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EVANGELICALISM IN HISTORY.

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IT is a commonplace of present-day discussions to say that the cause for the existence of differing schools of religious thought is primarily the existence of differing attitudes of mind. This explanation is perhaps more frequently offered by those dubbed Modernists, who in the words of Sabatier declare that "Modernism is not a new system or a new synthesis: it is an orientation." As a general statement of the influence guiding the Modernist movement, this is undoubtedly true: for the variety of opinions reflected say in the Girton Conference of 1921 and the same diversity of view which appears in the pages of *The Modern Churchman*, are a testimony to the fact that uniformity of conclusion is not the characteristic of the members of The Churchmen's Union. The distinguishing characteristic is a fearless freedom in the examination of all and sundry articles of the Faith, it is an attitude of mind which seeks always to know why it should believe, and, not content with the hope that some day certain difficulties may be resolved, it seeks here and now to bring all faith within the orbit of reasoned knowledge. This attitude of mind is not of course the exclusive possession of those termed Modernists, and the same caution must be kept in view when seeking for the attitude of mind which is characteristic of Evangelicals. Broadly speaking, however, the Evangelical is the man who in religion stands primarily for the inward and spiritual. In contrast with those who look mainly or primarily to organization, or to authority and law, in religion, he looks to the spiritual message rather than to the organization which is called into existence for conveying it. The Evangelical is in short the prophet, who sees the Invisible, and whose first object in life is to get other men to see the Invisible which is clear to himself. Other men may be more concerned with the organization which by form or ritual or symbol points to the same truth, others may become the priests to safeguard the continuance of the teaching of that truth, but the Evangelical, though he may value the rites and the priesthood, is never likely to mistake the symbol for the thing signified. A practical illustration of the two types is seen in the prophets and priests of the Old Testament, and they are well summed up in the Book of Amos. Amos, "an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit," sees through the mockery of a prosperous nation which thinks it can atone for moral laxity by feast days and solemn assemblies. "Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. . . . I will not turn away the punishment of Israel: because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy

for a pair of shoes. . . . (Amos v. 22, 23 : ii. 6). Amos might belittle himself on the ground that he was no prophet, neither a prophet's son, but the inspired herdsman of Tekoa nevertheless had a perception of the Invisible God and of what He needed from His people. Yet when he appeared at the sanctuary of Bethel and by his message condemned the insincerity and lack of reality in the religion practised there, it is the voice of the priest, the official voice of religion in the person of Amaziah, which condemns the herdsman prophet to silence.

This is not to infer that therefore the priest is always a danger to religion, or of no value thereto. The Old Testament itself would correct such an impression, for it is the priests of the Old Testament who collect and edit the Sacred Books in addition to ordering the ritual observance. But when all allowance has been made for the value of the priest, it is the prophet who sees into the heart of things and emphasizes that to which the priestly ritual points. The Levitical Law may hedge the life of the Jew with the minutest prescriptions of outward service and ritual, and in that way force an external consent to religious obligation, but it is the Book of Psalms which "turns away from all outward forms as empty and worthless, and is content with nothing short of the deepest union with God."¹

And this latter quotation from a former Master of Balliol may well sum up the Evangelical of the Old Testament.

Turning from the Old Testament to the New, it is noticeable again how the prophetic idea is summed up in a clearer and more perfect vision of God and His demands, than that possessed by other men. When John the Baptist proclaims the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven and teaches what is required from those who would enter the Kingdom, he is at once acclaimed as one of the prophets or even as the long-expected prophet foretold by Moses (St. John i. 21). So also when Our Lord Himself began His public ministry, the effect of His words was to impress men with His unusual knowledge and perception of God, and the result was reflected in the early designation of Him as "the prophet of Nazareth." And when "the days of His flesh" were ended, and His followers were compelled by force of circumstances to evolve a system of organization to carry on the work which their Master had left them to do, it is significant how important a place was occupied by the prophets. They rank next in importance to the apostles (1 Cor. xii. 28), and St. Paul goes so far as to declare that if Christ Himself is the corner-stone of the Christian Church, the prophets with the apostles are those who compose the foundation of it (Eph. ii. 20). It seems that before the flexible organization of the Church of the apostles was hardened into a more rigid system, the men who were looked upon as leaders with the Twelve were those who "had companied with the apostles all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us" (Acts i. 21, 22). These men were as cognizant of the teaching and practice of their Master as the apostles, and by their clear insight into the essential things of the Christian faith were

¹ Edw. Caird, *Evolution of Religion*, i. 389.

looked upon with veneration as leaders. It was a priority due to inspiration and not to office, a pre-eminence due to the clearer vision of the things of Christ. In short it was the evangelically-minded follower of Our Lord who, by the power of His Spirit and taught by His Spirit, took of the things of Christ as they were revealed to him, and received from men due acknowledgment as one who had a clearer vision of Christ than others.

Such were the Evangelical prototypes, and amongst them might also be placed St. Paul, and this, not simply because of the association of certain of his doctrines, such as Justification by Faith, with the modern Evangelical school of thought. It is rather because in contradistinction to the Lucan conception in Acts, of the Twelve as an Apostolic College directing the whole Church, St. Paul looks away from men to Christ, and finds the basis of his religious experience as well as his commission to preach in the fact that "it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. i. 15, 16). It was this revelation of the invisible which made him the power that he was. To sum up, therefore, what the Bible reveals of those to whom the Evangelicals trace their spiritual ancestry, their work was to call their contemporaries to spiritual realities, to proclaim the nearness of God and the accessibility of Christ, to teach on the one hand the holiness of God and on the other the redemption of man. In the manifold activities of these Evangelical spiritual forefathers of the Old and New Testaments, their work usually brought them into disfavour with those who represented the more official side of religion, and yet in the simpler and clearer atmosphere of apostolic and sub-apostolic days the prophets have due recognition as those who have a more open vision of God than other men.¹

Now if what has been said so far describes with accuracy those to whom Evangelicals look as the fount of their being, it can be seen that the teaching of such men and the experiences with which they met as a result of their teaching, have been repeated time and again from Biblical days down to our own. Some will see the successors of primitive Evangelicals in those to whom has been given the title of Mystics, and will find in men such as Cynewulf in the eighth century or Richard Rolle of the fourteenth century, links with the past. Such a claim could not be pressed very far, but the lives of those who are described as Mystics are at all events a protest against a mere official type of religion, and they do point to the essential truth of spirituality in religion and in life, which is one of the main characteristics of Evangelicalism.

It lies outside the scope of this essay to mention any but a few of those who, whether individually or as members of particular societies, form links in the chain which connects Evangelicals with the remote past. But in mentioning even a few of the more important, it should be borne in mind that even in the so-called Dark Ages there were always to be found some men who were carrying the light of God's truth in the midst of an age of spiritual decline.

¹ This latter point can be seen in *The Didache*, which most scholars consider to be an account of the position of the prophet in sub-apostolic days.

There were men like Peter de Bruys who lived in Dauphiny and Provence in the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, who, fanatical in his rejection of all discipline, ritual, and tradition, in favour of the living spirit, was at least a protest against the deadness of a Church which seemed void of spirituality. There were the "Poor men of Lyons" who came into prominence in the last few years of the twelfth century. Followers of Peter Valdez, who had secured a translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue, they wandered about the south of France preaching repentance and the need for imitating apostolic practice. They may have had extreme social views for their day, but were near akin to Evangelical tradition in their emphasis upon the Bible and in their rejection of priestly ministrations and prayers for the dead.

Or again one may find in men like Francis of Assisi, with his simple mysticism, his cheerfulness of life, his missionary enthusiasm and his straightforward, if sometimes emotional, method of preaching, the spirit for which Evangelicals have usually stood.

In our own country there follows in chronological order the "Evangelical Doctor" John Wycliffe. In his case the Evangelical type becomes more clearly defined because it is a more decided reaction against the priestly type which, as reflected in the growing corruptness of the whole ecclesiastical organization, caused Wycliffe to go to the extreme of rejecting Episcopacy as a distinct order in the Church. But the Evangelical note is sounded in his perception of the spiritual through the Bible, which caused him to enunciate the doctrine that Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation. It was an accurate appreciation of Wycliffe's position which led to his being called "the morning star of the Reformation," because in spite of the fact that he differed from the sixteenth-century Reformers in some material points, he at all events summed up in himself two of the cardinal features of the Reformation, which were a revolt against a repressive priesthood, and an appeal to the Bible to find a living faith.

It is not surprising therefore that the influence of Wycliffe lived on, and became one of the factors of the Reformation in Germany and England. There has been some attempt to belittle the force of Wycliffe's influence both in Bohemia and in our own country, but closer research has only tended to re-affirm what after all the evolution of history itself shows, that even in the darkest days there have been men who saw the light and that men of the rank and file were feeling after spiritual truths which were made clear by leaders such as Wycliffe. Lindsay, for instance, in his *History of the Reformation*, I, 152, refers to an Evangelical type of religion amongst the artisans of Augsburg, Nurnberg, Strassburg and other parts of Germany, as far back as the closing years of the thirteenth century.

"They professed a simple evangelical creed: they offered a passive resistance to the hierarchical and priestly pretensions of the clergy: they were careful to educate their children in schools which they supported: they had vernacular translations of the Scriptures, and committed large portions to memory: they conducted their religious service in the vernacular, and it was

one of the accusations made against them that they alleged that the Word of God was as profitable when read in the vernacular as when studied in Latin."

The same writer refers (I, 139) to "the silent spread of a quiet, sincere, but non-ecclesiastical religion" in the last decades of the fifteenth and the earlier decades of the sixteenth century.

"Historians usually say nothing about this movement, and it is only a minute study of the town chronicles and of the records of provincial and municipal legislation that reveals its power and extent. It has always been recognized that Luther's father was a man of a deeply religious turn of mind, although he commonly despised the clergy, and thought that most monks were rogues or fools: but what is not recognized is that in this he represented thousands of quiet and pious Germans in all classes of society. We find traces of the silent, widespread movement in the ecclesiastical legislation of German princes, in the police regulations, and in the provisions for the support of the poor among the burghers: in the constitutions and practices of the confraternities among the lower classes, and especially among the artisans of the towns: and in the numerous translations of the Vulgate into the vernacular."

What Lindsay says of the Germany of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries is most probably true of the England of the same period, and especially in the Eastern counties where an Evangelical type of piety has usually been found. And it is in this neighbourhood that the influence of Wycliffe lived on to merge into the wider stream of influences which brought about the Reformation in England.

The more immediate point for consideration however is to note the widespread existence of a type of religion amongst the artisans of Germany and in lesser degree perhaps in England, which is alien to the existing official religion, and which, despairing of spiritual vision in the established priestly order, looked to the Bible, and found there the spiritual solace which it needed. The existence of such a widespread feeling gives the answer to several queries. It explains amongst other things why the Reformation came so easily in England. The Tudors were powerful sovereigns, but they were powerful because they did what the nation wished them to do; it was not a power secured in opposition to the desires of the people, but a power accruing to them because they did what the nation desired. The Tudors, strong as they were, could not have cut the connection with the Pope had not the people of England wished it; the Tudors, great as they were, could not have set in motion the series of statutes which turned the eyes of England from Rome to Canterbury, had it not been with the approbation of the people of England. Part of that approbation may have been due to the strong feeling of antipathy against a Church which had become increasingly anti-national since the thirteenth century, but stronger than this was the deep-seated desire for a spiritual religion, a desire always latent, but strongly developed in certain parts of the country, through the influence of Wycliffe and his followers.

So again with regard to Germany. Opinions may be divided as to the exact measure of influence which Wycliffe exercised there. Certain it is that his writings were used by John Huss the Bohemian Reformer and that in this way his influence was felt in Germany.

But the influence of Wycliffe or Huss or Luther was more informative than creative. The last-named, for instance, owes his pre-eminence not to the fact that he discovered or re-discovered for his fellow-men certain great truths which the official Church had neglected since the days of Augustine. The mere mention of Staupitz, who pointed Luther to the teaching of Justification by Faith, is sufficient to disprove this. The influence of Luther—just as of Wycliffe or Huss—was due to the fact that there was a large body of men waiting for his message; that scattered throughout the country were many men for whom he made articulate that for which their souls were craving. Luther did not create or even begin the Reformation, he was rather the strong man who voiced the feelings of others, the leader for whom an army was already in being. It is merely one more illustration of the truth seen from the days of John the Baptist down to our own day, that when the voice of God speaks through a prophet, the hearts of people at once respond. This is the measure of the greatness of the Reformers, and this is why they rank high in the Evangelical succession. It may be a Luther or Calvin, a Cranmer or a John Knox, a Ridley or a Latimer, their great work was to break through the barrier of ecclesiasticism, and to bring the individual into direct contact with Christ. They pierced the cloud of subtleties which tended to remove God out of their ken, and replaced them with the simplicity which left men face to face with their Maker. But they did it for a people who were waiting for them to do it, because deep-seated in the hearts of most men then, as at all times, was the longing for the Invisible, the desire for the open vision of God, and a craving to know how sinful man may draw near to his Creator.

So again with the English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The one-sided criticisms which were recorded of the Puritans until the early part of the nineteenth century are summed up in the caricature of Cromwell in Sir Walter Scott's *Woodstock*. The Puritans had their limitations undoubtedly, but their defects were the result of an undue reaction against a formalism and ecclesiasticism which tended to strangle the spiritual. The true spirit of the movement in the latter half of the sixteenth century was the fear of a return to the pre-Reformation system which placed the Church between man and God; and it was only the broad teaching of Hooker on the implied Divine sanction in all forms of government in Church and State, which rallied the more moderate Puritans to a recognition of Episcopacy and to Church ceremonies. The seventeenth-century Puritan spirit was more widely diffused in so far that it was in strong opposition to the reciprocating cries of the Divine Right of Kings and Divine Right of Bishops. It was no mere accident which made the Puritans the champions of liberty in both Church and State, it was the logical reaction against principles which tended to crush out individuality, and to make the individual a mere puppet in a scheme ordered by God's vicegerents the King and his politico-religious advisers the Bishops. It was no mere opposition to Bishops that made Falkland and the members of the Long

Parliament at one in their desire for Church reforms that would reduce the Bishops to a position more in accord with primitive ideas ; it was rather the Puritan spirit now deeply rooted in the nation which on the one hand wished to confine the Bishops strictly to their ecclesiastical duties, and with it to recover the primitive simplicity of worship which was the characteristic of early Christianity. This is not the place to attempt to discriminate between the various bodies who are loosely grouped under the term Puritan, or to show how one section like the Presbyterians tended to reproduce the worst faults of the medieval Papal system. It is sufficient to know that men such as Cromwell were fully aware of the lack of liberty in the Presbyterian organization, and the gradual *rapprochement* of Presbyterianism with proscribed Anglicanism during the Commonwealth is sufficient indication of where it felt its hopes lay.

But underneath all the variations of Puritanism are to be found, first and foremost, reliance on the Bible, and the application of it to daily life, and also a belief in God's nearness and approachableness. Mystics, stern moralists, men of practical wisdom, the Puritans were all these, and they learned it all from the Bible, which was in very truth for them the word of God. Men will no doubt always differ in the estimate they place upon the Puritans, and many would claim the fruits of their work without acknowledging affinity with them. It is enough to know that in an age which attempted to enforce religious uniformity and to repress individual spiritual experiences by the undue exaltation of ecclesiasticism, it was the Puritans who called men to spiritual realities and emphasized again the direct individual contact with God. The true note of Evangelical succession is found at least there.

This brings us to those who are credited with what is known as the Evangelical Revival and who in consequence are familiarly known as Evangelicals. The present generation living in the years following the world upheaval of 1914-18 is in a peculiarly favourable position to appreciate the work done by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. We of the present day are very conscious of the prevailing apathy and sluggishness of England towards religious matters, and are apt to attribute it to a natural reaction from the high spiritual and emotional strain of the years of the war. This at bottom seems the natural reason for the general slackness noticeable in the early years of the eighteenth century, even though to some historians it seems the grossest anthropomorphism to say so. But the prevailing note is contained in the dictum of Alexander Pope that "all that is, ought to be," and in his conception that enthusiasm was only a form of madness. The outlook of the Whig politicians of the day also contributed to the spread of this demoralizing atmosphere. Their object was to ensure the Hanoverian succession and to prevent the return of the Stuarts, and this was to be secured by the avoidance of war abroad, by the development of trade, and by a general concentration upon material success. Historians may acclaim this policy as the means by which England was furnished with the funds to carry her through the wars

which came later in the century, but the policy of "letting sleeping dogs lie," of which Walpole was the exponent, was hardly calculated to stimulate high moral sentiments; whilst the cynicism which was characteristic of the Whig minister tended inevitably to the low tone of public morality. So Lord Hervey tells us that the ordinary man "grew ashamed to talk of right and wrong," whilst the Tory Bolingbroke in his *Patriot King* refers to his political opponents as men who "contend that it is not enough to be vicious by practice and habit, but that it is necessary to be so by principle." This latter quotation is of course open to the charge of being the exaggeration of a political partisan, but the balanced judgment of Lecky gives as his conclusion at all events that "the fault of the time was not so much the amount of vice as the defect of virtue, the general depression of motives, the unusual absence of unselfish and disinterested action." When those in authority held themselves up as apostles of the commonplace, and when purity and high motives were frowned upon, it is not to be wondered at that the general standard of morality should decline and that a spiritual famine should ensue. The result can be traced in the rationalism of the Church to which Butler's *Analogy* bears witness,¹ and to the Deism which followed in its train, and it can be seen in the low conception of duty which animated bishops and clergy. Something of this latter was of course a relic of the past and was only intensified by the spirit of the age. The purely intellectual slackness, however, was shaken ere long, and a firm foundation re-established by the work of men like Berkeley and Newton, but the spiritual and moral deadness still remained. The elder Pitt did something to purify and elevate political life, whilst George III accomplished a great deal in raising the tone of fashionable life, but what breathed a new spirit into England generally was the movement known as the Evangelical Revival. Whether it was the Wesleys and Whitfield in the earlier stages of the Revival or the Venns and Fletcher and Simeon and many others in the later stages, the whole were marked by similar features. The prevailing low level of morality made them realize the need for conversion: and the preaching of the Atonement with its corollary, Justification by Faith, was the central point in their message. The natural sequel was the emphasis upon the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, and the great stress laid upon the work of the Holy Spirit was something of a novelty even for the leading Churchmen of that day.² And yet, however minutely one might go on to examine the teaching of the Evangelical Revival, the simple fact stands out that there is no new truth enunciated in the Revival. Rather there is emphasized by one and all the all-sufficiency of Christ for the needs

¹ Cf. Butler's well-known statement: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but it is now at length discovered to be fictitious: and accordingly they treat it as if . . . nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule."

² Bishop Butler, for instance, said to John Wesley: "Sir, this pretending to extraordinary revelation and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing—a very horrid thing."

of men, by intense and earnest preaching men are brought face to face with Christ as a living Saviour to change their lives and to assure them of heaven. Whether we turn to Whitfield preaching to the 20,000 Bristol miners so that the tears ran down their cheeks, or whether we look at the work of a man like Daniel Wilson at Islington in the later stages of the Revival, the central truth they both proclaim is nothing new. But it is an old truth proclaimed with a new conviction and intense devotion ; it is the old call to repentance, and the old promise of pardon, but set forth with a new spirit that changed the life of England. The earlier movement might be frowned upon by the ecclesiastical authorities with the ultimate result of the secession of the Wesleyans from the Established Church, and the later movement might be regarded with suspicion and animadversion by those who, like Lord Melbourne, thought it " a pretty pass things are coming to if religion is to interfere with our private life." Yet the influence of the movement was irresistible. Church Missionary Society, Religious Tract Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, Sunday Schools, Day Schools, building of new churches, these and such-like spelled out the influence on the one hand. The abolition of slavery, the initiation of the Factory Acts, the care for Child Welfare and other similar movements illustrate it in the social sphere. It is no exaggeration to assert that whatever of living power for good there was in the nineteenth century in Church or State, in politics or literature, it owed its existence consciously or unconsciously to the influence of the Evangelical Revival.

To sum up this admittedly imperfect sketch of some of those to whom Evangelicals look as their spiritual forbears, the outstanding characteristics seem to be these. They laid emphasis upon the reality of God, and in particular the revelation of Him by Christ. They see the possibility of simple man being brought into union and fellowship with his Maker by the power of Christ and His atoning sacrifice. They look to the Bible as the repository of the revelation of the will of God for man and place a reliance upon it which they will not give to priest or Church ; and as a consequence they are frowned upon by ecclesiastical authorities, and in turn become themselves suspicious of authorities. Sometimes they are gloomy, like the extreme Puritans, as those for whom the sinfulness of human nature has made life a perpetual suspicion of what that nature may do ; more often they are joyous with a deep-seated exultation which knows that the limitations of human nature are fully met by the redemptive influences of Christ, and they joy in God through whom they have received the atonement. Practical, and usually unknowing that they are mystics, they know at all events that their " life is hid with Christ in God," and from this hidden source, by their lives and teaching, they call their generation back to God. The Evangelical is in short the prophet of the Church.