin Thornton, 'Spirituality in the Modern World: II Meditation and Modern Biblical Study', *Expository Times* 89, 1977-8, 164-7.

In its ecclesiology, evangelicalism rejects the Catholic doctrine of the church with its liturgy, priesthood and sacraments as the divinely ordained institutional channel of grace. Instead, it teaches a derived efficacy for the church in its nature as the body of believers and hence the dwelling place of the risen Christ himself (Matthew 18:20). Thus believers meet with each other as the church to find spiritual strength and nurture from the presence of Christ in the Body, and they draw upon the grace of God through the ministries of those gifted persons whom God has set in the church. They meet also for mutual encouragement and corporate as members of the body of which Christ is the Head.

This is perhaps a more functional view of the Body of Christ than the mystical view of the Catholic and Orthodox, but it places just as great an importance on the church. However, it is the invisible and universal church, the body of all true believers wherever they may be found, which is the ultimate focus of attention, rather than the visible institutional Church in its denominational form. Accordingly, the evangelical finds a relatively greater significance in inter-denominational fellowship (or non-denominational) compared with the purely denominational, for the latter depends finally on the doctrine of the visible church. Ecumenical fellowship is even less important because its commitment to organizational unity is based upon the ultimate significance of the visible church.⁴¹

It can also be noted that this emphasis upon the importance of the church flows down to the family, where it accounts for the significance of family devotions and training of children in Christian teaching. The family is seen as the church in miniature, giving to the parents, especially the fathers, the responsibility of leaders and pastors. In fact, the strength of the local church itself may be regarded as dependent on the strength of the families that comprise it rather, than depending upon the hierarchy or the institution.

⁴¹ '[T]he urge to unity can only be based on belief in a visible Church. Thus the whole Ecumenical Movement is instigated by the conviction that the Church about which we read in the NT must be in some sense identified with the visible, empirical Church as we know it.' A. T. Hanson, 'Invisible Church, Visible Church', *DCTh* 174. Note that the word 'ecumenical' is used in this paper to refer especially to shared and cooperative activities which are based on or have in mind the idea of the ultimate organizational unification of the denominations on the grounds of the sinfulness of the existing divisions.

⁴² R. A. Torrey, *How to Succeed in the Christian Life* (London, Oliphants, 1955 reprint), 82.

3. *Christian Service*

Evangelical spirituality teaches that believers function normally only as some regular and definite form of Christian witness is made a major focus their lives. Thus, R. A. Torrey writes,

One of the most important conditions of growth and strength in the Christian life is work. No man can keep up his physical strength without exercise and no man can keep up his spiritual strength without spiritual exercise, i.e., without working for his Master. The working Christian is the happy Christian. The working Christian is the strong Christian.⁴²

The first principle involved is that of witness and confession of Christ (Romans 10:9) as a joyous expression or fruit (John 15:16) of saving faith (or even part of it—James 2:17), and as a response to grace. Just as important is the obligation laid upon Christians to be ‘ambassadors for Christ’ (2 Cor. 5) with the responsibility for bringing the message of the gospel to the world. Finally, there is the idea of believers as co-labourers (1 Cor. 3:9) or at least obedient, grateful servants of God, stewards entrusted with the treasures of his grace and sharing in the extension of the Kingdom of God. Thus the ideal is sacrificial service, emulating that of Christ, not for merit toward salvation, but out of love, gratitude and obedience on the basis of the faith-union between believers and the Lord.⁴³

Thus new converts are urged to begin witnessing immediately by telling someone else about their ‘decision for Christ.’ They are then advised to become actively involved in a church and to find other forms of Christian service. Most of all, able-bodied Christians are urged to consider seriously why they should not become full-time Christian workers (especially missionaries) who depend on God by faith for the provision of their financial and other needs.

This heavy emphasis on Christian work exacts considerable sacrifice in terms of personal interests, family life, careers and finances. Vast arrays of programmes, organisations and institutions have been set up at local church, denominational and inter-denominational levels to carry it out. They range in type from evangelism, revivalism and missions, through Christian education, youth women’s and men’s work to social concern, medical and welfare activities. Many of these organizations are small voluntary associations, depending upon the spare-time help of their supporters, but others have become highly sophisticated national or international operations, with large, professional staffs.

⁴³ See also Colossians 1:24.

In addition to the structured forms of Christian service, evangelicals are also expected to discharge their responsibilities for service and witness informally in the personal and family context, as well as in their social activities and occupations.

The sacrifice and dedication associated with this network of service is gladly offered, but the visible result is not always commensurate with the effort expended. There is often considerable overlap and inefficiency, while the motives may not always be entirely unmixed. Yet in its purest form, there is complete support for R. A. Torrey's observation,

Bearing fruit in bringing others to the Saviour is the purpose for which Jesus has chosen us and is one of the most important conditions of power in prayer. . . . Those who are full of activity in winning others to Christ are those who are full of joy in Christ Himself.⁴⁴

4. *Discipline/Holiness*

The final area is not focused on any one group of practices, but is concerned with the context, motivation and outcomes of Christian living generally. Working on the basis that the Christian life is supremely one of joyous and grateful dedication to God for his gift of salvation, evangelicals are taught to surrender themselves unreservedly to him and to remain 'unspotted by the world' (James 1:27). Hence, the Christian life involves an incessant spiritual warfare against the power of evil in the world, a continual struggle against temptation, and the practice of disciplines to counteract the weakness of the flesh.

There is some variety in the way this conflict is understood. Some see the war as winnable in this life and so speak of victorious Christian living as a result of 'mortification' (or renunciation) and the appropriation of the life of Christ within the believer,⁴⁵ or of 'entire sanctification'; others see the struggle continuing with great overt intensity until death, and therefore call for discipline, perseverance and training in godliness; yet against, others speak of a decisive release or deliverance from the powers of evil by the direct intervention of God.

But whatever the interpretation,⁴⁶ there is constant need for vigilance, guidance and warnings in regard to spiritual exercises and active faith in God's power, lest one's own relationship with

⁴⁴ R. A. Torrey, *How to Succeed in the Christian Life*, 82-3.

⁴⁵ E.g., Watchman Nee, *Normal Christian Life*, 9.

⁴⁶ Donald L. Alexander (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity, 1988).

God be endangered or the standing of the whole body of believers be threatened. There is also regular need for forgiveness and reconciliation, cleansing and renewal to restore spiritual vitality after the skirmishes in this conflict. Provision must also be made for sanctions against those who reject or ignore the call to holiness.

This view of the nature of Christian living explains the need for the daily Quiet Time, corporate prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other believers in worship and service. Similarly, there is also an important role for pastoral guidance and the help to be gained from reading devotional, biographical and doctrinal literature. Practices such as these are designed to strengthen zeal for God and resistance to sin and evil, while pastoral counselling and occasions of surrender and confession through prayer or publicly in response to the preaching of the Word are means of reconciliation and renewal.

However, the principles which underlie these disciplines can easily be distorted or lost, with the result that the disciplines are practices out of mere tradition or for their own sake. In any case, an observer without a sympathetic personal understanding of them is likely to see only a rigid, authoritarian rule. Furthermore, this kind of discipline does tend strongly to generate a 'world denying' spirituality, although in recent times some are attracted to the view, expressed by such a prominent contemporary exponent as Thomas Merton, that 'by disengaging from the world . . . [it is possible to] become more closely involved with it.'⁴⁷ But for many evangelicals, 'other worldliness' is the epitome of spirituality, and therefore they devote themselves whole-heartedly to this pursuit, in the confidence that the best they can do for the world is to bring it to a knowledge of God through their prayer and evangelistic witness.

IV. Sources of Evangelical Spirituality

Evangelical spirituality depends almost exclusively for its sources on Scripture; this is a product of its Puritan background where it was fervently held that 'The Bible only is the religion of the Protestants' (to use William Chillingworth's well known aphorism). Manuals and helps for devotional reading, preaching and now even the ubiquitous Scripture choruses all show their indebtedness to this source. It is the Psalms, devotional passages of the gospels and epistles and the narrative sections of both testaments which provide a wide range of example of spirituality, although

⁴⁷ LHCb, 380.

sometimes not without requiring a degree of ingenuity on the part of the expositor! The doctrinal passages of the epistles are also heavily used, because they provide a conceptual basis for the system of spirituality taught by evangelicals.

However, the main problem with using the Bible as virtually the exclusive source of spirituality is the difficulty of applying it directly and literally to the everyday life of Christians in the modern world. Since the Bible is written in terms of its own culture and conditions, and also generally deals with principles, the interpreter must supply a great deal of explanatory material as a bridge. Often this bridging, explanatory material becomes more prominent and authoritative than the biblical text itself! A further serious problem is the disjointed nature of the system of teaching which is the norm for average Christians. Thus on successive Sundays they may hear sermons on texts taken from widely varying parts of the Bible, use short songs that may be heavily based on the subjective experience of the writers and be chosen for musical or personal reasons; then, during the interval between Sundays, they may read devotional books or attend prayer meetings, specialized groups or conventions where the topics are equally discontinuous or unrelated.

It is evident that in these circumstances, other sources of spirituality are likely to be as influential as the Bible, including music, devotional and biographical books (mostly popular and contemporary, not theological and classical, except for a few famous works by writers such as Bunyan, Andrew Murray or O. Hallesby), sermons or Bible studies, testimonies and the personal influence of fellow Christians and church leaders.

Apart from some notable exceptions, training in spirituality is therefore mostly informal, sporadic and fragmented, with the attendant advantages and disadvantages of such a process. Only a few organized systems of teaching spirituality exist; many of these are for new Christians, and are in the form of courses to nurture them in the early stages of their Christian lives in the follow-up their conversions.

Personal example is far more influential, especially popular preachers and writers, and those Christians whom evangelicals have unofficially canonized as their saints—pioneer missionaries, fruitful revivalists and personal evangelists, popular musical performers and prominent lay people, and the occasional professional or business person who has demonstrated signs of exceptional spirituality in one form or another. Scholars rarely rate a mention unless they also qualify for one of the other categories!

V. Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed

If this is traditional evangelical spirituality, we may now enquire how it relates to the many other sources of spirituality which are now live options. Perhaps the most obvious of these are traditional Catholic sacramental and monastic disciplines, the 20th century Liturgical Movement, Quaker mystical tradition and in some cases (in form if not in content) Eastern religions or their westernized derivatives. Another highly distinctive and influential form of spirituality is found in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement.⁴⁸ Then, by contrast, there is the radical spirituality which arises from the activism of Liberation Theology, and from political and secular theologies generally. Others that may be grouped with these (although the relationship is often only indirect) are the spiritualities associated with 'Theology of Every Day Life'⁴⁹, Prosperity Doctrine and those which draw heavily on the human and social sciences.

These movements account for a score or more of separately identifiable disciplines which may be distinguished from mainstream evangelicalism, ranging from active political involvement and solidarity with the poor, through encounter groups, fasting and solitude to spiritual direction and deliverance ministry.

In the light of these possibilities, does evangelical spirituality need reform or modification? Can it take up insights from other movements without undergoing fundamental change to itself? Are those other movements completely incompatible with evangelical spirituality, or does it perhaps already contain within itself the essence of some of these movements, or even alternate and possibly superior ways of expressing them? For the purpose of this initial review, the multiplicity of spiritual disciplines now available may be reduced to manageable proportions by considering them in terms of the fourfold analysis already used earlier.

1. Life

A contemporary evangelical advocate of 'retreats', a neo-eremical tradition, has traced the origin of his movement to a dis-

⁴⁸ R. T. Spittler, 'Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic', Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, Regency Zondervan, 1988), 804-9.

⁴⁹ See Robert Banks, *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Sutherland, Albatross, 1987) and some of the publications of the Zadok Centre, Canberra, Australia.

satisfaction with the traditional evangelical 'Quiet Time'. A major factor in his thinking was the conclusion that the well advanced intellectual and moral appreciation of Evangelical Christianity which he and other founders were taught in their formative years was not matched at the spiritual level by the mainstay of evangelical life—the Quiet Time; a second factor was the perceived lack of preparation in their pastoral training for 'ministry to secular Australia'.⁵⁰ Others have questioned the highly experiential and interiorized nature of evangelical spirituality. These criticisms suggest that there is likely to be some attraction in the more objective, communal and historic nature of structured prayer, meditation, liturgical worship and spiritual direction, which are distinctive elements of the spirituality fostered by the 'retreat' movement.

The retreat movement has been described as 'the new spirituality',⁵¹ but it should be noted that evangelicalism is already well accustomed to practices which are somewhat similar to those emphasized in retreats, *viz.*, the setting aside of concentrated periods of time for reflection on spiritual matters under the direction of strong leadership in a location away from the usual routine of a busy life, frequently in an area of natural beauty (which fosters appreciation of God's creation).⁵² A famous example of this is the 'Keswick deeper life' convention movement,⁵³ while the familiar youth or church family camp is another familiar to most churches. Movements such as these enshrine some of the important values of the 'new spirituality' but in typical evangelical style, they place attention on biblical exposition and fellowship rather than on solitude, contemplation, classical spiritual direction and the deliberate use of the insights of the human sciences. There is perhaps some attraction in the fresh approach employed by the 'retreat' movement, but the convention movement provides a established groundwork upon which improvements could be built.

Thus the 'new spirituality' should not be considered incompati-

⁵⁰ B. Wilson, 'Eremos: Desert of Life', 27.

⁵¹ 'The New Spirituality', *On Being*, March 1983, 4.

⁵² Note the descriptions of 'retreats' in Bruce Wilson, 'Eremos: Desert of Life' and 'Eremos Institute: Exploring the Desert', *On Being*, March 1983, 6.

⁵³ J. Pollock, *The Keswick Story* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964); W. B. Sloan, *These Sixty Years* (London, Pickering and Inglis, 1936); S. Barabbas, *So Great Salvation* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1952); C. F. Harford (ed.), *The Keswick Convention* (London, Marshall Bros., 1907); G. Bargen, *Mountain Miracles* (Clayfield, Queensland, WEC, 1966); David Parker, 'Fundamentalism and Conservative Protestantism in Australia 1920-1980' (Ph.D., University of Queensland, 1982, University Microfilms Int.), 465-504.

ble with evangelical spirituality if it is capable of enhancing the personal faith-relationship between the believer and God. Furthermore, the insights of the human sciences may well be called into service to understand better the development of the person as a whole,⁵⁴ even if the whole process might seem at first somewhat uninspiring or intimidating to those trained in traditional ways. Thus, Bruce Wilson concludes,

Nourishing of the inner self is really about making us more conscious of who we are as God's people in all the depths of our personalities, so that we are better placed to act for and with Him in the world. . . . The mainstream of Catholic spirituality, for example, has often seen the true end of spirituality as contemplation. I think the true end of spirituality is compassion, love. We need a spirituality to give us the bearings to know *what* we're doing in God's world, yet one that doesn't lead us away from our responsibility.⁵⁵

However, if these practices become an end in themselves by focusing on the worshipper rather than the relationship, or if they deny the grace of God by subtly appealing to human achievement or introducing a stand of legalism, then they must be considered a danger in the present even as they have been in the past.

Similarly, specific methods of meditation, prayer and Bible reading emanating from Catholic and Quaker sources are now being advocated by some.⁵⁶ These can be welcomed if they meet the same criteria. Thus Peter Toon encourages the use of meditation, even including some of the physical techniques from Eastern religions, but warns against confusing the two at the more basic level of content and aim:

In the meditation of the East, individuals are in search of their true self; in the meditation of the West, individuals are in search of their true Maker, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in spite of similarities in methods and psychosomatic benefits, the respective aims are very different.⁵⁷

However, despite the attraction of some of these practices, they may introduce nothing essentially new, in that evangelical spirituality is already well known for its emphasis on devotional

⁵⁴ Note the Eremos slogan, 'You can't grow as a Christian unless you grow also as a person.' Bruce Wilson, 'Eremos: Desert of Life', 32.

⁵⁵ Bruce Wilson, 'The New Spirituality', 5.

⁵⁶ R. E. Webber, *Common Roots*, 219–239; R. Croucher, *Recent Trends Among Evangelicals*, 56–76; R. Croucher, 'Towards a Spirituality for Ministry', *GRID* (Melbourne, World Vision Spring 1987); Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1980).

⁵⁷ Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987), 10, 11, 66.

reading of Scripture, the importance of spiritual growth and the sermon as a meditation on God.⁵⁸

What may be needed is refinement of these practices and a more profound understanding of the processes to enable them to serve current needs more adequately. It may also be argued that they need to be supplemented with other areas of spirituality and integrated more perfectly with them so that the person's entire life becomes more godly and Christlike through prayer and Bible reading.

2. Fellowship

A similar assessment may be made about practices relating to fellowship. Certain modern influences constitute a fresh emphasis on this area of spirituality. These include the house church and home group movements, therapy groups, and the charismatic movement with its use of large groups for purposes of celebration and praise. Community-style living may also be included here, both the traditional monastic kind and the more open 'basic communities' focusing on some social or evangelistic mission.⁵⁹

In the past, Evangelicals have been familiar with this stream in many different forms, not the least of which are the convention and conference movements and residential Bible and missionary training colleges where great emphasis has been placed on the value of community life. The value placed on church family camps is another illustration of the same trend, while missionary societies have typically developed well-defined 'rules' for their staffs. In recent times, many evangelicals have become involved in the 'basic communities' as well. Thus, these new developments may be welcomed insofar as they are consistent with the idea of the visible and invisible church which is characteristic of Evangelicalism as outlined earlier. Indeed, the creativity and dynamism which typify these new movements may be seen as something institutional evangelicalism could well emulate.

However, where the purely social or 'horizontal' aspects of such developments are emphasized at the expense of the transcendent, then caution is necessary. This is particularly the case where manipulative psychological processes are present. Similarly, caution is in order where the movement is largely the product of reactionary or sectarian forces.

⁵⁸ For example, Canon Thornton observes that '... preaching is pastoral meditation between scholarship and the prayer of the faithful: encounter with the living Word' ('Spirituality in the Modern World. II Meditation and Modern Biblical Studies', 165. Croucher, 'Towards a Spirituality for Ministry'.

The focus on the corporate, sacramental nature of the church in the Catholic and Liturgical sources is another area of concern, due to incompatibility with the evangelical understanding of fellowship and grace. For example, to suggest that worship may be enhanced by symbolism, art and movement because the worshippers are psychosomatic persons and can therefore express themselves by visual and dramatic imagery may be a useful way to liberate a church service from deadening effects of tradition. But to do so on the theological grounds that Christianity is 'essentially sacramental in character'⁶⁰ is to challenge a basic premise of Evangelicalism that human beings may enjoy direct communion with God in Christ by the Spirit.⁶¹

3. Service and Witness

Although evangelical spirituality has been characterised as being excessively activist, it has now been well and truly eclipsed in this respect by the spirituality of Liberation Theology. As Webster summarises it,

... theologians are not meant to be theoreticians but practitioners engaged in the struggle to bring about society's transformation.⁶²

Or in the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, (who speaks of the 'significant evolution of Christian spirituality').

... communion with the Lord inescapably means a Christian life centred around a concrete and creative commitment of service to others.

Thus, the

spirituality of liberation is a spirituality which dares to sink roots into the soil of oppression—liberation.⁶³

As the tone of these words suggests, the activism of evangelicalism is vastly different from that of the Liberationists. For the former, it is a matter of vigorous sacrificial effort to share the gospel (in evangelism, missionary labours and ministry of all kinds) and to

⁵⁹ Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold, *The Study of Spirituality*, 573ff.

⁶⁰ 'Sacrament', *DCTh*, 300; James F. White, *Christian Worship in Transition* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1976), 40–2; Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1984); Webber, *Common Roots*, 254.

⁶¹ David Parker, 'Evangelical Worship—Sacramental, Charismatic or Biblical', *Colloquium*, 19:2, May 1987, 57–64.

⁶² D. D. Webster, 'Liberation Theology', *EDTh*, 636.

⁶³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London, SCM, 1974) 7, 11, 204; see also 203–8 and page xxxii of the 1988 edition.

meet human need in the name of Christ (charitable work, educational, medical and social concern) in glad response to God's grace and out of genuine concern for the world. For the liberationist, it is a question of 'critical reflection on historical [or, Christian] praxis in the light of the Word'⁶⁴. This kind of theology is one

which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and fraternal society—to the gift of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁵

There are serious flaws with this stance if it is seen as a theoretical basis for a theology of revelation and salvation. If emphasis be placed on the Liberationist's theological methodology, the incompatibility with Evangelicalism is also quickly revealed.⁶⁶ However, if it is mainly a matter of Christian discipleship and social ethics, then it is much closer to traditional evangelicalism—the major differences being the tools of analysis, the pre-supposed economic/political theory, the context in which it operates and the extent to which its proponents are prepared to become involved in direct socio-political action. Apart from the period of the 'great reversal'⁶⁷, evangelicals have typically exhibited a developed social conscience, and it is doubtless for this reason that some aspects of Liberation Theology are looked at sympathetically, despite its Catholic and Socialist/Marxist connections.

With good reason, then, evangelicals have responded to calls for 'a simple life style'⁶⁸ and have been prepared to show solidarity with the poor. Consequently, they have been highly suspicious of 'prosperity doctrine' with its facile and tempting belief that

material prosperity glorifies [God] and shows His blessing to our lives, whereas poverty is a curse. . . . if we're not prospering

⁶⁴ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15, 13.

⁶⁵ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

⁶⁶ J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology: an Evangelical View from the Third World* (Basingstoke, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979); Emilio A. Nunez, *Liberation Theology* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1985).

⁶⁷ David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (London, S.U., 1973).

⁶⁸ Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978).

financially, then Satan is robbing us of our inheritance in Christ . . . Invest in God, and be prosperous for His glory!⁶⁹

However, it must be conceded that at its worst, evangelical activism borders on salvation by merit; it may be a form of escapism, and perhaps arises out of feelings of insecurity rather than a true sense of gratitude and love. This may well reveal a weakness in evangelical spirituality, at least in practice, which is being counteracted to some extent at the present time by an emphasis 'on being' rather than 'on doing'.⁷⁰

The ideal for Evangelicalism is to retain its emphasis on engagement in this world as a genuine arena of redemptive history, but yet to see it all *sub specie aeternitatis*, rather than setting the other-worldly in absolute contrast to the this-worldly.

4. Discipline

Evangelical spirituality is no stranger to discipline and rules—as, in earlier times, Bible college students, missionary candidates and restless children enduring a Puritan 'Sabbath' would testify! But 'Victorian' attitudes and standards have long since given way in contemporary society to more liberal views, and evangelicals too have been strongly influenced by these changes. Yet now when there is evidently some disillusionment with the emptiness of the 'permissive society', it is not the old Puritanism or Pietism that is being re-introduced, but the trend is often towards a kind of neo-monasticism.

While some of the popular contemporary advocates of the traditional monastic disciplines (such as Henri Nouwen) may exhibit evangelical characteristics such as a keen sense of grace and conversion and an explicit biblical authority, careful note must be taken of the back-ground, context and significance of these traditions. If the disciplines of introspection, silence, fasting, spiritual direction, confession and the like are used as techniques to 'overcome the flesh', and to enable the believer to be more sensitive to God, then help may be gained from them.⁷¹ But if they are practiced on the basis of sacramental theology that gives them intrinsic worth as channels of grace, or on the grounds that there

⁶⁹ D. Lehmann, quoted in Owen Salter, 'Making cents of God', *On Being*, March, 1984, 4.

⁷⁰ This is the supposed point of a monthly magazine published in Melbourne, Australia with the title, *On Being*, although it is not always easy to see such an emphasis consistently displayed in its content.

⁷¹ But the warning of Colossians 2:23 about the ineffectiveness of certain forms of spirituality is still valid.

are higher levels of spiritual life, vocation and mystical experience for some Christians than for others, then Evangelicals must be cautious, even as the Puritans were in their day. Another serious problem arises when it is believed that the essence of Christianity is to 'follow Christ' by emulating his way of life, as if it were sufficient or even possible to do this, apart from grace. Equally serious is asceticism practiced from gnostic or dualistic motives which deny the Christian doctrine of creation and redemption.

Yet evangelical Christianity also has a problem in this area, a persistent other-worldliness which refuses to take this life seriously, and confusing the 'flesh' (*sarx*) with the 'body' (*soma*), as if anything material were intrinsically evil and the body could not become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Such a view derives from Manichaeism rather than the New Testament, and it often creates a more thorough-going secular monasticism than that which exists among the religious monks themselves! In a rapidly changing cultural context, much more needs to be done to work out the religious and social implications of Christian commitment. But many evangelicals have shown that they do appreciate the basic issues, at least in a practical way, through their life-long devotion to Christian discipleship and the sacrifice of themselves and their possessions for God's purposes.

One of the more obvious and influential aids which have been used for developing a sensitivity to God is spiritual direction. According to Rowland Croucher, the use of a spiritual director is one of the most urgent needs sensed by many Christians today, being 'an idea whose time has come (again).'⁷²

The spiritual director's role is to help Christians to know God's voice and activity in their lives by means of intimate knowledge of their condition. While it is recognized by all that the Holy Spirit must be the ultimate guide even where a spiritual director is used, to set up a system where another human being (however skillful and saintly) is given the responsibility of mediating that guidance is to create the possibility of enormously powerful spiritual control, which must raise difficulties for those committed to the idea of the priesthood of all believers. Thus, it is appropriate to be cautious about the selection and use of a spiritual director, as Paul Arnott has written,

If we seek out a spiritual director we must be certain that he or she is someone who will lead us to Christ. We have a responsibility to check them out before placing ourselves under their spiritual direction.⁷³

⁷² Croucher, *Recent Trends Among Evangelicals*, 63.

⁷³ Paul Arnott, 'Where will they lead us?', *On Being*, October 1988, 23.

But Evangelicals already have a long tradition of spiritual guides, in their pastors, preachers, authors, and the corporate voice of the circle of fellow Christians within the fellowship of the church or a prayer group. A close friend or confidant has also often served this purpose as well. But Evangelicals have usually tended to focus on the use of Scripture, prayer and the corporate life of Christians (and recently professional counselling techniques) rather than the more personalized and individual methods of classical direction, yet they have not been any less effective thereby. In fact, because their methods have been less subjective, they may have produced a more virile and stable result.

However, since the idea of Christians showing pastoral interest in each other as fellow-members of the Body of Christ is well established in Scripture and the history of the church, any help that can be obtained in the discharging of this responsibility should be welcomed. In particular, evangelicals would benefit from ability to convey not only the knowledge of being right with God, but also a deep-seated awareness of it.⁷⁴ It is in this area that the tradition of spiritual direction may be most beneficial.

VI. Conclusion

A glance at the literature of evangelical spirituality will show that in comparison with others it tends to produce expositors rather than guides. This is both its strength and its weakness.

It is a strength because there is a focus on the basic principles of spirituality which are taught on the authority of Scripture—and that is a good evangelical trait. Furthermore, these basic principles are primarily concerned with the inner realities of the spiritual life, such as faith, love, regeneration and surrender. Evangelicals place their confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about growth in grace through the application of these doctrines (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 14:3–4), rather than in the teaching of moralism or external religious practice.

However, it is a weakness because in the absence of a widely recognized and unified system of spiritual practice, it is left to individual expositors and believers to relate the biblical principles to the practicalities of daily life in a modern world. This produces a wide and often contradictory variety of interpretations, which may be helpful in meeting the complex issues of life, but is confusing to those trying to understand biblical teaching and to

⁷⁴ Webber, *Common Roots*, 238, 354f.

practice evangelical spirituality. This situation also leads to dogmatism and legalism as advocates of conflicting interpretations try to commend their own particular views, instead of allowing the spiritual or biblical authenticity of each one to speak for itself.

Thus, severe problems may be created, while at the same time, the biblical principles themselves are obscured, and the basic theological framework in which they subsist is imperfectly understood. This results in superficiality and instability, which makes it even more difficult for evangelical spirituality to cope with the pressures it faces today. It is with some justification, then, that Klaus Bockmuhl can write,

Evangelicals are losing out in the logistics of spiritual warfare . . . I am convinced that the deepest problem of evangelicals today . . . is a decline of spirituality . . . We need to direct our attention to the rebuilding of a biblical spirituality.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Klaus Bockmuhl, 'Toward a spirituality of the Kingdom', *Christianity Today*, 6/12/81, 42.