

the fault of Sullivan himself, who turned eighty-four just two months after Twitter was founded. Rather, the question is whether Sullivan's five-step method, the slow and precise reading of texts that he models, and the fine distinctions that he makes between the various levels of assent that magisterial documents demand, still have relevance in the age of "digital immediacy," to use a phrase of Anthony Godzieba. C. answers this question in the affirmative, with the caveat that "Sullivan's contribution will need to be supplemented and adapted" (183), but his answer would be more convincing if he traced out, even briefly, what those developments might look like.

This small weakness does not undermine C.'s basic point, namely, that Sullivan is "a theologian well suited to help address serious ecclesial problems in our day" (175). One can say likewise of this volume: it is well suited to serve as an aid to readers of magisterial documents, beginners and veterans alike.

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Evangelicalism in America. By Randall Balmer. Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2016. Pp. vii + 194. \$24.95.

The term "evangelical" is a somewhat slippery one for many Catholics in the United States. Those who live in the Upper Midwest have come to learn that many of their neighbors in Minneapolis prefer to be identified as members of the "evangelical and confessing church," rather than "Lutherans." Those who are addicted to marathon viewing of early morning television programming (especially on Sundays) have encountered any number of televangelists who invite their viewers to embrace what they take to be the singularly true "evangelical" understanding of Christ's message. Faithful readers of *America* and *Commonweal* magazines have discovered (possibly to their astonishment) that there even is a small—but very vocal—group of coreligionists who call themselves "Evangelical Catholics." The term "evangelical," then—like the terms "patriotic" and "spiritual"—appears to have become both ubiquitous and almost content-less for many Catholics, and for many others as well.

Balmer, good religious historian that he is, prefers to offer a quite specific set of qualifiers for defining the term: for B., "evangelical" refers to a set of quite "specialized characteristics" (ix) that emerged from the confluence of New England Puritanism, Scots-Irish Presbyterianism, and Continental Pietism. Those diverse geographical and denominational traditions shaped a quite specific spiritual and theological stream within the broader current of American Protestantism that emphasized three characteristics: the centrality of personal conversion as the cornerstone of genuine church membership (based on Jesus' own words in John 3); the quest for an affective, conscious piety that had to be "witnessed to" by all church members (best exemplified by the "born again" experience of millions of Americans in the successive "Great Awakenings" that have defined US history); and a profound suspicion of, and opposition to, wealth, worldliness, and ecclesiastical pretension.

Measured by those three “true marks,” televangelists peddling the “gospel of wealth” as well as Protestants and Catholics who talk about the physical sacrament of baptism as a “regeneration” are—by definition—excluded from the term “evangelical.” But while B. is clear that a significant number of people are excluded from the group, he also asserts that “evangelicalism in America is vast and internally diverse, drawing on everything from Restorationism to New Thought” (xv–xvi). He thus places inside the umbrella Fundamentalists, Neo-evangelicals, Holiness sects, Pentecostal Christians, and assorted others.

B. points to Roger Williams as one of the founding fathers of the evangelical tradition in America, one of whose core principles was a firm belief in a wall of separation between the “garden of the church and the wilderness of the world” (3). The term “wall of separation,” of course, came from a famous letter of Thomas Jefferson (and not from any of America’s founding documents, as many Americans seem to believe). But what Williams the separatist evangelical had in common with the Deist Jefferson was the belief that the wall dividing human governments from religious groups could never be high enough. From the evangelical side of that commitment emerged a passionate commitment to legal disestablishment, with the concurrent (equally passionate) commitment to “voluntaryism” (not to be confused with voluntarism). Voluntaryism was the belief that churches had to *attract* committed believers, and not rely on other ecclesial mechanisms (e.g., family memberships or state-supported tax incentives, etc.). Part of this voluntaristic tradition within American evangelicalism thus includes revivalism (as the one of preferred methods of membership growth), high tension standards of membership identity (in sharp distinction to the mores of popular culture), and a deep distrust of hierarchy and overly-formal worship.

B. is better positioned than most to write a book about what the last religious census labeled as the single largest religious grouping of believers in the USA, having spent the majority of his distinguished career examining various components of the vast evangelical empire in North America (including an award-winning made-for-PBS series entitled “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”).

Arguably the two most engaging chapters in an engaging book are his chapter on the deep ambivalence the American evangelical tradition displayed toward worldly success and financial display in chapter 4 (“An End to Unjust Inequality in America”), and an especially nuanced study of what journalists breathlessly termed “the new religious right” in chapter 6 (“A Pentecost of Politics”). The former chapter (subtitled “The Radical Tradition of Progressive Evangelicalism”) gives the lie to the easy equation of evangelicalism with the “gospel of wealth” message of a number of televangelists, while the latter uncouples the knee-jerk identification of evangelicals with the Moral Majority and the “Focus on the Family” lobbying movement.

This is not, finally, an academic book, but rather a book built on first-rate academic scholarship. For directors of parish discussion groups, professors teaching undergraduates about American religion looking for an accessible text, or pastors appointed to an ecumenical commission, I’d run out and buy this book.

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