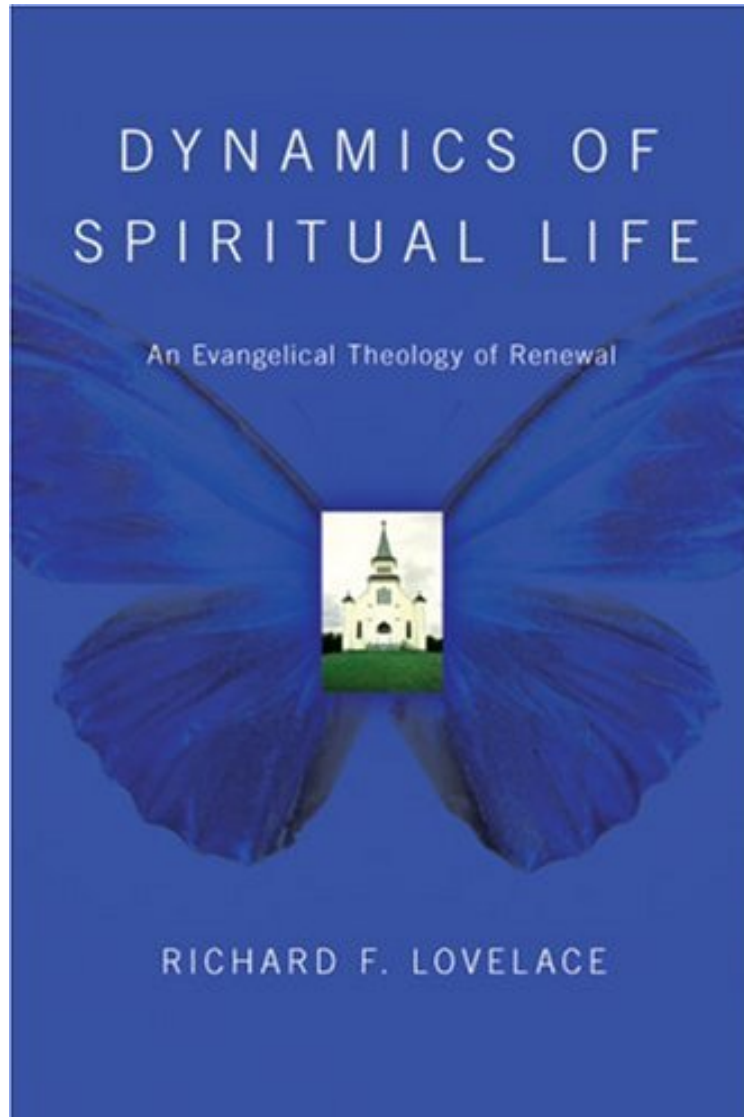


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Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal

Richard F. Lovelace

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Richard F. Lovelace : Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Wide ranging, well written work By Jason Kanzi saw Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal (1979) on a few different reading lists of people I trust. This large book written by a church history professor is wide ranging in scope, but highly readable. Essentially, the author explores the history of revivals and spiritual renewal in the church and especially the "evangelical" church, such as the

first and second great awakenings. He spent quite a bit of time discussing Jonathan Edwards, who was a catalyst in the first great awakening in America and a fine writer to boot. I found this to be a theologically rich book covering a wide variety of topics such as soteriology, eschatology, pneumatology, and eschatology but generally grounded in the history of the church. Although addressing evangelicalism, he ventures more broadly into Roman Catholicism, Lutheran Pietism, and Reformed Puritanism to name a few. There was much to commend about this book. I think it would be useful for church leaders to read even today to read and understand the dynamics of renewal. As a psychologist and one who is interested in the life of the soul, I found this book particularly sensitive to the role of soul care in the church. Lovelace does not commend a primarily exhortational method nor does he go so far as to wholly give way to modern forms of psychotherapy. In other words, his writings would seem to fit comfortably in the world of Christian Psychology, where I tend to identify myself. For the average reader, this book may be overwhelming. It is 455 pages long and he is prone to using technical terminology at times. If you are willing to wade through that, however, I think the extra work will be worth the reward.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent presentation and challenge to churches and individual believers

By Adam Smith

Book Highlights

From the back cover of this book, we have the following summary: "Richard Lovelace gives a history of spiritual renewals in light of biblical models. Isolating the elements of live orthodoxy, he proposes a comprehensive approach to renewal. Lovelace looks at such practical issues as renewal of the local congregation, the ways revivals go wrong, the evangelical thrust toward church unity, and Christian approaches to the arts and social concern. A book for all concerned to revitalize the church." This book helps us to see the big picture of the historical development and the current challenges in the evangelical movement. Lovelace covers a broad range of historical church movements. He begins with Jonathan Edwards; then moves to the Great Awakenings and other revival movements over the past 400 years. He examines models of renewal and the need for continuous renewal by fighting our common enemies of sin, the flesh and the world. Spiritually, the church needs to have a deep understanding of justification, sanctification, the empowering or filling of the Holy Spirit and exercising the authority of Christ in spiritual warfare through prayer. Second, Lovelace examines missions and prayer and their importance for renewal. He also emphasizes the importance of a unified community of believers, theological integration (not allowing minor issues to divide us) and "disenculturation". This last term means that we need to see our societal culture for what it is and our particular church culture for what it is; and deepen our understanding of our collective strengths and weaknesses.

In the second half of the book, Lovelace examines the local congregation and its need for renewal. He criticizes the lack of sanctification in individual believers and how that can lead to division and a drifting away from renewal. He examines the concept of "live orthodoxy". He says that live orthodoxy is the way in which we live out our faith coupled with the way in which we think (having sound doctrine and a renewed mind). He contrasts live orthodoxy to dead orthodoxy. That is, it is possible to have the correct creeds and confessions and have lives that are still unrenewed. On the other hand, it is possible to have personal commitment to Christ without any clear doctrinal commitment. Lovelace advocates that we must have both to have an effective witness to the world. His vision comes from Ephesians 4:12-16 which calls for unity and a deep theology that is thoroughly biblical and essentially normative.

Lovelace goes on in the final chapters to examine issues such as church unity, apostasy, separation from corrupt denomination structures, ecumenical dialog and the development of a healthy unity that presents a united front to the world, while not doing away with the existing denomination structures. Given all the above discussion, Lovelace asks whether or not it is possible for western culture to be renewed. Can we see springs in a dry land, roots nourishing the tree? Are we in a trough that will soon be a mountain-top? Are we at the point of no return? Lovelace is optimistic. He sees renewal happening across the globe. The church is alive and well on the whole, even if the West has in recent times rejected the church as the answer to its problems.

Finally, Lovelace tackles social renewal in the structures of society that help the poor and educate our children. He says we have a duty to help the poor even with our higher duty to preach the gospel. We must not lose sight of either mandate. Jesus ministered to the poor. He did not simply come to preach and train up 12 disciples and then die on the cross. He had compassion on the real needs of people.

In the final chapter, Lovelace examines eschatology. He says that no matter what the personal views are of when Jesus will return to claim the Bride of Christ, that churches have the responsibility to be missional. We must push for the spread of the gospel in the world with a sense of urgency and excitement. In this push, we will eventually see the Lord fulfilling his plans for his people and the world at large.

Book Evaluation

I believe this book is important for Christians to consider. We need to have an understanding of church history, especially the history of evangelicalism. We need to see where we fit in and gain an understanding of the big picture and how we can help to further the cause of the gospel and the building up of the church. Our mandate from our Lord demands it. He told us to "Go and make disciples of all nations". I think this book can help us to understand our past, rightly assess our current challenges, and gain insight and motivation for where we need to concentrate our efforts going forward.

One point where I would criticize Lovelace is that he is fine with mystical practices and that they may be helpful in personal renewal. He seems to think that they are okay as long as we avoid extremes. I would hold to the view that mystical practices such as contemplative prayer and inwardly focusing on the presence of God are unsafe and not helpful in our spiritual growth. Paul tells us to renew our minds in Romans 12. This requires that the Word of God become central in our thinking and the prime motivator of our actions.

Recommendation

I would

recommend this book to everyone. I believe it will inspire you to a deeper commitment to Christ, a better understanding of the church and a deeper commitment to do your part in expanding the kingdom of God. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Book in Excellent Condition! By Nathan B. Shaver This book has been on my recommended reading list for some time. Do not hesitate to purchase this great work on renewal and revival. Lovelace has offered the Church a very well researched volume on the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in the awakening of the Church to her life in Christ. Dynamics of Spiritual Life has been written with the Church universal in mind. R. Lovelace was respectful and discerning in borrowing insights from sources outside of his Evangelical tradition to supplement the deep and wide work of the Holy Spirit within the life of Believers and the Church. Very grateful for this volume. Highly recommended!

Richard Lovelace gives a history of spiritual renewals in light of biblical models. Isolating the elements of live orthodoxy, he proposes a comprehensive approach to renewal. Lovelace looks at such practical issues as renewal of the local congregation, the ways revivals go wrong, the evangelical thrust toward church unity, and Christian approaches to the arts and to social concern. A book for all concerned to revitalize the church.

"Why is Lovelace's writing a must-read? It's a madly efficient use of your mental and spiritual energy. For pastors, church planters, missional leaders, and thinking Christians, the benefits of this book will be well worth the effort." (Coram Deo (cdomaha.com/blog), July 22, 2008) "Here is more evidence of growing Evangelical concern with renewal, spirituality and the historic witness of Christianity. Dynamics of Spiritual Life is a major new contribution to our understanding of God's action in the church and in history. While writing from an essentially Reformed perspective, Lovelace remains open to other traditions, including contemporary Neo-Pentecostalism, and is sensitive to God's renewing action historically within Roman Catholicism as well as in Anabaptism, Pietism and other Protestant renewal movements." (Howard A. Snyder, author of *The Problem of Wineskins and Liberating the Church*) "We need a book like this at this time. Lovelace has done the job in a sensitive, insightful, readable way. His work deserves a readership far beyond the Evangelical tradition out of which it grows." (Mark J. Link, S.J., author of *These Stones Will Shout and The Seventh Trumpet*) "Disciples of Jesus Christ who know the cost of discipleship, heirs of grace who treasure its costly gifts, and men and women of taste and scholarship and civil impulse have good reason for wishing the author luck. No, put that not 'luck' but 'steadfastness' and 'grace.'" (Martin E. Marty, University of Chicago) About the Author Richard F. Lovelace (Th.D., Princeton) is emeritus professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and the author of *Homosexuality and the Church* (Revell) and *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (Eerdmans).