

***The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality.* By Michael A. G. Haykin. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2007, xx + 120 pp., paper.**

Reviewed by Brian G. Najapfour

Michael A. G. Haykin, currently Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, is undoubtedly one of the authorities when it comes to the subject of Christian spirituality. He knows the subject very well both scripturally and historically, as evident in his book—*The God Who Draws Near*. Packed with biblical references, and sprinkled with illustrative stories and quotations from Reformed, Puritan and Evangelical writers, this small book is an outstanding primer to biblical spirituality.

In *The God Who Draws Near*, Haykin reclaims the word “spirituality” from people who have lost the essence of the term. He says that believers should not hesitate to employ this term, “for it reminds us of something very basic about the Christian life”—that Christians live by the Holy Spirit.¹ Etymologically, the word “spirituality” comes from the word “spirit” or “Spirit.” Thus, “[t]rue spirituality,” explains Haykin, “is intimately bound up with the Holy Spirit and his work” (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 4:6; 5:25; Eph. 2:18; Phil. 3:3; and 2 Tim. 1:14).²

Having established the basic thesis of the book,—that Christian living is absolutely inseparable from the Spirit,—Haykin enumerates nine essential aspects of biblical spirituality by which the Spirit draws us near to God. These nine elements, discussed chapter by chapter in the volume, are the following: the doctrine of the Trinity, knowledge of God and of ourselves, Christ, the cross, the Word, prayer, meditation, spiritual friendship, and mission. The inclusion of spiritual friendship here is fascinating, for many people do not look at it as an important area of Christian spirituality.

¹ Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2007), xviii-xix.

² *Ibid.*, xix.

Readers should realize, however, that the above list is not meant to be exhaustive. Haykin himself admits that other means of sanctifying grace can be added such as the Lord's Supper.³ But given the nature of the book as only an introduction to the subject, he decides to concentrate on those nine means. I wish, though, he included in the list the singing of psalms and hymns, a vital vehicle of piety.

For the sake of brevity, I will only consider the first of these elements which to me is the foundation of Christian spirituality: the doctrine of the Trinity, which states that there is only one God with three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Along with other trinitarian passages (like Titus 3:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; and Rev. 1:4-5), Haykin particularly picks Matthew 28:19 to support his understanding of the Trinity. He rightly observes in the words of Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-9121) that this verse is “the nearest approach to a formal announcement of the doctrine of the Trinity which is recorded from Our Lord's lips.”⁴ How is this doctrine then crucial to Christian spirituality? According to Haykin, this teaching must shape our spirituality. He laments that some evangelicals tend “to focus on Christ to the exclusion of the other persons of the Godhead.”⁵ Some Pentecostals and charismatics, on the other hand, pay too much attention to the Spirit, and unknowingly neglect the other persons of the Trinity. The point—our spirituality must be trinitarian. This means that we need to have a balanced view of God. We need to allow each of the divine persons to draw us near to God. *The God Who Draws Near*, by the grace of God, can help us do this. I therefore heartily recommend this work.

³ See *Ibid.*, 96, footnote 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6. The quote is taken from Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in his *Biblical Doctrines* (1929 ed.; repr. Edinburgh/Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.