

Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements

The Failure of Contemporary Theological Education

By Thomas C. Oden

Introduction -

These excerpts are taken from Oden's book *Requiem*.¹ Oden describes himself as a Sixties Revolutionary, "a former convinced proponent of the radical demythologizing biblical criticism of Rudolf Bultmann." He is unabashedly Liberal with a big "L". That's what makes his scathing critique of the Christian Academy so potent. Liberalism in our seminaries has apparently become too liberal even for him. And so he has elected to describe "the impassioned values of an emerging group of young orthodox cultural renovators who, having understood the values and methods of modern inquiry, and having been disillusioned by their consequences, are now turning in earnest to classical Christianity. They are young in spirit because they are not intimidated by modernity."

He likes to call them "young fogeys" to distinguish them from the *old fogeys* who remain bogged down in the quagmire of liberal Protestant pietism. The young fogeys are emergent classic apologists who have healthily survived the death of modernity and joyfully flourish in this after-modern environment. The young fogeys are those who are discovering in the old Christian writers of the first five centuries the deeper basis for the critique of modern pretense to moral superiority." (12-13)

Oden describes the symptoms of the disease which plagues our seminaries, and he applauds the current robust "renovators" who desire to return us to classical Christianity, if not orthodox Christianity (Oden's orthodoxy is my heterodoxy). Oden loves open debate on the seminary campus. And so he resents the close-mindedness of the Academy which excludes reformed theologians and moderates from that debate. They are refused a seat at the same table with radical feminists, liberationists, secularists, and eastern mystics. The intellectual aristocrats in our seminaries seek to dominate the conversation with "their trivial games, their fashions, their entertaining breakthroughs... variations on themes much more interestingly engaged by the Great Tradition." (10) They believe their inventions are new only because they are largely ignorant of the Christian scholarship that preceded them. They ignore the doctrinal foundations of the very Church they have been charged both to represent and to instruct in those doctrines.

In the foreword, Richard John Neuhaus writes, "It is too simple to say that the problem is unbelief. Chesterton observed that the trouble with someone who does not believe in God is not that he will end up believing in nothing; it is, rather, that he will end up believing in anything. We live in an age of credulity, as is dramatically evidenced by the novelties – ever ancient – that provide such excitement in our seminaries and divinity schools. Oden invites us to an exploration toward faith in an age of credulity. When setting out on a great adventure, you take care to check out your travel companions. Oden is pleased to report that, after numerous disappointments, he has found a splendid company of friends with whom to travel. They have been traveling for centuries, and he has been traveling with them for some time now. He has found them to be faithful, wise, and filled with wonderful stories about the One who promised to travel with them "until the end of the age." (10-11)

I hope you enjoy Oden's musings and observations. In 2002, Oden joined with J.I. Packer to write the book, *One Faith*. It draws from historic evangelical documents to articulate an evangelical consensus of faith to which we all subscribe, whether liberal Arminian or conservative Reformed. Interesting...

W.H. Gross, Colorado Springs CO, February 2007

¹ Oden, Thomas C., *Requiem – A Lament in Three Movements* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995) pp.49-50 Thomas C. Oden is the Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology, The Theological School, Drew University, Madison, NJ.

Movement 1 – Out of the Depths

The Structural Irreformability of Self-cloning Faculties

By *liberated* I mean those persons who are the sexual experimenters, the compulsive planners of other's lives, the canonical text disfigurers, and ultrafeminists... The liberated characteristically understand themselves to be freed from oppressive, traditional constraints of all sorts and shapes. *Liberated* is not a term applied to them from outside their self-understanding, but a term they frequently apply to themselves. By liberated, they usually imply doctrinally imaginative, liturgically experimental, disciplinarily nonjudgmental, politically correct, multi-culturally tolerant, morally broad-minded, ethically situationist, and above all, sexually lenient, permissive, [and] uninhibited. They have been liberated from our classic Christian past, from the patriarchalism of Christian scriptures, from benighted Jewish and Christian traditions, and from their oppressive social systems. As a former full-time liberator, I know from experience how mesmerizing this enchantment can be.

Just as the analysis of class oppression is a standard feature of Marxist sociological and historical analysis, so also it is a key feature of the politically, sexually, and liturgically liberated. The sexually liberated no longer view heterosexual covenant fidelity to be assumed as a norm for Christian marriage. The welcoming of bisexuals, transsexuals, and homosexuals, is viewed as the surest litmus test of sincerity and ecumenicity. The liberated live out the fantasy of being emancipated from moral constraints...

The intellectual ethos I am describing is not liberal in the usual or classic sense of the word, but intolerant and uncharitable when it comes to traditionalists of any sort, all of whom are capriciously labeled "fundamentalist." The liberated understand the gospel in a particular way and do not pretend to be infinitely tolerant of interpretations of Christianity they find oppressive. To be inclusive, for them, does not mean to include the voices of oppression on an equal basis with the voices of the oppressed. Hence, they do not feel that they are being exclusive when they rule out voices that they have already decided are hierarchical or patriarchal. The game focuses on who gets to name the oppressor. Should it be only victims (or only those who have chosen to view themselves as victims)? Or should traditionalists be allowed any voice in the naming of oppression.

I am not pleading for a lockout of these voices. I am protesting a lockout of other voices that do not fit the politically correct grid. I plead only that the politically incorrect may also be admitted into the game. The inquisition going on today is not by traditionalists but by inquisitors who describe themselves as liberated. (34-36)

The Status and Role of Tenure in the Tradition-Deprived Seminary

The tenure principle, which was designed to protect academic freedom, has become so exploited as now to protect academic license, absenteeism, incompetence, and at times moral turpitude. Once tenure is offered, it is virtually impossible to withdraw.

Marriage has annulment, separation, and divorce, but there is no nullification and no easy procedure for dissociation from tenure once extended. It is a common joke in academia that tenure is revocable only if one commits a crime like grand larceny from a church strongbox during Christmas season, and then only when one is wearing an academic gown over a clerical collar... There is no job security in our society so fixed in stone as academic tenure.

It is no longer sufficient for seminaries to get off the hook from entering into dialogue with church constituencies by claiming that professors have the freedom to teach anything they please under the flag of ordinal preparation. If the liberated have the freedom to teach apostasy, the believing church has the freedom to withhold its consent. If they teach countercanonical doctrines and conjectures inimical to the health of the church, the church has no indelible moral obligation to give them support or bless their follies.

When academic freedom becomes a dodge by which the seminary sidesteps every hint of potential moral criticism, then academic freedom itself has been prostituted. When the Reformed or Wesleyan traditions, for example, can no longer implement in their seminaries their own historical doctrinal standards (such as the Westminster Confession or Twenty-Five Articles), terms repeatedly defined in their books of church order and discipline, then these judicatories do not have a responsibility to pamper the supposed freedom of a faculty to disavow their solemnly pledged doctrinal tradition, or flaunt their own academic missional statements... (37-38)

Once a tradition-retrogressive faculty has been amply stocked with a simple majority of tenured radicals, its members have the unique privilege of cloning themselves with look-alike future colleagues. The ensconced bureaucracies and hypertenured faculties have learned well the fine art of replicating themselves politically, repeating ever anew their own ideological biases, making sure that no one comes in for long who will challenge the prevailing ideological tilt. The tenured iconoclast can also incidentally relax intellectually, and happily pursue her or his own personal ambitions regardless of the objective needs of students, laity, and the church or its ministry. (39)

Academic Distrust of the Parish

Brilliant academics with no experience whatever in the actual practice of the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and pastoral care are often those who compete best in the race to become teachers of ministers in the trendy, fad-impaired seminary. Should an experienced, godly pastor who had a distinguished Cambridge doctorate apply for a position in that faculty, that person's extensive parish experience might well be viewed as a negative factor by PC purists who, having no experience in ministry, prefer colleagues who have not been contaminated by any exposure to local church practice or any strong tradition of piety. (40)

Signs of Hope

There abide within this liberated space a flourishing group of *postliberated* Christians... They have had it with the fantasies of liberation. They have exercised some of its license, received its cheap grace, and feasted briefly at its narcissistic table, only to remain hungry. Having gone

through the motions of liberation, they once again find themselves grounded in the apostolic truth that sets us free.

The first sign of hope: suffering seminarians who do not wish to be liberated are becoming more aware of how they are being ripped off. Ordinarily they do not become upset until their last year, as they belatedly realize that they are leaving the skepticism factory with heavy debts. Some find that they are not deemed practically ready by their judicatories to preach or to administer sacraments they do not understand or to take on the demanding tasks of pastoral care. They really get steamed when their ordinations are delayed. Then when finally placed in a parish, they recognize how little of their theological education they can use, and how much of it they must hide... Can what I learned be preached? Do I have the inward spiritual resources to offer meaningful bereavement counsel? Can I be trusted by the congregation? Can I answer queries about the afterlife, innocent suffering, and a scrupulous conscience that avoids communion? ...The healthy revolution brewing among seminarians is an increased awareness of the dysfunctionality of their preparation, a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit renewing their lives, and the determination to ground their pastoral work in sound textual investigations of the apostolic tradition and its early layers of interpretation. This is a vital sign of hope. (41-43)

The second sign of hope: funding sources for seminary education are belatedly learning to insist on accountability to grassroots constituencies. Where hypertenured faculties have been formed so as to systematically block out ancient ecumenical teaching, they cannot expect moderate or evangelical or traditionalist lay support. Funds may need to be withdrawn if the pattern persists. ... Even as support systems fade, the trendy want to continue business as usual. They want to be subsidized in the style to which they have become accustomed by a nodding, compliant constituency. They want ample funds to shape education for ministry in any way they see fit, whether within or without the criteria of classical Christianity. The innovation-addicted knowledge elite in a tight job market lust after fiscally healthy institutions to raid, sack, storm, and take over. This is why well-funded theological institutions have been special targets of shrewd Machiavellians who could not make in the Ivy League. (43)

Beyond Theology as Anything

A third sign of hope is the rediscovery of the *distinctiveness of theological method* as distinguished from other methods of inquiry (historical, philosophical, literary, psychological, etc.). Theology is a unique academic enterprise that has its own distinctive subject matter: God; its own methodological premise: revelation; its own way of inquiring into its subject matter: attention to the revealed word through Scripture and its consensual tradition of exegesis; its own criteria of scholarly authenticity: accountability to canonical text and tradition; its own way of knowing: listening to sacred Scripture with the historic church; its own way of cultural analysis: with worldly powers bracketed and divine providence appreciated; and its own logic: internal consistency premised upon revealed truth. (43-44)

The Complete and Startling Absence of Heresy

It seems worth noting that the liberated seminary at its zenith has finally achieved a condition that has never before prevailed in Christian history: heresy simply does not exist. Christian

doctrine and catechesis, after long centuries of struggle against heresy, have finally found a way of overcoming heterodoxy altogether, by banishing it as a concept legitimately teachable within the hallowed walls of the inclusive multicultural, doctrinally experimental institution. This is an unexcelled accomplishment in all the annals of Christian history. It seems to give final expression to the quest for the flawless community... It is like trying to have a baseball game with no rules, no umpire, and no connection with historic baseball. Yet we insist on calling it baseball, because a game by that name is what most people still want to see played...

I am looking, like Diogenes with his lamp, for a seminary where some heresy exists. I would love to find a seminary where a discussion is taking place about whether a line can be drawn between faith and unfaith. The very thought of asking about heresy has itself become the new archheresy. The [archheretic] is the one who hints that some distinction might be needed between truth and falsehood, right and wrong... Just at this point we glimpse a faint sign of hope: a growing recognition of the need for criteria to recognize heterodoxy. (46-47)

Whistle-Blowing on Divinity: The Debt Crisis in Theological Education

The unenviable position I am in is analogous to that of a worker who belongs to a strong union that has blatant featherbedding practices, who blows the whistle on huge cost run-ups, then must face the union hall. It's like being a member of the board of a savings and loan institution that has been operating on the edge of the law and now faces bankruptcy. I am the one who must report the bankruptcy back to the homeowners. This is not a pleasant task.

Think of this generation of emerging classical theologians as analogous to the legislators elected to attempt to correct a huge national debt when long-term spending patterns have become ensconced expectations. Suppose we are now into our fifth generation of deepening economic deficit. Generation 1 was the poor but pious Bible-reading, praying generation. In Generation 2 were the upwardly mobile sons and daughters of pious Generation 1. These wealthy sons of the revival gave generously to sustain the values of their pious parents' generation, because they believed in the ideals of the revival, even if they had better things to do with their lives. With Generation 3 come the modernizing grandchildren of the revival, who take over its robust institutions and turn them into a secularizing counter-revival. With Generation 4 come the spoiled, spendthrift, reckless intellectual elites, the great-grandchildren of the revival who detest the revival and see it as alien to their interests, but benefit daily from the inheritance and legacies of the institutions it has built. That is their moral quandary. This intellectual aristocracy now controls the institutional endowments, but has completely lost touch with grassroots supporting constituencies who are still sentimentally attached to the ideals of the revival, and by now the elites are unable to fund and sustain the institutions built by the second generation.

Now comes Generation 5, which I am calling postmodern classical, who grasps anew the vital vision of Generation 1 and is trying to make the institutions proximately accountable to the first generation's values and the second generation donors' bequests. Generation 5 must deal simultaneously with the severe debt crisis, theological recovery, institutional nurture, and fence-building with an alienated constituency. This is the arduous task facing the young fogeys.

We are now in Generation 5, not 4. Generation 4 is desperately on the defensive. Generation 5 cannot begin its reconstruction without telling honestly the story of this decline, or without challenging the interests and ideological assumptions of Generation 4, who regards 5 as reactionary troublemakers and spoilers of a good game. Generation 5 knows it is necessary to turn the heat up on 4 in order merely to begin to get some recognition that the game is over, the elite jig is up, and now the piper must be paid. The sign of hope is not that the battle has been won, but that it has finally been joined, and at last the story can be told. (49-50)

Why Not Concede Defeat?

So what is ahead for the next generation of ordinands? Turmoil. Is the seminary as it now stands virtually irreformable? Probably. Should we then abandon the present seminary structure? I doubt it, even though that may seem inconsistent with the premise of irreformability. Why not vacate the premises, concede defeat, and capitulate to inevitability? It seems unthinkable to abandon, without further prayers for special grace, an institution to which so many of the faithful have committed themselves and supported with their personal and often spare resources over so long a time. These libraries and endowments and alumni cannot simply be abdicated.² But can the liberated ethos be significantly reshaped? Not without a basic reversal of the undemocratic processes and tenure abuses that promote ideological cloning. I see no way to both continue the present tenure system and reform the tradition-impaired seminary. And there is virtually no hope for reforming the tenure system. I wish it were otherwise. The dilemma: a clean sweep seems both necessary and impossible;³ hence the need for prayer for special grace and for an army of intercessors for the urgent reform of the seminaries. (52-53)

When Field Disciplines Tyrannize Spiritual Discipline

The disciplines of the liberated seminary have... become a playground of competing methodologies that bicker constantly for esteem, recognition, sanction, and approval, especially in terms of narrowly empirical methods of inquiry. It is as if the disciplines were constantly skirmishing for higher status in a strict pecking order, where methods employed at the higher end of the pecking order allow plenty of room for revisionist history and femography and class-warfare analysis, but little or no room for Scripture as the Word of God or divine revelation as a serious intellectual enterprise. Here is where the reductionist empirical and rational methods of enlightenment modernity have infested the sanctuaries of theological education.

The decisive peer group for the liberated theological teacher in a given field of study is not anyone in the church or even university colleagues, but rather the small world of the professional society patterned after other academic and scientific societies. It is these peers only who count, they whom the professor most wants to emulate and please, they who shape the publishing environment, they who dictate status and have *de facto* appointive power. The moral high ground is thought to belong to the guilds, in the liberated academic's eyes, not to the ecclesia or even one's own university colleagues.

² And why not? Oden's only argument is that we've invested so much in them. But why throw good money after bad? If seminaries are no longer responsible or responsive, and they have chosen to abandon their charge, then why would we not put an end to the beast? (1Tim 6).

³ Again, why is it impossible? Simply because it's painful and there will be costs? What is the cost of continuing?

Each sub-discipline of theological education, now awash in dated Enlightenment assumptions, finds itself desperately seeking an alternative to the premises of Triune reasoning, incarnation, resurrection, and scriptural revelation. The field itself becomes an abstract persona that dominates the guild professor's identity and consciousness. Each discipline feels compelled to legitimize its teaching by some form of empirical data gathering that might be grudgingly acceptable in some second-rate chemistry laboratory. Or if this fails there is always the hope of the invention of some deft novel form of speculative criticism that only a club insider could surmise. In this way the pattern of the so-called scientific study of religion has gradually flooded the seminary, discipline by discipline. (63)

Resisting Marginalization

You have a right to speak out in class about your real convictions. Apostolicity itself is a critical principle that brings its own "hermeneutic of suspicion" to modern ideological critics. The text has rights over against its interpreters, some of whom stand poised to exploit, assault, and mug the text. When contemporary readers make themselves the absolute masters of the text, then the author has lost all rights of authorship. Authorial intent becomes subservient to contemporary ideological interests. Historians are not the absolute judges and arbiters of the documents of testimony. If it is God who is speaking, the text must be viewed as the judge and constrictor of the interpreter.

There is a danger that pretentious criticism may set itself between the text and contemporary hearers as if to say, "Sorry, you can meet the apostles only if we doorkeeping guild scholars deign to introduce you to them with our methods and categories." This premise has led to the temporarily expanding employment of a knowledge elite, but hardly to improved historical or textual inquiry, which does not lord it over texts but is called to listen to them. (73-74)

Movement 2 – The McGovernization of Ecumenical Gridlock

I speak frankly, but not angrily, of the distinctively modern ecumenical sin: turning our backs on our closest ecumenical brothers and sisters – other Protestant evangelicals. To address this negligence, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of ecumenism – evangelical ecumenism from secularizing ecumenism – and to assess their potential encounter. In the background stands the current situation of dialogue between evangelicals and Eastern Orthodox, which I will try to update and interpret.

My thesis: ecumenical gridlock is due in large part to the excessive McGovernization of Protestant representational processes. By "McGovernization," I mean a leveling quota ideology applied to church governance. I speak as one who earnestly supported George McGovern, the Democratic presidential candidate against Nixon in 1972, in the platform his party ran on... With high moral intent a wooden, rationalistic quota representation scheme was devised for American politics, and it soon was imported into the churches... I thought that minorities and women needed coercive guarantees *against* electing bodies so that they would forever be sufficiently represented numerically. This pitted the populist voters against us elite planners. It required us to define official minorities to whom preferential treatment would be perpetually ensured. I thought

that past injustices required a stiff corrective in the form of constraints on who could vote for whom... The excesses they generated have been recognized as unfair by both the court of law and the court of public opinion, which by a large margin now rejects quota representation as encouraging reverse discrimination and neglect of merit criteria.

The policy... introduced new voices of leadership to the political process. But the artificial and simulated gender and race balances proposed by sincere egalitarians fail to grasp the actual local rainbows of varieties of Christian community and the catholicity of the church being raised up locally by the Holy Spirit... What seemed at first an empowerment turned out to be a disempowerment. What intended to be democratic turned out at times to be antidemocratic and arrogant... They have placed unnecessary limits on the free exercise of democracy. The church has suffered from rationalistic attempts to achieve catholicity by racial formula. Catholicity is created by the Holy Spirit, not by a committee. (85-87)

The Bureaucratic Distrust of Democracy

The quota theory of representation intuitively distrusts popular democratic judgment. It wants to control the categories through which any legislative initiative can be made. It insists on telling electing bodies in advance what types of persons and categories they can elect: according to gender, age, and above all, race, along with any others who may have achieved the preferred status of officially recognized oppressed minorities.

The outcome is McGovernized paralysis. Egalitarian orchestrators have been astute in manipulating the representation process so there has been an unnatural number of voices of dependency groups demanding that the alleged oppressors reinforce their dependencies.

A guilt-prone compensatory accommodation has thus been made to ideologically based activists in the democratic process who, to fulfill quotas, are preferred over all other vote-casting and underwriting constituencies. If the moderate constituencies refuse to fund ideologies as alien to their historical memory as lesbianism, Marxism, free love, and abortion, the liberated elites become outraged. So in the interest of harmony and peace, the moderates usually back off and let the disaster continue. Often their only recourse is to vote with their feet. This is what has demoralized voting constituencies. (89-90)

The Distinctive Modern Ecumenical Sin: Disdain for Evangelicals

Heirs of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopalian traditions have spent enormous amounts of energy and money and effort on ecumenical affairs in the past decades. Most of that energy has been directed towards conversations with look-alike liberal facsimiles in so-called mainline or established church traditions. These are church bodies that any sociologist can tell you are generally regarded as scaled upwardly in terms of class status, applying usual criteria of education, prestige, and economic clout. Downward mobility grounded in servant consciousness has never been a powerful motivating factor for those liberal denominations that talk most conspicuously about ministry to the needy and liberation of the poor.

Meanwhile, the evangelical denominations that are indeed more likely to be identified with the poor are left off the decent persons' ecumenical invitation list. Those invited are mainline Anglicans, Reformed, Lutheran, Wesleyan, and Congregationalist leaders. All others need not apply, especially if they have a high view of scriptural authority. (93)

The Promise of Dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals in the Wake of Canberra

During the Canberra, Australia Assembly of the WCC in 1992, many of the syncretistic excesses that had been encouraged by WCC leadership surfaced with a vengeance. The key event was a worship service that romanticized shamanism and sought to legitimate nativistic neo-paganism on equal or superior footing with oppression-laden apostolic teaching. As a result, many common concerns were discovered in conversations between Orthodox and evangelical participants who protested the permissive drift of the WCC...

In February 1993, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople sent Eastern Orthodox delegates to Bernhauer Forst, near Stuttgart, Germany to discuss common concerns with evangelicals. Theologians and missiologists came from Africa, Europe, North and South America, Australia, Asia, and the Pacific Rim... They identified and agreed upon several common convictions as shared objectives for future collaboration between ecumenically committed evangelicals and Orthodox. These commonalities include

- Faith in and worship of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed;
- Faith in Jesus Christ as Universal Lord (Pantokrator) and Unique Savior – in his full deity and humanity as expressed in the Nicene, Ephesian, and Chalcedonian definitions – and faith in the finality and all sufficiency of his work of salvation, acknowledging no other Savior;
- Acceptance of Holy Scripture as authoritative for faith, life, and practice;
- Faith in the Gospel revealed by God, as expressed in the early creedal affirmations (in particular the Nicene-Constantinopolitan, the Apostles' Creed, and the "Athanasian" Creed, or "quicumque Vult"), which may not be altered or improved upon by politically correct strong-arming;
- Such fundamentals of the faith as the virgin birth, the sacrificial death of Christ, the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the final return of our Lord; and
- Baptism in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (98-99)

The Stuttgart meeting has been generally regarded as a significant moment in the potential restructuring of ecumenical dialogue. It allowed voices to be heard that had been systematically neglected in ecumenical circles...

It is hard to miss the irony of the NCCC-WCC's syncretistic fixation on schmoozing with non-Christian religious leaders. Yet, they obstinately refuse to enter into dialogue with the very evangelical traditions of revival that spawned the ecumenical movement itself – evangelicals whom they have by now to some extent demonized. (101)

Evangelical and charismatic communities are moving on a trajectory toward a recovery of the liturgical life that they have been so profoundly missing, a repossessing of the very prayerbook tradition that John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and John Wesley took for granted. They are poised to be profoundly reformed by classical liturgies, the language of prayer that was far more accessible in the seventh or seventeenth centuries than in the early twentieth. Evangelicals can learn much from early Christianity about sanctification of the whole of life, about walking in the way daily as informed by the grace of baptism and Eucharist. These gifts await evangelicals who are ripe for meeting the ancient ecumenical exegetes. (103)

Movement 3 – Postmodern Paleo-orthodox Spirituality

[Oden also calls it *postmodern evangelical spirituality*] This is my take on emergent classic Christian spirituality within the current cultural theater... I intend by spirituality to point to personal life lived in union with Christ – a relationship with the incarnate and risen Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, where his death is my death, his resurrection, my resurrection. This life expresses itself in praise of God through loving service to the neighbor. Spirituality in the New Testament sense is not a moral program, not a set of rules, not a level of ethical achievement, not a philosophy, not a rhetoric, not an idea, not a strategy, not a theory of meditation, but simply *life lived in Christ*.

In speaking of evangelical spirituality, I point to an actual ethos, a living history of a covenant community of worship, in which life in Christ is taken seriously and joyfully as creation's true center, a community in which a disciplined approach to life in the Spirit is informed by Scripture study within a community of prayer. I refer more specifically to the traditions of discipleship shaped by the heirs of Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Cranmer, Calvin, Wesley, and revivalism.

By postmodern, I mean the course of actual history following the death of modernity. By modernity I mean the period, the ideology, and the malaise of the time from 1789 to 1989, from the Bastille to the Berlin Wall.

By evangelical I embrace all those who faithfully believe and joyfully receive the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. In particular I am thinking of those who even today deliberately remain under the intentional discipline of ancient ecumenical consensual teaching, and especially those within the classic Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist, Baptist, and Wesleyan connections of spiritual formation, especially in their renewing phases, freely subject to classic Christian teaching, admonition, and guidance. (109-110)

Does Postmodern Imply Antimodern?

In postmodern paleo-orthodoxy, we take for granted the achievements of modernity, of modern methods of inquiry, modern procedures of searching scientifically for truth, modern assumptions about a just democratic political order. The problem my young fogey friends experience is not that they are tardy in being introduced to these agendas. They have already been through these agendas *ad nauseam*. They know what modernity is all about from the inside; they appreciate its strengths and are aware of its weaknesses. What they instead are doing is not a rerun of

modernity, but the rediscovery of classical paleo-orthodox Christianity within postmodernity, like hugging a lost child.

That does not mean a simplistic, sentimental return to pre-modern methods as if the achievements of modernity were to be circumvented or short-circuited. Rather, it is a rigorous, painstaking rebuilding from the crash of modernity using treasures old and new for moral formation and spiritual reconstruction. These young fogeys have been hardened by modernity to use the methods of modernity (scientific, historical, hermeneutical, psychological, sociological, and behavioral change models) to detoxify the illusions of modernity that have eaten like acid into the bones of the religious communities.

It is not merely a censorious, embittered, negative emotional reaction against modernity... Rather, it is an upbeat, grace-formed, providence-recognizing, hope-bearing venturesome passage beyond modernity. Note carefully: *There is no reason to oppose something that is already dead.* (110-111)

The End of the Old-line

We are at the end of old-line religiosity, which has chosen to identify itself so snugly with modernity. We are at the end of the old-line, which hides the call to repentance and is embarrassed by the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ. *But the end of the old-line is the beginning of a new era for disciplined evangelical spirituality.* We are free to ask what the Spirit is calling us to do to recover and renew classic spiritual formation and community building. The period of mourning is soon to be over. (111)

There is an emerging resolve in the worldwide evangelical family to renew the familiar *classic spiritual disciplines*:

- Daily meditative study of the written Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- An earnest life of personal prayer – a daily order of praise, confession, pardon, and petition for grace and use of the means of grace in common worship;
- Mutual care of souls with intensive primary group accountability;
- An ordering of daily vocational life in which persons seek faithfully to walk by grace in the way of holiness – regardless of how the world interprets it; and
- Complete yielding of the mind, heart, and will to the glory of God. (112)

Four Leading Motifs of Terminal Modernity

Four things characterize all that's wrong with modernity:

- The ***autonomous individualism*** of the iconoclastic tradition from Nietzsche through Dadaism to Sartre and Hemingway has now come down to gun battles between eleven-year-old boys with flashing tennis shoes
- The ***narcissistic hedonistic assertiveness*** of the tradition from Rousseau and Bentham through Shelley and Whitman to D.H. Lawrence and Madonna is entangling countless young minds in its seductive, sensualist, pornography-infested, lust-driven net.

- The *reductive naturalism* of the tradition from Hobbes and Hume through Freud to Skinner is proving to be a narrow new dogmatism that in the interest of identifying natural finite material and efficient causality denies freedom and abolishes all forms of purposeful antecedent and final causality, and thus misunderstands human accountability.
- The *absolute moral relativism* of modern chauvinism typified by Feuerbach, Dewey, Bultmann, and Fellini that imagines the developing ethos of later modernity is destined somehow to be the unquestioned cultural norm by which all subsequent cultural norms are to be judged, and on this premise presumes to assess (and typically denigrate) all premodern norms, texts, and ideas. Modern chauvinism regards modernity as the intrinsically superior ethos by which all premodern views are harshly judged as primitive or misogynist or artless. (118)

The turning point we celebrate today is [\[the fact that\]](#) *Evangelical piety, scholarship, hymnody, and institutional life have in fact outlived the dissolution of modernity...* Evangelical faith is still around and vitally flourishing. (112)

Postlude

To young fogeys, I close with this expression of hope: center yourself in the text of the primitive apostolic witness. Listen to Scripture *with* the historic church. You will then be more ready to receive the empowerment of the Spirit to hold fast to the oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the community of faith amid any cultural contingency. Thus prepared, the Holy Spirit will give you new freedom to resist accommodating to systems of syncretistic secularizing spirituality that have already miserably failed...

I plead the esthetic beauty of retrogression... to the future through the route of classic Christian exegesis of the first five centuries, the ancient ecumenical tradition to which *all* Christians – Catholic, Orthodox, and liberal and conservative Protestants – have a right to appeal. (138-139)