"Medieval Evangelicalism: Discussion of "True Religion" in the Western Church of the Middle Ages"

by Evan B. Howard (November, 2019)

Introduction

1.   Medieval evangelicalism? Isn't that an oxymoron? Some would think so. Those following the lead of historian David Bebbington, for example, view evangelicalism as a characteristically modern movement.[1] Thus Timothy Larsen, in his article on "Defining and locating evangelicalism" in the *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* states, as the second characteristic trait of evangelicalism that ("an evangelical is:"), an orthodox Protestant "who stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitfield."[2] By definition, this school of thought would not have place for any kind of *medieval* evangelicalism. Others, however, see evangelicalism as a theological foundation present to a greater or lesser extent throughout history – though usually associated with central elements of Protestantism. Thus J. I. Packer speaks of defining evangelicalism by way of doctrinal enumeration: identifying the authority of the Bible, the reality of the Trinity, the sovereignty of God, and the necessity of faith as central elements of an "evangelical catechetical syllabus."[3] Though they might be willing to conceive of a "medieval evangelicalism," as participating in the continuously transmitted "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3), Packer and others like him tend to view the medieval era as a time when key evangelical doctrines were neglected or distorted.

Historian Bruce Hindmarsh combines, in one sense, elements of both these perspectives, calling evangelicalism "a modern form of traditional spirituality."[4] On the one hand he argues that ""evangelicalism" deals with the doctrines, practices, and history of a class of Protestants that emerged distinctively in the early modern period . . ."[5] Yet notice that phrase, "emerged *distinctively*." Hindmarsh is keenly aware of the streams from which modern evangelicalism has been watered. He

draws attention to the Reformation heritage of the *evangelische* church. But he also notes that the eighteenth-century pioneers of modern evangelicalism read with interest some of the very Catholic writers that we in spiritual formation circles find worthy of attention today. In an essay titled "Seeking True Religion: Early Evangelical Devotion and Catholic Spirituality," Hindmarsh documents early evangelical use of Catholic writings.[6] The works of Augustine, Anselm, Thomas á Kempis, Madame Guyon, and others were mined for resources that both illustrated and strengthened evangelical faith.

Central to the evangelical re-appropriation of Catholic spirituality was this interest in "true religion." Early Evangelicals perceived, quoting Hindmarsh, a "tradition of "true religion" that was seen to run from the earliest church right through to their own times."[7] Yet note – evangelical identification with earlier examples of "true religion," according to Hindmarsh, was not a matter of doctrine, but rather a kinship of spiritual life. Thus Hindmarsh asks, in his recent *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, "What drove evangelicals to have a regard for the Christian past? . . . "Genuine piety," "true Christianity," "true religion," "real Christianity"-- all of these terms signal the central preoccupation of the leaders of the evangelical movement, namely that men and women who had a merely formal relationship with the church come to a real experience of Christian faith."[8]

Hindmarsh exhibits the depth of evangelical interest in Catholic expressions of interior faith, noting that John Wesley claimed to have learned from Thomas á Kempis "that true religion was seated in the heart." What Hindmarsh does not seem to notice is that a number of medieval spiritual writers, including á Kempis, employ the phrase "true religion" itself, or other kindred expressions with similar purpose. Thus, by exploring the use of the concept of "true religion" through the medieval period we learn not only something about medieval spirituality, but also something about evangelicalism. And more importantly I think, we discover something about the way the Spirit of God guides the church. That is what I want to explore in this presentation.

My aim here is not to argue that modern evangelicals consciously referenced, or were even aware of the theme of "true religion" in medieval spiritual writings. Nor am I trying to demonstrate the

persistence of a single theme through medieval to modern (such as interior religion), toward which I can point and thus identify some perennial "evangelical" movement. Rather, as a student of Christian spirituality I am simply trying to give voice to a "noticing," suggesting where I see the dynamics of the Holy Spirit and of human religiosity at work both in medieval history and in the movements we currently identify as "evangelicalism."

In a 2012 essay on "The Pursuit of True Religion in Fourth-Century Monastic and Related Expressions" I argued in six points that "one of the primary concerns of historic evangelicals was also a primary concern at the origins of Christian monasticism."[9] Now, after reviewing medieval literature, I feel I can take a step further. My claim here is that the matter which Hindmarsh considers to be *the* central concern of early evangelicals was also a primary concern within medieval religious life, even to the point of using the same language. Though medieval contexts differ, and though consequently the "solution" message varies between different medieval contexts, the *concern itself* – which I would identify as a concern for faithfulness to the person of Christ and the gospel – is a perennial concern, evident in the life, practice, and language of many medieval Christians. My suspicion is that the medieval expressions of this concern suggested to early Protestant evangelicals a continuity toward which they could point both as evidence of their own heritage within the historic faith and as models of evangelical life for their own movement. And as evangelicals today, we will discover that the important matter of evangelical identity is not simply *that* we are interested in true religion, but rather *how* we are interested.

2. Context of True Religion until the 12th Century: The Order of Monastic Life

Though I think it is an overstatement, Herbert Grundmann's summary of the nature of "religion" in the medieval church, in his influential *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, provides a worthy description of "authentic religious life" as perceived by the medieval European church prior to the twelfth century. He writes,

The Middle Ages themselves knew no such concept as "religious movement." The words *religio* and *vita religiosa* meant the same as "monastic order" or "monastic life" do now. . . . Every movement which did not issue in an order, cut itself off from the Church and from "true religion," becoming a sect, a "pseudo-religion," a heresy.[10]

In this sense, medieval society before the twelfth century saw only one true religion: the order of nuns and monks formally affiliated with the church. This was a perception that was strongly reinforced from the tenth into the twelfth century by the overwhelming dominance of one monastery and form of "religion," the monastic life of Cluny. Thus, aside from criticisms of hypocrisy, early medieval Christians had no reason for discussion of "true" or "false" religion.[11]

3. Contexts in the Twelfth Century: New Monasticisms and True Religion

One early sign of the medieval "true religion" debate came with the development of the regular canons. Though one can point to groundwork laid as early as the eighth century—or even back to Augustine—communities of priests serving local churches and living under a common Rule of Life became increasingly prominent in the Western church after the mid-eleventh century.[12] The regular canons established themselves as a form of devout life markedly distinct from the cloistered existence of Clunaic monks. By the early twelfth century archbishop Conrad I could confidently conclude that "the canon's way of life was superior to all others."[13] Part of the inspiration for the development of the regular canons was the 1059 synod of Rome which had urged clergy to live an "*apostolic* life." While the term "apostolic" pointed the canons specifically toward the sharing of resources described in Acts 2, "this call to return to the origins of the Church," to quote Robert M. Stewart, "invited ever-expanding reflection on the nature of the *vita vere apostolica*, the *truly* apostolic life."[14]

By the mid-twelfth century, a wide range of new monastic expressions had emerged, each uniquely embodying their own perception of the apostolic life. Carthusians, Camaldolese, and Grandmontines recovered the desert emphasis on contemplative withdrawal. Knights and Hospital

orders mobilized an army of laity to accompany the needs of the Crusades far and wide. Cistercians turned to a fresh simplicity in an attempt to observe Benedict's Rule to the letter. Charismatic preachers began to travel the countryside, proclaiming repentance to whomever would listen. Each of these expressions turned to Christ and the gospel in their recovery of the *apostolic life*. Some looked to Jesus's times of withdrawals, or to his preaching ministry for inspiration. Others pointed to the common life of the early church. Historian Gert Melville identifies this century as a time of "Diversity and Competition."[15] But who was right?

4. Contexts in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries: Apostolic Life and Poverty

By the end of the twelfth century the Roman Synod's call for apostolic life was itself used to critique the institutions of church and monastery themselves. Groups like the Waldensians were issuing harsh accusations regarding the abuses of the ecclesial establishment. Grundmann writes, "At the end of the twelfth century the hierarchical Church and the religious movement confronted one another stubbornly, tensely, and with mutual hostility, each disputing the other's right to claim itself as the true Christian Church, each declaring the other heretical."[16] Again, the issues were not merely doctrinal but rather emphasized matters of practice. Christopher Brooke points out that "It seemed to many who meditated on the apostolic life that Jesus had laid emphasis in his instructions to his disciples on poverty, simplicity, and practical good works; and these three elements were emphasized, in varying proportions, by most monastic reformers of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries."[17]

The Roman hierarchy responded to the multiplication of monastic establishments, to the proliferation of "religions," with a ban on the formation of any new orders. The "The Fourth Lateran Council issued the following resolution in 1215: Lest the great diversity of religious forms of life— *religio* was the concept used here—create confusion in the Church of God, it was strictly prohibited that anyone should found a new *religio*."[18] The doors were closed. Well, almost. A few groups were able to slip in and receive approval for various reasons. Perhaps the most significant of those who

slipped in were the Franciscans, for it was the followers of St. Francis of Assisi who led the conversation on apostolic life into a discussion of poverty, as culture itself shifted from a gift to a profit economy.[19] Francis was inspired by the simple and poor life of Jesus and his disciples. He desired to imitate a gospel poverty with his own life, and to lead others—his followers, the friars minor—into a similar life. Over the next century some saw, in strict Franciscan spirituality, the emergence of a new phase of Christian history itself, indeed, the culmination of that history itself in a Spirit-led Franciscan revival. The late medieval debates about poverty helped take the discussion of "true religion" to a new level. In this context, religion was not primarily a matter of institutional affiliation—whether one was a Benedictine or a regular canon or a Franciscan friar. Rather "true religion" was demonstrated by one's form of life (in this case, poverty): whether monk or canon, or priest or even laity.[20]

5. The Late Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: Interiority

In the midst of the "calamitous fourteenth century" medieval Europe was transformed. Wars, plagues, brigandage, ecclesiastical divisions—changes in education, government, and economy—these and more all forced the church, and individual Christians, to take a closer look at just what religion was all about. Historian Kaspar Elm describes this fifteenth-century context particulary as it regards shifts in discussion of religious virtuosity:

> What is of most interest here is that from the fourteenth century into the fifteenth, semi-religious life experienced an unprecedented flowering. And this in turn meant that "informal groups" and "free religious associations" took shape not only in the northwest, but virtually all across Europe; and that beguines and beghards, penitential brothers and tertiaries, *conversi* and *donati*, hermits and recluses of both sexes emerged in great numbers. It meant, moreover, that they enjoyed high esteem—so much in fact that in certain circles the inherited "scale of perfection" could be turned on its head: the semi-religious believed themselves able to say that they had achieved the highest perfection known to Christiandom.[21]

Consequently, it is during this period that I found the most frequent use of "true religion" or similar phrases. I can only give a few examples here.

a. Wycliffe and the Lollards

Lollards were followers of the English religious reformer John Wycliffe. The Lollards believed that the church should aid people to live a life of evangelical poverty and imitate Jesus Christ. Their life commitment was rooted in a harsh critique of the entire ecclesiastical institution, and in particular the mendicant orders. A group of so called, "True Christians, for example " published an attack of clerics, bishops, abbots and more, accusing them of "failure to perform the office of true curates. . . , nor do they help the poor . . . as true secular lords should, nor do they live in penance or by manual labor as true religious should."[22] The Lollards envisioned a complete revolution of the structure of the church, oriented toward the primacy of the simple lay Christian. Helen Barr writes, "Lollard preachers appropriated for themselves the epithets "true," "pore," and "simple" as terms of approbation in opposition to the temporal possessions of the Church. In contrast to the deceit, corruption, and false preaching of the material church the words of the humble Lollard preacher are true."[23] Their Rule of Life was the Gospel itself. Christ was their Abbot.

b. The Friends of God

The Friends of God were an informal mystical movement with strains of thought connected with Meister Eckhart and often associated with the life and teachings of John Tauler, Rulman Merswin, and the *Theologia Germanica*. I will use Merswin's *The Book of the Nine Rocks* as my example of this movement here.[24] On the first page, the book claims to guide the readers to the "the true road ascending to his origin." We learn on that same page of the "captivity that has enslaved" Christendom and "led them astray from the true road." (55) The reader is then taken through a category-by-category review which recounts how every station of humankind in their time has forgotten the way. Popes, bishops,

priests, and monks are specifically mentioned as those who have lost the true path. The second part of this work moves from critique to reconstruction through the presentation of a set of nine stages or "rocks" one must climb in order to reach salvation. When we climb up to the 5th rock of Merswin's "stairway to heaven," we find that we have "reached the start of the true road." The kind of life identified with this stage, and with the climb more generally, is a life of absolute surrender and of submission to a true friend of God. "The men who live on the fifth rock," writes Merswin, "are those who have given up their own wills and rendered them back to God." (112) Elsewhere it speaks of surrendering to God in obedience, in complete humility. The vision of the Friends of God was the transformation of personal interiority, not a revolution of ecclesial structure, a people who were, to adopt Eckhart's language, "born again."

c. The Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life (*devotio moderna*)

The Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life (also called *devotio* moderna or Modern-Day Devout) was a network of intentional communities founded in the Netherlands in the 14th century by Gerard Groote, formerly a successful and worldly educator who had had a religious experience and preached a life of simple devotion to Jesus Christ. John van Engen writes of them, "The Modern-Day Devout fit badly into the binaries we too often rely upon to frame medieval religious history. They accounted themselves true Christians (as did most Cathars and all Lollards), and quite loyal ones too, even as they brought an inquisitor down upon them and met with local hostility. But Sisters and Brothers also resisted being fully drawn into the "Ruled" center (like Cistercians or Franciscans), or being pushed into heresy or the margins (like Waldensians or Lollards). They were an alternative community, always perceived as slightly odd, often somewhat on the defensive . . ."[25] Whereas the Lollards sent missionaries and the Friends of God were mystics, the *devotio moderna* tended to form small semi-monastic households of devotion. It was from within the context of these communities that they reconsidered just what "religion" was all about. Van Engen reviews what he calls the searing

critique [in the fifteenth century] of religious claims to perfection, ending with a statement about Modern-Day Devout, "John Wyclif and Jean Gerson, both secular masters, also challenged this position [of the place of religious in the scale of perfection] in the fifteenth century, the first with a raging and sometimes foul-mouthed repudiation of "private religious sects" (meaning chiefly mendicants), the second with a tightly-argued theological critique that used and overturned Aquinas's arguments. No one thought so deeply and so hard about what what constituted "religion" than the Devout authors Zerbolt in the 1390s and John Pupper in the 1460s/70s."[26]

The meaning of "religion" was shifting. A "religion" was not the monastic institution to which one joined. It was not even the form of life one lived, within or even without, the institution. Now "religion" referred to the conduct of a Christian's life in relationship to God as such, whether nun, monk, priest or laity. Thus "true religion," Christian life that conforms to the primitive gospel, was now available to all. Kaspar Elm, speaking of the Brothers of the Common Life, writes: "What monks, canons, and mendicants, and indeed the military orders had long claimed for themselves—to live according to the model of the Apostles and to return to the early church—semi-religious now claimed as well, and with an exclusivity similar to that of the other orders and their branches. Returning to arguments that the wandering apostolic preachers of the twelfth century had used and to those James of Vitry had used in his *Vita* of Mary d'Oignies in defense of the beguines, the Brothers now claimed to be a direct continuation (if not in fact the only legitimate continuation) of the early apostolic community."[27]

Certainly the most well-known member of the modern devotion was Thomas á Kempis. We know him as the author of the platinum selling *Imitation of Christ*. In another pamphlet he wrote (*De disciplina claustralium*) he devotes a chapter to "true conversion," which he argues, must be continuous. "It is not enough to change the habit;" he argues, for "true and religious conversion" there must be a constant battle "turning the heart from all things visible and material."[28] This is the same kind of re-orientation toward interiority characteristic of the Friends of God. In the *Imitation of Christ,*

Kempis speaks of true devotion, true humility, true peace, true holiness and so on. In one place he actually refers to "true religion." Speaking of monastic life (in a characteristic contrast between outward vs. inward) he writes, "What you wear and the customs you follow contribute little; rather changing your ways and refocusing all of your energies toward the spiritual life will make you a true religious."[29] Again, Bruce Hindmarsh notes that Wesley got his sense of true religion being seated in the heart from Kempis. Was Wesley (or Hindmarsh) aware of Kempis's context?

I could go on and on but I think I have shared enough to document my first point: that this theme, "true religion," which Hindmarsh takes to be *the* "central preoccupation of the leaders of the evangelical movement" was also a primary concern within medieval religious life, even to the point of using the same language.

Two things I noticed as I read through this material. First – genuine concerns. Throughout the long history of true religion in its various forms, expressions would emerge that pointed out legitimate weaknesses in the surrounding Christianity. Monks would make elaborate visible displays of holiness, while lacking the fundamental virtues of humility or kindness. Friars lived a corrupt practice of their mendicancy, begging not for the most basic needs of survival, but rather in the context of luxury compared with the common peasant. And time and again, those calling for a return to "true religion" or something similar would invite their hearers back to the Gospel: to the practice of the early church, to Christ's own desert experiences, to the active ministry of the early disciples. But second, I also I observed unfortunate divisions. The steps were all too easy from a legitimate call for true religion, to concrete measures to embody this call, to the identification of one's own group as the sole (or at least best) representation of true religion, and from there to unnecessary factions. There is a certain logic to all this, but some of it did not smell too good to me.

3. Interpreting True Religion:

So, having glanced at the history of this concept my next question is to ask, "What do we make of it? We have already learned something about medieval religion (its genuine concerns and its unfortunate divisions). What now can we learn about evangelicalism, or the work of God in the world?

a. Schools -

First, we must return to Bruce Hindmarsh. Hindmarsh is consistent in his works to identify evangelicalism not as a doctrinal category nor as an ecclesial institution, but as a school, specifically as a school of Christian spirituality. He declares in his 2018 *Christianity Today* article on "What is Evangelicalism? that the core convictions of evangelicalism lead us to define it,[30] "more as a 'school of Christian living' than a "school of theology." Elsewhere he compares evangelicalism with the schools of the history of Christian spirituality such as the Spanish school often associated with Teresa of Avila or the French school associated with Francis de Sales. Hindmarsh continues, "We might add that early evangelicalism, as a devotional tradition, ought reasonably to be considered a "school."[31]

b. Schools and Countermovements

Now I want you to notice Teresa of Avila. It is particularly interesting to note that Teresa of Avila is a *Carmelite* nun, for Kees Waaijmann, like Hindmarsh, specifically names the Carmelites as an example of a school in the section on "schools of spirituality" in his comprehensive *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Waaijman defines a school as a spiritual way that derives from a key Source-experience around which followers develop and share in the Source-experience, structuring central elements into a whole and transmitting this way to future generations.[32] Waaijman identifies *schools* as one of the three primary forms of lived spirituality, along with *lay spirituality* and *countermovements*. Now countermovements are actually relevant to our exploration here. Waaijman identifies countermovements as forms of spirituality that "are found outside the sphere of power structures and established relations: outside of their concepts, their spacial orders, their time period,

their hierarchies, their great narratives. But they do not let themselves be locked up in this "outside" state. They swim against the current."[33] Waaijman names prophets, exiles, mystics, martyrs and other example, but my interest here is not so much to borrow his examples as simply to acknowledge the presence of these kind of forms. There are schools of spirituality, established ways of Christian living, and then there are those who question the established ways of Christian living and push for something else: countermovements.

When I was working on the chapter on schools of spirituality for InterVarsity Press's *Reading the Spiritual Classics,*[34] I got to wondering about schools and countermovements. You see, some of the groups we might call "schools" today, were actually considered "countermovements" at the time of their early development. Indeed, if you remember, the Carmelites themselves were one of the "new monastic" groups that formed in reaction to the dominance of the Clunaic model. Carmelites were searching for a renewal of genuine elements of "true religion." And that is part and parcel of what it meant not to be a school, but a countermovement. Thus, when we begin to imagine a spiritual milieu populated not only by a set of established "schools" but also challenged by a few countermovements, we begin to see a fuller sense of the interplay of forces in religious history and society.

Indeed, Hindmarsh himself opens the door to such thinking when he proclaims that, "Evangelicalism was not a church or a denomination, . . . the phenomenon itself appeared more like a social movement, parallel to other social and political movements characteristic of the modern period."[35] By introducing the phrase "social movement," Hindmarsh here invites us to explore evangelicalism with the rich interpretive resources of social movement theory and the study of new religious movements.[36]

The literature on social movements tends to outline the development of a social movement in four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline. These categories have been developed with particular reference to political movements, but it is worthy to see some parallels in the life cycle of religious movements as well. What is relevant to notice in all this for our purposes is the

importance of identity formation in the transition from Emergence into Coalescence and then the place of identity maintenance in the stage of Bureaucratization. We discover who we are (and who we are not) as we explore our Sources, values, and practices together, from Emergence into Coalescence. We perpetuate, recruit, and distinguish ourselves by summarizing these Sources, values, and practices in the stage of Bureaucratization. Furthermore, we must recognize that there is a blurring between these stages, elements of one are present in the other, and at times perhaps it is better to think less in terms of distinct "stages" and more in terms of "functions": a discovery function, a gathering function, an ordering function.

This, in turn, brings us to the discussion of the word "truth." Use of this word has different performative functions at different social movement stages, with reference to different aspects of life. Consider, for example the use of "truth" and similar concepts in the first epistle of John. If we walk in darkness we do not live out the truth (1:6). If we claim to be without sin, the truth is not in us (1:8). Whoever says "I know him," but does not keep God's commands is a liar and the truth is not in that person (2:4). But you have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth (2:20). We know we have passed from death to life because we love each other (3:14). Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (3:18). This is how we know that we belong to the truth . . . if our hearts do not condemn us (3:19-21). This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit (4:13). It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is truth (5:6). Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life (5:20; see also Galatians 2:5,14).   So what is true religion? Doctrine, love, Spirit, virtue, and more. "True religion," to quote James - "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

But there are other ways that people have used the concept of "true religion" in Scripture. In particular we might think of the pharisees. It may have been a long road from the genuine zeal for the interpretation of the law we read about in Nehemiah 8 to the whitewashed sepulchers in Matthew 23

(Matthew 23:27), but it was a road that was taken. And many religious movements have taken this same road from living pursuit to dead routine.

You can begin to see where I am going with this, both with regard to true religion in medieval spirituality and modern evangelicalism. In the early stages, or insofar as a religious movement is pointing back to the Gospel, the phrase "true religion" or similar language is used in a prophetic or *countermovement* function, drawing attention to what is missing in the dominant religious systems and drawing kindred spirits together into an expression that addresses the need. In medieval religion we have seen this with reference to the place of solitude, of active ministry, of virtue, of the laity and more. In evangelicalism we see it in declaration, for example those made by by Henry Scougal, that religion is *not* orthodox notions, external duties, or ecstatic devotions, but rather "true religion is an union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature of God drawn upon the soul." Scougal continues, "in the Apostle's phrase, *it is Christ formed in us.*"[37] In this sense both medieval reform movements and early evangelicals functioned as countermovements, establishing their identity through a return to Christ and the Gospel in one way or another.

But some time after this prophetic, countermovement, moment—as a school solidifies itself perhaps just a little too much—Bureaucratization begins to set in and the language of "true religion" is used, in a pharisee moment, to to label oneself as the best school, the truest religion in a context of unfortunate divisions. We have seen this for Cistercians and for Franciscans. I think it is also true for evangelicals. We have given attention to the detail of the law. We have the right doctrine. We have the born again experience. Hindmarsh writes of evangelicalism at its best when he states that, "Evangelicals are more concerned to bring people to Christ than to convert anyone to the category of evangelicalism."[38]

So now let me say something about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and renewal to the Body of Christ. The Spirit does this, at times, through the very members of that Body. Spiritual formation is not simply a matter of individual piety, but also

corporate maturity. And furthermore, this corporate work of the Spirit addresses not only small groups or congregations, but larger segments of the Body of Christ. And the Spirit does this work by raising up movements, "new religious movements," revivals, even "countermovements."[39] I am not trying to argue that the countermovement stage is good and the schools are bad. Rather I am trying to identify the work of the Spirit to correct errors in schools (or in countermovements) when they stray from Christ and the gospel. This is a work of renewing the center, drawing the people of God from one sideline or another into the circle of Christ and the Gospel.

So what does this say about our title? Were there medieval "evangelicals"? If we think of "evangelical" not as a doctrinal standard, but rather as a school of Christian living, and we identify that "school" (or that countermovement) with Hindmarsh's central concern of the pursuit of true religion, here embodied in various expressions throughout the middle ages, then perhaps we can indeed speak of a perennial "evangelical" force working in the Church through history. But if we do this, then we must also recognize that in both medieval renewal movements and in modern evangelicalism, we face the danger of a central interest in "true religion" that is not a healthy interest, but rather a self-serving identity-marker that fosters unfortunate divisions rather than addressing genuine concerns.

Thus, my conclusion is that being what I would consider to be a "true" evangelical is not a matter of the fact our attention to true religion, but rather how we do it.

1   David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

2   Timothy Larsen, "Defining and locating evangelicalism," in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1. See also, for example, Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitfield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 17-21.

3   James I. Packer, "Reflection and Response," in Timothy George, editor, *J.I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2009), 178-181.

4   D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "Contours of Evangelical Spirituality," in Glen G. Scorgie, ed. *Zondervan Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 146.

5   D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "What is Evangelicalism?" in *Christianity Today* (March 14, 2018). https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/march-web-only/what-is-evangelicalism.html, accessed 11/11/2019.

6   D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "Seeking True Religion: Early Evangelical Devotion and Catholic Spirituality," in Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2010), 115-137.

7   Hindmarsh, "Seeking True Religion," 136.

8   D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99. I have argued similarly in my treatment of "Evangelical Spirituality" in Bruce Demarest, editor, *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 165-70.

9   Evan B. Howard, "Evangelical Vision, Eremitical Tradition Part I:The Pursuit of True Religion in Fourth-Century Monastic and Related Expressions." https://spiritualityshoppe.org/evangelical-vision-part-1/, accessed November 12, 2019. All I want to add here with regard to the Patristic period is that while the desert tradition welcomed a variety of practice and even a range of forms of life (solitary, community, skete), concerns regarding select practices or forms (what about wandering monks? What about communities who choose a life of prayer without manual labor?, and so on) eventually stimulated a few discussions of "true" and "false" religion not only in the context of the reproof of hypocrites, but also with regard to the forms of religious life themselves. On the concerns regarding unaffiliated or wandering religious, see, for example, Jerome, *Epistle to Eustochium* ("A Letter from Jerome (383-384)" available at https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/447.html, accessed November 12, 2019; John Cassian, *Conferences* XVIII in Boniface Ramsey, trans. *John Cassian: The Conferences* (NewYork, NY: Newman Press, 1997), 629-61. These concerns are reflected in the introductory chapters of *The Rule of the Master* and the *Rule of St. Benedict.* On Augustine's concerns, for example, about religious communities who choose not to include work as part of their rhythm see Augustine, *De Opere monachorum*. For tensions between various communities in Provence, compare *The Life of St. Martin,* chapter X (connected with Tours) with *The Rule of the Four Fathers*, chapter 10 and *The Rule of St. Macarius,* chapter 8 (connected with Lérins) – both in Carmela Vircillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, trans. *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 25, 43; along with Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 82-90 and Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, The Fall of Rome, And the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 413. On concerns regarding spiritual marriage (*subinstroductae*), see for example, Elizabeth A. Clark, "John Chrysostom and the Subintroductae" in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 265-90; Susanna Elm '*Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 187-90.

10   Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages.* trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995 (originally published in 1961), 1.

11   For an example of this critique of hypocrisy in Cluny see Giles Constable, *The Abbey of Cluny: A Collection of Essays to Mark the Eleven-Hundredth Anniversary of its Foundation* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 76. For the dominance of Clunaic monasticism more generally see this volume along with Gert Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life.* trans. James D. Mixon (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2016), 50-88.

12   On canons regular see especially J. C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London: SPCK, 1950); and Evan B. Howard, "The Canons and Canonesses Regular and their Relevance to the Ministries of Large, Multi-Staff Congregations Today." available at https://spiritualityshoppe.org/wp-content/pdfs/The%20Canons%20and%20Canonesses%20Regular.pdf, accessed November 12, 2019.

13   Melville, *World*, 135.

14   Robert M. Stewart, *"De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam" The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Roma: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1991), 109-110.

15   Melville, *World,* 180-185. For the development of these expressions see pp. 89-185; C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (Essex, England: Longman-Pearson, 2001), 147-49; and Giles Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life," in Robert L. Benson et. al., eds., *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass:

Harvard University Press, 1982), 53-55. For further examples from this period, see for example, Michael Casey, trans., *Cistercians and Clunaics: St. Bernard's* Apologia *to Abbot William* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, 1970); Giles Constable and Bernard S. Smith, trans., *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus Qui Sunt in Aecclesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), esp. xiii; William of St. Thierry, *The Golden Epistle,* trans. Theodore Berkeley (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1980), esp. pp. 11-14.

16 Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 30. These debates about which religious order was the best would continue throughout the middle ages. See, for example, Kapar Elm, "Medicants and Humanists in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: The Problem of Justifying Humanistic Studies in the Mendicant Orders", in James D. Mixson, trans., *Religious Life between Jerusalem, the Desert, and the World: Selected Essays by Kaspar Elm* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 132-37.

17   Christopher Brooke, *The Monastic World: 1000-1300* (New York, NY: Random House Publishers, 1974), 126.

18   Melville, *World*, 184.

19 For relevant bibliography and reflections on the history of Franciscan poverty discussions in this era, see my "Who Should be Poor, How Poor, and Why? Reflections on a Franciscan Motif," available at https://spiritualityshoppe.org/who-should-be-poor/, accessed November 13, 2019.

20 Space does not permit my treatment of the rise of the laity during this period, but it is an important element in this whole shift. For the shifts in the experience and power of the medieval laity see, for example André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices,* translated by Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); M. Stewart, *"De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam" The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Roma: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1991), 91-134.

21 Kaspar Elm, "The Devotio Moderna and the New Piety between the Later Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era," in James D. Mixson, trans., *Religious Life between Jerusalem, the Desert, and the World: Selected Essays by Kaspar Elm* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 323.

22 John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), Kindle, loc 5402.

23   Helen Barr, "Wycliffite Representations of the Third Estate" in Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard, eds., *Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003), 213). For a popular portrait of the Lollards, see Arthur D. Bardswell, *The Poor Preachers: The Adventures of the First Lollards* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2011), 213. See also 188ff on their relationship to Franciscans, 202 regarding how poor labourers are trewe men, and 213 regarding the comparison of the virtuous ploughman and the corrupt friars.

24   See Rulman Merswin, "The Book of the Nine Rocks," in Rulman Merswin, *Mystical Writings of Rulman Merswin: The Four Beginning Years and the Book of the Nine Rocks* (no loc: Kessinger Publishing, n.d.). Pages in parentheses which follow refer to this book.

25   Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, loc 3610

26   Van Engen, Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life, loc 6979.

27 Kaspar Elm, "*Vita regularis sine regula*: The Meaning, Legal Status and Self-Understanding of Late-Medieval and Early-Modern Semi-Religious Life" in James D. Mixson, trans., *Religious Life between Jerusalem, the Desert, and the World: Selected Essays by Kaspar Elm* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 308-09.

28   John Van Engen, "Conversion and Conformity in the Early Fifteenth Century," in Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton, eds., *Conversion: Old Worlds and New* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2003), 44. He summarizes the shifts nicely on p. 46.

29   Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, William C. Creasy, trans. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1989), 45.

30 Hindmarsh, "What is Evangelicalism?"

31   Hindmarsh, *Spirit*, 251; see also "Contours of Evangelical Spirituality," 151.

32   See Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, John Vriend, trans., (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 117-118.

33   Waaijman, *Spirituality,* 213-14.

34   Evan B. Howard, "The Schools of Spirituality" in *Reading the Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals*, edited by James Goggin and Kyle Strobel and (Downers Grove, Ilinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 63-78.

35   Hindmarsh, "What is Evangelicalism?"

36   See, for brief overviews, David G. Bromley, "The Sociology of New Religious Movements," in Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Combridge University Pres, 2012), 13-28; Jonathan Christiansen, "Four Stages of Social Movements," EBSCO Research Starters, 2009. available at http://www.ebscohost.com/uploads/imported/thisTopic-dbTopic-1248.pdf.

37   Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes: 1868), 6-7.

38   Hindmarsh, "What is Evangelicalism?"

39   I have treated the theme of revivals more thoroughly in my *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2008), 403-437.