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EVANGEL, EVANGELICALS AND EVANGELICALISM

A history of Evangelicalism has long been needed and David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Unwin Hyman, 1989, 364 + xi pp, Hard Back £35, Soft Back £11-95) sketches out the territory well. The task, not an easy one, is critical for our understanding of the modern church, illustrating for example that phenomenon - seen in other aspects of church history - whereby a *movement* becomes a *party* which in turn begets a *partisanship*, which too easily unchurches those not wholly sharing a certain doctrine, outlook or experience.

The movement by the beginning of the nineteenth century was successful in virtually capturing the whole of orthodox dissent. However, by the end of that century, notwithstanding the founding of the National Council of the *Evangelical Free Churches* in 1896 and the Federal Council of the *Evangelical Free Churches* in 1919 (an aspect of the story curiously omitted by Dr Bebbington), the assumption that

all orthodox dissenters espoused evangelical teaching had ceased to be valid. The Baptist Union, probably the most evangelical of the Free Churches, in 1873 dropped from its constitution an earlier reference to 'sentiments usually denominated evangelical' in favour of the freedom of member churches 'to interpret and administer the laws of Christ'. The bogey apparently was connexionalism rather than liberalism.

In the twentieth century the boundaries of evangelicalism have become much more difficult to define, as indicated by the desire of many to add qualifying adjectives. Thus some add the designation conservative, whilst others more recently, following the North American Mennonites, have found a new affection for the contrasting epithet, radical, to define the distinctiveness of their discipleship.

For Dr Bebbington, the four marks of Evangelicalism are conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. Bible, cross and conversion are perhaps self-evident; activism draws attention to the convert's immediate commitment to evangelism and other aspects of Christian mission. 'Action', wrote Hannah More, 'is the life of virtue and the world is the theatre of action.' (p.12) The account here is particularly valuable for being defiantly and properly *British*. Dr Bebbington's exile in Stirling and understanding of the Celtic context will not be content with that partial analysis which confines itself to or attempts a separation of the *English* story. This is an important strength of this volume, which clearly indicates both the continuities that link Evangelicalism to an earlier Puritanism and yet the discontinuities between these two manifestations of reformed religion.

This discontinuity focuses in a changed understanding of assurance. The English puritans, in pressing the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, both created doubts about an individual's ultimate destiny and let a doctrine of works - proving your election - in through the back door of Christian experience. The doctrine among evangelicals was far more robust, claims Dr Bebbington, citing Charles Wesley's lines: 'My God I know, I feel Thee mine.' (p.45) This new assurance freed evangelicals from debilitating anxieties and gave birth to evangelical activism (p.74).

Having reinforced the importance of Continental Pietism for the birth of Evangelicalism, Dr Bebbington is at pains to indicate how Enlightenment thinking affected the shape of Evangelical apologetics, not least through the influence of John Locke via Jonathan Edwards. Thus he concludes that the emergence of Evangelicalism 'was itself an expression of the age of reason', 'permeated by Enlightenment influences' (pp.53/57). In particular, this gave rise to that 'optimism of grace' characteristic of early Methodism (p.60), and made its impact on old dissent through the emergence of Moderate Calvinism and the various agencies for Christian action that it spawned.

Attention is given to the revival of Calvinism under the Haldane brothers to whom may be attributed the origins of that tougher, less gentle, Evangelicalism which espouses an exclusive rather than a co-operative dogmatism and can perhaps for the first time be properly called fundamentalist, in contrast to the more open views of Biblical inspiration hitherto prevailing amongst Evangelicals. This came to a head in the Apocrypha controversy which split the Bible Society in the late 1820s.

Although initially much affected by the Haldanes, Henry Drummond and Edward Irving soon came to champion a millenarian pentecostalism decidedly Arminian in outlook. This group was known either by the name of Drummond's country seat, Albury Park, where its conferences were held, or by its periodical, *The Morning Watch*. David Newsome has emphasised their importance in provoking, by way of *reaction*, greater emphasis upon strictly church principles by other evangelicals of the Wilberforce-Simeon school, which he sees as one stream of pre-Tractarian

consciousness, with its consequent damaging of the relationship between Evangelical Churchmanship and Evangelical Dissent. Bebbington, by contrast, shows how *directly* Irving and his like themselves came to be concerned with issues of ecclesiology, liturgy and priestly ministry, and thus to crave a higher churchmanship.

The linkages are fascinating. Irving's assistant, A. J. Scott, later became the first Principal of Owen's College, the Professor Scott who, espousing Maurician theology, was the subject of critical comment by Spurgeon as leading some young ministers on the theological downgrade. Thus, from the crisis years of the late 1820s and early 1830s, Liberalism (no less than Tractarianism) became the *bête noire* of Evangelicalism, at least in its Anglican form. Again this led to clashes with Evangelical dissent, for example over the founding of University College London, in large part the outcome of a successful coalition between Evangelical Dissenters and Liberal interest groups. Church and Chapel also clashed, as was to be expected, on the issue of establishment - but at least that division produced an evangelical witness within the two main parties of English political life, though at the expense of a more cohesive impact upon the political scene. Both groups of Evangelicals, however, became increasingly hostile to that other threat to evangelical values - the Roman Catholic Church - and in due course that Catholicism within the English Church, in part at least parented by some within its own family.

Dr Bebbington identifies the 1850s as the high point of evangelical ascendancy in the Anglican Church with an Evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury, six Evangelical elevations to the episcopal bench between 1856 and 1860, and with 6,500 Evangelical clergy by 1853, well over a third of the whole. At the end of that decade, however, he detects a crucial change in evangelical outreach. Whereas up until 1859, there had been a series of spontaneous revivals, from 1859-60 onwards, other than in the Celtic periphery, revivals had to be 'organised', though he fairly argues that revivalism was always in tension with the more patient outreach of home mission which continued throughout the century from the earlier years of itinerancy.

As the century progressed, so home mission, as it became more familiar with the plight of the poor, was compelled to broaden its programme of compassionate action. Political involvement, though perhaps at first reluctant, nevertheless soon engaged Evangelical consciences as part of the ongoing battle with sin, defined as anything that obstructed a gospel ministry, or posed as a substitute for it, or infringed the high standards of behaviour articulated in the New Testament. This led to campaigns against sexual wrong-doing, drunkenness and sabbath breaking.

At the opposite extreme to sin was holiness. Whilst the founding of the Evangelical Alliance and its early history receive only passing treatment, Keswick and holiness teaching secure a whole chapter. Like the earlier Irving movement and perhaps not surprisingly in view of the locale that gave the movement its name, Keswick is identified as the fruit of the impact of Romanticism upon religious life. This explanation's connections may need rather more spelling out, especially as the pattern Dr Bebbington discerns in the development of Evangelicalism is almost an alternating response to rationalism (Enlightenment) and sensibility (Romanticism in the earlier period and the Modernism of the Bloomsbury group later on).

'Walking Apart', the sixth chapter, analyses the rift between Conservative and Liberal Evangelicals. Clearly the debates owed much to their American counterparts, yet the context and content of events in England was different. Dr Bebbington challenges the notion that the liberals were the innovators, pointing out the distance between the position adopted by the Conservatives and historic Evangelicalism.

Externally, the more dogmatic conservatism was a reaction to advances in Biblical criticism and the lax liberal theology that seemed all too often to arise from it. Internally, it was a fruit of the widespread adoption of the pessimistic futurism

of premillennialism, especially when associated with that dispensationalism of Brethren origins which was widely circulated with the publication of the Schofield Reference Bible. One grave consequence was an encouragement of a disengaged pietism that, whilst overtly disparaging political involvement, in fact served to support the status quo of the established order. This was particularly true of Anglican Evangelicals. Dr Bebbington properly draws attention to the bifocal concern of such a leader as Campbell Morgan who at Westminster Chapel was quite prepared, amongst his regular programme of biblical expositions, to devote a sermon at the time of the LCC election in 1919 'to the need for regulation of the drainage, atmosphere, smoke and traffic of the capital' (pp.211-2). It was the next generation of evangelical leaders that initiated the Great Reversal: 'a repudiation by Evangelicals of their earlier engagement with social issues' (p.214) which was to confine Evangelical usefulness from the 1920s to the 1960s: again, it is argued, the fruit of the dominance of pre-millennial teaching.

Fortunately, however, Britain was not to witness the bitterness of the fundamentalism controversies of the U.S.A., though some attempts to move in a like direction were made, in response to the claims of science, the development of 'modern' theology, and the responses made by some to the demands of changing secular culture. A controversy over a staff appointment at Didsbury College led to the foundation of the Wesley Bible Union just before the First World War. In 1922 the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society split from the Church Missionary Society over issues relating to Biblical authority.

Even the orthodoxy of teaching at Keswick was challenged. James Mountain, minister of St John's Free Church in Tunbridge Wells, challenged the addresses of his fellow Baptists, F. C. Spurr and Charles Brown at the 1920 Convention. Mountain, also worried by proposals for Free Church Federation, at the same time established the Baptist Bible Union. This was reconstructed in 1923 as the Bible Baptist Union, reacting strongly to T. R. Glover's nomination as Vice-President of the Baptist Union. Two years later the organisation became the non-denominational Believers' Bible Union (pp.217-20), lasting until 1928, largely through the backing of John Bolton, Leicester manufacturer of 'Chilprufe' children's wear. That such organisations failed to secure party support on the American scale, Dr Bebbington attributes to the eirenic and wise moderation of mainstream Evangelical leaders.

'The Spirit Poured Out', mainly concerned with the impact of the Charismatic Movement and Restorationism, begins chronologically with an account of Frank Buckman's undogmatic Oxford Group Movement, which after the Second World War took the title of Moral Rearmament. Many evangelicals became involved in the movement which helped them to re-examine old inhibitions and to re-discover something of the nature of community commitment built on the Movement's four absolutes: absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. This is seen in part as an anticipation of the charismatic renewal of the 1960s, as both movements represented an accommodation of Evangelicalism to changing cultural outlooks (pp.240-1).

An Anglican Report of 1981 labelled Charismatic Renewal 'a form of Christianised existentialism', whilst Brian Martin saw it as 'the evangelical answer to mystical ecstasy' (p.233). New hymnody, the rediscovery of healing, speaking in tongues and prophecy were all manifestations of the movement. In contrast to the reformed exaltation of reason, the charismatics emphasised inspiration, experience and the direct reception of divine dictates. Indeed, the movement's lack of interest in theological issues even estranged some of its top leadership. The movement tended to be careless of ecclesiastical, and especially denominational, structures, which helped it to spawn a new kind of ecumenism. However, at least in its restorationist form, the origins of which are seen as predating charismatic renewal itself, it erected its own rigid structures of authority which impinged on ordinary members in the

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form of heavily directive 'shepherding' and on the leadership in submission to the authority of apostles (travelling teachers with translocal responsibilities), the source of whose authority is less than clear. This has provoked the gravest concern amongst other Evangelicals. More generally charismatic renewal has brought new life to previously moribund congregations, but has also contributed a new chapter to the history of evangelical schisms.

Granted the breadth of scholarship that lies behind this work, it is perhaps churlish to complain of omissions. I would have liked more on: working-class evangelicalism - city missions outside the capital, the Salvation Army, the Church Army and the like; the interplay between home and overseas missions; the church growth movement; ethnic evangelicalism; the denominationalism of undenominational evangelicalism and its relationship to Brethrenism; and the work of the Evangelical Alliance, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship.

The book's last chapter bears the optimistic title, 'Into a Broad Place', words designed to send shivers down the backbone of that exclusive evangelicalism that has impinged upon the story from time to time. Numerical strength, coupled with a restoration of confidence in its own academic theology, seem once more to have bred a confidence which allows evangelical leadership to exercise a more expansive vision, or perhaps rather to recover the best holistic emphases of the past, in which neither rationalism nor sensibility are allowed to exclude the other, and in which evangelicals, aware of the ever-present dangers of sectarianism, commit themselves to work with all other Christians to serve the Kingdom of God. Hopefully the adjectives ecumenical and evangelical need no longer be seen as antagonistic, but may be combined in co-operative commitment, which is another way of recognising that the ecumenical movement is in no small way the fruit of the evangelical revival.

Piero Guicciardini (1808-1886): un riformatore religioso nell'Europa dell'ottocento, Biblioteca Storica Toscana, 2nd series, Vol.11, ed. Lorenza Giorgi and Massimo Rubboli, Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1988, viii + 200pp. No price given. ISBN 88 222 3586 X.

The record of the proceedings of a conference held in 1986 on the centenary of the death of an Italian count associated with the Brethren holds greater interest than might at first appear. Guicciardini, as eight articles in Italian reveal, was an important figure. A Florentine aristocrat converted to Evangelicalism in 1836, he was exiled in 1851 to England, where he was baptised at Barnstaple by the so-called Plymouth Brethren. He returned to promote the Lord's work in Italy, at the same time assembling a magnificent collection of material relating to the abortive Italian Reformation. Articles in English explain something of his context. Peter Lineham charts the place of Bible distribution in the growth of Italian Protestantism. Timothy Stunt writes about Guicciardini's contacts in England and about his friend T. P. Rossetti (a cousin of Dante Gabriel), who was converted while exiled in England but remained more closely concerned with the political *risorgimento*. Other articles pay less attention to Italy. Roy Coad describes some English Brethren businessmen. Harold Rowdon uses historical analysis to identify the nature of Brethren identity, locating it (challengingly for Baptists) in the supremacy of scripture alone. And, extremely usefully, David Brady lists the holdings of the Christian Brethren archive begun a decade ago at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. It aspires to assemble material from the Brethren movement worldwide. Already its holdings of papers of individual Brethren are extensive. Historians of the Baptists will need to consult this important collection. They may even discover items that can be added to its shelves.

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