



Dynamics of Spiritual Life

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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.

Dynamics of Spiritual Life Details

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Author : Richard F. Lovelace

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William Randolph says

This book is what brought me back to the content of my Reformed heritage, and stopped my movement towards Catholicism. It might not be the most spectacular book out there, but Lovelace's generosity of spirit is there on every single page.

On the other hand, he wrote in the seventies; sadly, his high hopes for the nascent Christian music industry would prove to be unfounded.

Jason Poling says

There is the American way to eat a meal and the French way. The difference can be measured in time: one takes four times as long as the other. I ate this book the French way. Yeah, I probably chewed too slowly and some of the ideas grew cold, but stopping to savor every thought of Lovelace was worth it. This book has given me a renewed hope in the future missional effectiveness of the Church. It also proved my long-held contention that a good grasp of church history is more essential to formulating strategies for church renewal and kingdom expansion than many believe. If church leaders would read this book, along with the new Center Church by Tim Keller (which is indebted to Lovelace's work), the study of church history might regain a place of prominence and help us both to avoid repeating past mistakes and to emulate the godly practices of more "awakened" eras when the Church utilized holistic evangelistic efforts that included concern for social renewal.

Matt says

A phenomenal record of Evangelicalism - along with its ancestors and offspring! As Lovelace traces this sub-culture's presence throughout history since the Reformation, he helps the reader mine valuable lessons about the purpose, mission, and functioning of the Church. He hits hard at the weaknesses and failings, and weaves history and Scripture together masterfully. This book may be from the 1970s, but its lessons and implications are needed if the church is to see restoration and revival again. This is, by far, the most important book on the church I've ever read barring the Scriptures themselves.

Jason Kanz says

I 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.

Jonathan Watson says

Easily one of the most important books I've ever read. I will be coming back to this time, and time again.

BJ says

Fantastic book that should be more widely read among Christians for its gospel-centered study, reaching across many traditions, on revival and spirituality in evangelicalism. Like any book, one will not agree with all of Lovelace's opinions, but I'm convinced you will leave it challenged and helped. I will be revisiting it often. I found the first-half superb, and while it's a touch slower on the back-end of its 435 pages, it's still darn good.

Tim says

I finished rereading Lovelace's large book for the first time in many years and I remember now the dual influence of his exercise in spiritual theology upon me. The first influence was in creating a sense of the place and the operation of renewal in the church argued from a firm basis in Scripture and in Lovelace's analysis of history. He sees renewal coming when the church realizes God's holiness and the depth of sin. Its primary elements are a connection of justification and sanctification and a deep experience of the Spirit and authority in spiritual conflict. The secondary elements he describes are in mission (evangelism and socially), prayer (individually and communally), communion, disenculturation (aware of cultural constraints), and theological integration (having the mind of Christ). His discussion of all these elements is rich, descriptive, and challenging to the individual and to the church.

The second influence on me was an awareness of church and especially American church history and the story that history tells. I have come to study a good deal more of church history in the interim, inspired in part by Lovelace. I like the story he tells with his history, even if I would disagree now, even vehemently, at points. At other points newer research/writing might alter his conclusions (it has aged, but with grace). Still,

the basic narrative is one that shows the church to be much like Israel in its waywardness. He writes from amid the Charismatic renewal happening around him in the 70s and knows the necessity of the Spirit as well as the warpings of the spiritual that come so easily. He understands that because he is deeply rooted in the Puritans and especially in Edwards, who is quoted extensively throughout the book. Lovelace is Reformed and that affects his soteriology, but as he was converted reading Thomas Merton, he is not oppressively Reformed.

This is a long work that does not have to be read all the way through to find it useful. If you do read all the way through though you will enjoy his style, which is sharp, and the enormous detail he does provide. Still really excellent work.

Nathan Carter says

A little bit disorganized, but some amazing gospel nuggets in here!!!! Reading this helps you better understand Tim Keller (Lovelace was his professor at Gordon-Conwell).

Rod says

If you are looking for something that chronicles a historical perspective of the development of Christian and Biblical spiritual development from a scholarly (but not super heavy) standpoint, Lovelace provides it in this book. He leaves no evangelical tradition's stone unturned and causes the reader to ask questions about his/her own evangelical tradition's heritage and convictions. An excellent objective (as much as possible - the author is Reformed in perspective) treatment of the subject. I was fascinated by the book.

Ben says

Lovelace, a church historian, traces the history of personal and corporate renewal. He establishes the primary and secondary elements of renewal through the church's history. This is a good read for examining why some ministries take off while others wallow in mediocrity. It gives a reader the opportunity to reflect on God's design for using His people and for those people to get in line with His purposes through their lives.

Amy says

have heard nothing but good stuff about this book. probably be a slow read.

Brandon Howlett says

Stirring, convicting, biblical, and practical. Altogether a worship inducing experience. Lovelace writes well and is well read. His command of philosophy, history, and multiple traditions of theology causes this book to be balanced and a delight to read. A must read if you're interested in the renewal of the Church.

Fair warning, the book is academic in its nature.

Phil says

I am deeply indebted to this book which I first found in my Bible College's library after seeing it footnoted in a couple places in Keller's *Prodigal God*. I started working through it and it reshaped a lot of my thinking in really positive ways. I can't recommend it highly enough. I have returned to it time and again to clarify my own thinking and to be reminded of the precious truths he so helpfully distills from a lifelong study of the Scriptures and Church History.

It contains what I think to be a pretty phenomenal description of the nature of sin:

"The structure of sin in the human personality is something far more complicated than the isolated acts and thoughts of deliberate disobedience commonly designated by the word. In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or [even] patterns of wrongdoing; it is something much more akin to the psychological term complex: an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs and behavior deeply rooted in our alienation from God. Sin originated in the darkening of the human mind and heart as man turned from the truth about God to embrace a lie about him and consequently a whole universe of lies about his creation. Sinful thoughts, words and deeds flow forth from this darkened heart automatically and compulsively, as water from a polluted fountain. ... The human heart is now a reservoir of unconscious disordered motivation and response, of which unrenewed persons are unaware if left to themselves, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). ... The mechanism by which this unconscious reservoir of darkness is formed is identified in Rom. 1:18-23 as repression of traumatic material, chiefly the truth about God and our condition, which the unregenerate constantly and dynamically "hold down." Their darkness is always a voluntary darkness, though they are unaware that they are repressing the truth."

Daniel Nelms says

This book is hard to narrow down in terms of genre. Tim Keller says that when you finish this book, you'll feel like you've read at least three different books in one. I agree with him. But wow, what a book!

Part systematic theology, part biblical theology, part historical theology, part church history, part devotional, part philosophical and part social critique, Lovelace's scope is very broad. He even covers a theology of music to a significant degree (too bad his vision for a resurgence of Christian music never happened... I wonder what he would have said about 90s Christian music, haha)

At 400+ pages with not so large font, it is a lengthy read. It's written from a reformed perspective but he is very generous and fair to all aspects of Christianity, sometimes to a fault. All to say, I found myself walking away from it wanting to be more and more charismatic than ever before. Of course I don't agree with everything he said, he can be idealistic at times.

I must say, his general concept of "Live Orthodoxy" that is the basis of the book will be something that will stick around in my ecclesiological filter for some time to come. It's an inspiring read, a challenging read, and it has spurred me on in my current church planting endeavor. I'm so, so happy I've read this book, and I wish

all church planters and pastors would read this book.

If you want spiritual renewal in the American church, that we can grab his list and the process he found common throughout church history of renewals on pg. 75, create environments where these characteristics can be had, and pray for the Holy Spirit to activate them to renewal if he should wish. At minimum you will be having a biblical, active church. At best, we could see the Spirit renew a congregation. It's exciting to think and pray about.

Just make sure you get your pen out... mark up your copy.

Chris Dang says

Really long sentences.
