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fact as well as Gustaf Stählin, and Emmanuel Levinas for the present time. It is interesting that Stählin as well as Spener have attached importance to the consequences of **P. 151** theological education. Thus Gustav Stählin wrote: 'All ... training and education has to be tied up within the work on the soul of the student. For, even if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul, it wouldn't be of any use. Therefore, the heart of a theological school is the Chapel, the place where the students are led to faith, worship and devotion by daily service'.

For me it is important again to keep in view the relation to the exegete. For only the one who listens obediently is able to exegete spiritually. Without his personal obedience his exegesis is going to be an empty shell, it loses its strength to lead to imitation of obedience. If Niklas Lahmann gives his opinion on theology of the present time: 'Theology doesn't—harshly said—offer religion', if he a little later asks: 'Isn't it important for the Christian religion to adhere to the reality of God's guidance which is taught and witnessed through Jesus?' then necessity comes up with these formulations and questions that we ourselves as exegetes are touched by the encounter and even by fellowship with God, to help our hearers to draw closer to Him. This getting close to God in fellowship can't be completed by knowledge alone. But it leads—to use this ambiguous word again—to obedience. According to Jesus' word and life, obedience alone is able to receive a genuine exegetical understanding ([John 7:17](#)). Thus, one could even clearly formulate: Obedience is the true method of spiritual exegesis.

Again and again we go back to the communicative basic structure of biblical-historical exegesis. The wheel comes full circle in again attaching importance to the encounter which the Bible serves. Because of the general character of 'meeting' one can guess what led Emmanuel Levinas to the confession: 'For me the things which are said don't count as much as the speaking. Speaking is not so much important because of its information content but because of the fact that it is addressed to a partner'.

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Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed

David Parker

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(Abridged)*

1. 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

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

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 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-emphasizing practices which [p. 153](#) 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

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

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

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

traditions are not fully appreciated or positively related to each other (as Lovelace indicates has been the case), it is not surprising that, when 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 p. 154 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

EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY IDENTIFIED

1. Spirituality

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 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 p. 155

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

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, (Australia) Albatross, 1986), 58.

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

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

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, 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 [p. 156](#) 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

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.

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

magisterium of the Church. But, according to the golden phrase of Plus 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 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 **p. 157** 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 the 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

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.

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.

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.

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 p. 158 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-orientated 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-emphasized 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 an analysis of the principles of evangelical spirituality carried out in such a way as to reflect the distinctives of the evangelical theology of salvation.

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

²⁵ *NDTh*, 657.

²⁶ *Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*, 377.

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.

According to its theology, Evangelicalism focuses on the 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. [p. 159](#) 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 disciples *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 emphasis upon its distinctive elements—conversion, holiness (or spiritual mindedness) and Service. Humankind is oriented primarily towards God as a being created in the divine image and therefore made for fellowship with him. But this fellowship is not the normal or birth state, [p. 160](#) 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 baptized people as already able to develop and grow in their spirituality.³⁶

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, University of Queensland Press, 1986), 212.

³⁴ Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 105

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 baptized people.

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.

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 [p. 161](#) 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 the 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.

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

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 roster of readings covering most of the Bible over a period of time (*lectio continua*) and a series of [p. 162](#) 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. [p. 163](#)

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

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

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.

ministries of those gifted persons whom God has set in the church. They meet also for mutual encouragement and corporate fellowship 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 interdenominational 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. p. 164

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 of 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 colabourers ([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

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.

⁴³ See also [Colossians 1:24](#).

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 interdenominational 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 p. 165 spare-time help of their supporters, but others have become highly sophisticated national or international operations, with large, professional staffs.

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 again others speak of a decisive release or deliverance from the powers of evil by the direct intervention of God. p. 166

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 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

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

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

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

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 wholeheartedly 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.

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Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church: Prayer in the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian

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INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Christian tradition has never known any conflict, nor even made a sharp distinction, between theology and mysticism.¹ Indeed, the 'mystical' and 'experiential'

⁴⁷ LHCb, 380.

¹ The term 'mystical' in Byzantine theology 'does not imply emotional individualism, but quite the opposite: a continuous communion with the Spirit who dwells in the whole Church. It implies as well the constant recognition of the inadequacies of the human intellect and of human language to express the fullness of truth, and the constant balancing of positive theological affirmations about God with the corrective of