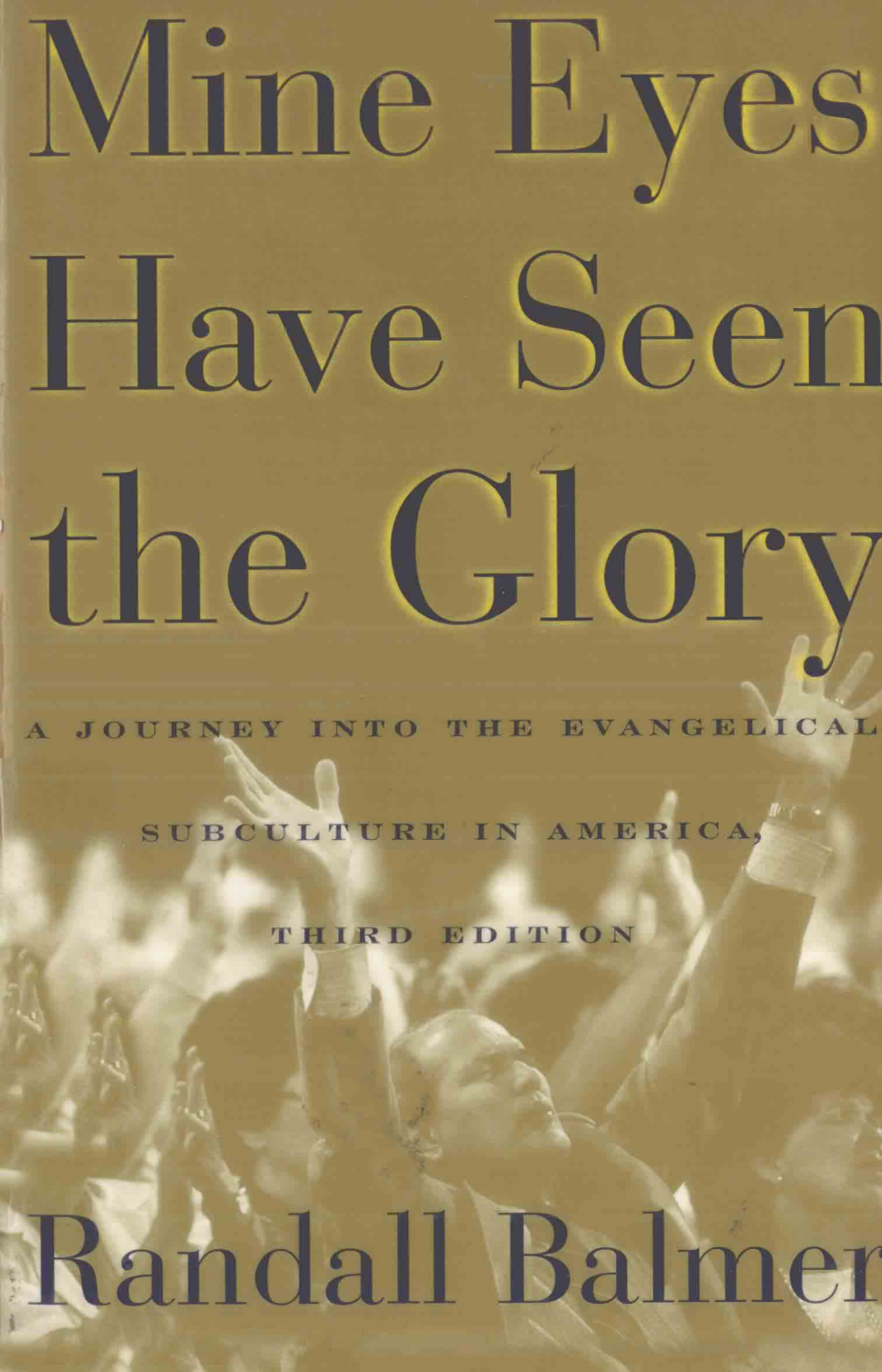
Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory

A JOURNEY INTO THE EVANGELICAL SUBCULTURE IN AMERICA, THIRD EDITION



Randall Balmer

SEEN THE GLORY

Evangelical Subculture in America

THIRD EDITION

Randall Balmer

OXFORD
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For Christian
who in time, I trust, will find his place
in the patchwork quilt of American evangelicalism

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

A GREAT DEAL HAS HAPPENED since the first edition of *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* descended quietly on bookstore shelves a decade ago. Mentors and colleagues had warned me that publishing this volume, which dared to combine ethnograghic observations with historical digressions, would be professional suicide. Thankfully, it didn't work out that way. The three-part PBS adaptation of this book won several awards, a wide and generally appreciative audience, and a near miss at the Emmy Awards. I have been gratified over the years to hear from readers who cared enough to write, and I have also learned that this modest little offering has been used not only in history, religion, sociology, and anthropology classrooms, but also by book clubs and writing workshops.

My father, who unwittingly cast a long shadow over these pages, couldn't decide whether to be proud or embarrassed by his son's musings on evangelicalism, a tradition that had so profoundly shaped both of us. He eventually settled on the former, not long before his passing on a cold February morning in 1997. In the brief time he knew her, my father took great delight in Catharine, the wonderful and extraordinary woman who is now my wife. He detected a profound faith beneath her eclectic and (for him) unconventional piety; she, in turn, helped me to

recognize his love and wisdom and compassion and to appreciate anew the subculture against which I had raged for most of my adult life.

It is, I suppose, a measure of my rapprochement with the evangelical subculture that earlier versions of the two new chapters in this edition first appeared in the pages of *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of evangelicalism. My editors there, especially Richard Kauffman, seem to understand my tortured relationship with the evangelical subculture, and they still give me a free hand—or perhaps, to shift the metaphor, lots of rope. One constant over the last decade has been my editor at Oxford. Cynthia A. Read and I have collaborated now on five publications, with another in the works. It remains, for me, a most satisfying and productive relationship.

Stowe, Vermont R. B.
September 1999

PREFACE

PERHAPS IT'S A natural consequence of having endured far too many sermons, lectures, and committee meetings, but I've developed a mortal fear of boring my audiences, whether in the classroom, on the lecture circuit, in a newspaper column, or on the pages of a book. I would rather pull up short than risk nudging my auditors into somnolence or, worse, indifference. An audience, after all, is a sacred trust, one that is all too easily (and far too frequently) violated by pedantry or pretension or mere self-indulgence. What is that old show business maxim? Always leave them asking for more.

The most gratifying responses I received to the first edition of *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* were those that suggested the book was too short. Some correspondents even offered their own ideas for its improvement. Why didn't you visit this place? I wish you had written about so-and-so. I could not, of course, honor every request, but the frequency of the comments emboldened me to offer three new chapters to this expanded edition, additional glimpses into evangelicalism that will, I hope, offer further insight into the most important social and religious movement in American history.

"Bible School," set at Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon, offers an analysis of the Bible institutes that cropped up on the American landscape in the middle decades of the twentieth century. "City Crusade" looks at an evangelistic rally in Central Park, featuring the redoubtable Billy Graham, but, consistent with my grass-roots approach to evangelicalism, the chapter has less to do with the evangelist himself than with the trappings of the crusade and my own responses to it.

A tiny newspaper notice alerted me to the fact that Church of the King, a charismatic congregation in Valdosta, Georgia, was making preparations to affiliate with the Episcopal Church. On Easter Sunday, 1990, I witnessed one of the most extraordinary and moving services I have ever seen. Although it may be presumptuous to suggest that I am a journalist, I have no doubt whatsoever that my journalistic colleagues who didn't bother to show up in Valdosta that day missed the most intriguing religious story of the year, perhaps the decade. The good people of Valdosta accepted me into their homes and into their lives not once, but twice—when I first wrote "Georgia Charismatics" and when I returned more than a year later with a television crew.

When I set out to write *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,* I decided not to include photographs with the text. The reason was selfish: I wanted to stretch my writing skills and tax my powers of description. I reasoned that a well-chosen word, to paraphrase John McPhee, is worth a thousand pictures. It seemed sensible to maintain that policy in the expanded edition, but curious readers can catch visual images of some of the people and places in this book through a three-part television documentary also entitled *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory.*

A number of people deserve recognition for their efforts and cooperation in this enterprise. My initial thanks go to Cynthia Read, my editor at Oxford University Press, who recognized the possibilities of translating this book into a documentary before I had written a single word. Joel Carpenter of Pew Charitable Trusts believed in the series from its inception; if money is the mother's milk of politics, that is no less true in television. Nick de Grunwald,

the executive producer, made a determined effort to see the project to fruition, despite many obstacles and not a few headaches.

The production crew itself developed an unusual camaraderie during seven weeks of shooting in the summer of 1991. When we gathered each night for dinner the conversation invariably turned to what we had witnessed in the preceeding hours—the slick, meticulously choreographed Sunday worship of a church in the Chicago suburbs, the guileless simplicity of a pentecostal service, the valiant struggle of African-American evangelicals in central Mississippi against the scourge of racism, the quiet testimony of a middle-aged musician and erstwhile hippie who persuaded all of us that he would have died of drug abuse had he not found Jesus. I am grateful to members of that crew, not only for their time, energy, and talent, but also for their friendship. Tim Watts, the sound recordist, and Chris Cox, the cameraman, were consummate professionals, working long hours to get it right. Chris's images are true and intimate, yet compassionate and understanding—precisely the balance I had sought in writing the book. Terry Todd, research consultant for the series, is ostensibly a graduate student, but I have come to regard him as a colleague. He has taught me, I fear, a great deal more than I have taught him. Through many weeks of travel and late nights in the edit suite at WTTW in Chicago, Julian Norridge, producer and director of the series, has become a friend as well as a collaborator.

Still, I hope all of those listed above will forgive me the arrogance of insisting that the television series is a companion to the book, not the other way around.

New York R. B.
July 1992

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A NUMBER OF PEOPLE contributed to this book in myriad ways. John Wilson, Yoma Ullman, Albert Raboteau, Mark Noll, and Frederick Borsch all provided advice and encouragement at the formative stages of this project; Don Haymes, Marvin Bergman, Sue Anne Morrow, and Stephen Stein led me to believe I might be on to something. Several colleagues at Columbia—Robert Somerville, Wayne Proudfoot, and Jack Hawley—gave an early draft of the manuscript the benefit of their scrutiny, as did Grant Wacker and Elena Garella. Peter Awn got me thinking about the meaning of modernity to fundamentalists, and Harry Stout suggested several interpretations which I have tried to develop in various places. Stephen Warner, a true sociologist, corrected some of the mistaken notions that fell from the pen of a shade-tree sociologist. Jack Fitzmier is both a good friend and a trenchant critic, and he manages somehow to keep one role from compromising the other.

Others contributed in ways less tangible but no less important. Countless late-night conversations with Jerome and Kay Iverson over the years have helped me understand the psychology of growing up fundamentalist. Also, I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents,

whose gentleness, faith, and piety I have always deemed worthy of emulation, even as I fell so abysmally short of those standards.

I know that many of the people I've just named will disagree with some, much, and perhaps all of this book, so I hasten to add the following disclaimer: I alone bear responsibility for what follows. Far too often in their history evangelicals have judged people guilty by association. That verdict, I emphasize, should not be rendered in this case.

Several others made possible the completion of this volume. A grant-in-aid from the American Council of Learned Societies helped to defray the costs of travel. The Columbia University Council for Research in the Humanities also provided a stipend, for which I am most grateful. Paul Schlotthauer and Cynthia Read made this a better manuscript than it would have been without their steady editorial hands.

The most timely encouragement, however, came from this latter source. After several fruitless approaches to foundations and publishers, I had virtually given up on my quixotic idea to travel around America and write about popular evangelicalism. Then an envelope arrived from Cynthia Read, religion editor at Oxford University Press. Responding to a letter I had written in the *New York Times*, she asked if I was working on any projects that Oxford might find interesting. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I dusted off an old prospectus, and soon thereafter, armed with a contract and fueled by a modest advance, I set off to explore the evangelical subculture in America.

At times, my absence as half-time homemaker necessitated complicated arrangements for the care of Christian and Andrew. On the morning of one of my final trips, I informed Christian, not yet three years old, that I would be leaving again for several days. "You know what, Daddy?" he said. "You sure do leave a lot."

Well, son, after two years of airports, rental cars, cheap motel rooms, and enough bad sermons to last a lifetime, I'm home.

New York R. B.
March 1989

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

FOR OUR PURPOSES, any discussion of the terms *evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic,* and *pentecostal* should steer a middle course between an extended, technical treatment and the kind of dismissive description suggested by Potter Stewart's attempt to define pornography a few years back. "I can't define it," the Supreme Court justice acknowledged, "but I know it when I see it."

The term *evangelical* has been bandied about a lot in recent years. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it simply: "Of or pertaining to the Gospel" of the New Testament, especially the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.[1] Historically, the term often refers to the theology of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, when Martin Luther "rediscovered the gospel" after its eclipse in the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages. Luther believed that Roman Catholic theology, particularly the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, had compromised the *evangel* or gospel, the "good news" of the New Testament, by substituting a theology of works (the notion that you effectively earn your salvation by good works, avoiding sin, and remaining in communion with the Church) for the New Testament theology of grace (God, through Jesus Christ, bestows a

saving grace without regard to human merit). For Luther, this discovery, based on his study of St. Paul's letters to the Galatians and to the Romans, liberated him from responsibility for his own salvation.

Ostensibly at least, modern-day evangelicals still subscribe to the rudiments of Luther's theology, although they rejected his ideas about polity and worship as too formal and "papist," and their theology emphasizes human volition in salvation far more than Luther would have countenanced. *Evangelical* has picked up other connotations in the four-and-one-half centuries since Luther challenged the papacy and launched the Protestant Reformation. Evangelicals generally believe that a spiritual rebirth, a "born-again" experience (which they derive from John 3) during which one acknowledges personal sinfulness and Christ's atonement, is necessary for salvation. While Luther certainly took the Scriptures seriously—they formed the basis for his attacks on Roman Catholic accretions to Christian theology—many successive evangelicals have insisted on a literalistic hermeneutic for understanding the Bible. In the nineteenth century, amidst challenges from Darwinism and the discipline of higher criticism emanating from Germany, this insistence on literalism led to an emphasis on the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Evangelicalism has also been characterized by a proselytizing zeal that, at various points in its history, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has erupted into large-scale revivals or spiritual awakenings.

Part of what defines an evangelical, however, transcends mere doctrine or belief; in greater or lesser degrees, evangelicals place a good deal of emphasis on spiritual piety. On May 24, 1738, John Wesley attended a religious gathering on Aldersgate Street in London. There, as someone read Luther's preface to his commentary on the book of Romans, Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed" and felt an assurance that Christ "had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."[2] Wesley's evangelical experience has served as a model for many American evangelicals. They, like him, point to some sudden, instantaneous, datable experience of grace, and they aspire to the kind of warmhearted piety so characteristic of Wesley's spiritual life.

In the years since the Iranian Revolution, the term *fundamentalist* has been applied to many religions to denote literalistic, moralistic, pietistic, and even militant impulses within the larger tradition. However, the word has its origins in American evangelicalism and derives from a series of pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals*, published early in the twentieth century to turn back the theological challenges of Protestant liberals or "modernists." These pamphlets, financed by California tycoons Lyman and Milton Stewart of Union Oil, set forth a series of doctrines their authors regarded as essential to evangelical Christianity. Those who subscribed to these doctrines, which included belief in the virgin birth of Jesus, the infallibility of the Bible, and Christ's imminent return to earth, became known as *fundamentalists*. Many within the fundamentalist camp, moreover, chose to separate from denominations that harbored modernist ideas, and their general suspicion of "worldliness" issued in strict codes of personal morality and taboos against such worldly evils as cosmetics, card-playing, dancing, movies, and alcohol.

Pentecostals, members of such denominations as the Church of God in Christ, the Assemblies of God, and Aimee Semple McPherson's International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, comprise another camp of evangelicals. Rising out of the holiness movement in the nineteenth century and the pentecostal revivals in the early years of the twentieth century, pentecostals believe that the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the early church in the book of Acts are available to modern-day believers. Pentecostals insist that a spiritual experience of baptism or filling by the Holy Spirit, often marked by *glossolalia* or "speaking in tongues," constitutes the mark of a true Christian. Other spiritual gifts include the word of knowledge (an ability to discern the needs and spiritual condition of another) and divine healing.

Like pentecostals, *charismatics* believe in the spiritual gifts (*charismata*), but this term generally refers to those affiliated with non-pentecostal denominations. Pat Robertson, a charismatic, is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination that generally shies away from dramatic, emotive outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Charismatics, moreover, have been active among the Episcopalians since 1959, and since the mid-1960s the charismatic move-

ment has taken root within Roman Catholicism and other denominations.

If all this sounds neat and compartmentalized, it isn't. Southern Baptists, for instance, squirm in the face of attempts to force them into categories. For years, evangelicals and fundamentalists have looked askance at pentecostals and charismatics. Many evangelicals resist the label fundamentalist. Jerry Falwell, on the other hand, styles himself a fundamentalist, not an evangelical, although he pulled off a minor miracle in the late 1970s and early 1980s by uniting hitherto diverse elements of American evangelicalism under the political banner of Moral Majority. I can think of several people in the pages that follow who would be embarrassed, even outraged, to appear in the same book as some of the others treated here.

Such is the unwieldly nature of evangelicalism in America. But its breadth and diversity, I think, only add to its allure. All of the terms above appear in the following pages; the context should make the meaning clear. Moreover, I shall use the word *evangelical* as an umbrella term to refer broadly to conservative Protestants—including fundamentalists, evangelicals, pentecostals, and charismatics—who insist on some sort of spiritual rebirth as a criterion for entering the kingdom of heaven, who often impose exacting behavioral standards on the faithful, and whose beliefs, institutions, and folkways comprise the evangelical subculture in America.[3]

NOTES

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), s.v. "Evangelical."

2. Quoted in Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, eds., *Conversions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 59.

3. I'd like to add here a parenthetical note about pronunciation. Almost everywhere I traveled, evangelicals pronounced the word *evangelical* with a short "*e*" (the first two syllables rhyme with "leaven" or, perhaps more appropriately, "heaven"). Almost all the people I encountered who could *not* be described as evangelicals pronounced the first syllable with a long "*e*" (*ee*-van-gel-i-cal; similar to the way Britons pronounce *economic*).

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