

The Essentials of Evangelicalism.

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THE essentials of Evangelicalism ; essentials — do we mean thereby a set of shibboleths, the precise and accurate pronounciation of which shall alone admit to the evangelical body, or do we mean the fundamental doctrines and practices without which Evangelicalism is untrue to its name?

Evangelicalism—do we mean thereby a party in the Church—whether great or small, it matters not, so long as it be rigidly exclusive, fighting in ardent controversy for its own existence, and, if possible, for the downfall of all that is opposed to it—or do we mean a school of thought, somewhat undefined in extent, which is mainly concerned that the truths for which it stands shall be impressed upon the life of the Church? In the minds of some adherents and some opponents and the vaguer mind of the man in the street, the former answer in each case sometimes seems the right one ; but it is not too much to say that in the real interests of both Evangelicalism and the Church at large, Evangelicals must make it universally apparent that they stand for great principles which are vital to the Church's well-being, and that they exist for no other purpose, as a school of thought, than to make those principles a common possession, in their rightful emphasis, of the whole Church. It is supposed to be a maxim of the political world that he who serves his country best, best serves his party ; it is certainly true in regions ecclesiastic. If Evangelicalism does for the Church the real services of which she is capable, it need care little for its own existence. The essentials of Evangelicalism are really the essentials of the Church, only as yet the Church does not see it. Nothing can be really essential to the welfare of the smaller body which is not really essential to the larger. This thought—and I believe it is defensible—to a considerable extent clears the ground. It enables us to differentiate between essentials and

accidentals, between matters of taste and preference and matters of principle and life. It is a grievous error to whittle down principles, but it is scarcely less grievous to magnify into principle that which is only the creature of fancy or of prejudice. The essential, moreover, differs from the merely expedient. It may have been expedient in the past that Evangelicals should wear the gown in the pulpit, should refrain from putting their choirs into surplices, should shrink from the appearance of anything like a cross in their churches, even in Christmas decorations. Some of these things, perhaps, are still inexpedient in some cases; for it is never wise to ignore either deep-rooted prejudice or the likes and dislikes of pious but old-fashioned people. They are matters of taste and expediency, and must be treated as such; they are not matters of principle—essentials.

What are these essentials which we hold and which we would make others possess? Obviously, at first starting, the basal principles of Protestantism—principles which emerged from the Reformation, principles which should be the property of the whole Church, but to which we Evangelicals owe special allegiance. They are, as set out by the present Bishop of Winchester:

(a) Holy Scripture is the one absolute standard of Christian doctrine and conduct.

(b) Complete liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment are the prerogatives of the believer in Christ.

(c) The national Church is independent of all foreign control.

These Evangelicalism accepts *ex animo*; it is only necessary to point out that the first is in no way depreciated by the serious and reverent examination of the text and origins of the books of Holy Scripture. The Bible can never suffer at the hands of reasonable criticism. Merely rationalistic criticism on the one hand and ignorant prejudice for preconceived ideas on the other can do harm. Reverent study of the Bible can do none. Take the Bible at its lowest, and it is the most marvelous human document; at its highest, and it is the revelation of

God. To the reverent student the movement is ever upwards, and we need not fear. With regard to the second, we do well to remember that the right of private judgment is not the right of obstinate prejudice; the loathsome story of the Agapemone, the vagaries of Christian Science, Campbellism, and Spiritualism, are signal instances of the effect of unrestrained private judgment. God guides his Church; the consentient voice of Christian men has force and value, and that private judgment, which is and must be a bulwark, may in its excesses endanger the Church which it should protect. The third need not detain us. No new feature has risen since Reformation days which in the slightest degree modifies the position of national Churches in relation to outside control.

From these three principles Evangelicalism proceeds to postulate three others, as typical of, and essential to, its position in the Church. They are these:

1. The direct access of every soul to God through Christ.
2. The all-sufficiency of Christ as the Saviour of everyone who comes to Him.

3. The gift of the Holy Spirit to all who thus accept Him.

1. Christ's whole teaching expresses beyond doubt this right of access. As Son of God He bids men come, and the Apostle merely summarizes His teaching when he writes: "Through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. ii. 18). No one denies this right of access. The Broad Church system, in its logical outcome, stopping little short, if any, of the Unitarian position, practically denies to Christ that Divinity which is essential to His mediatorial work; the Sacerdotal system, holding with us that God is in Christ, interposes, or certainly tends to interpose, the barrier of a priesthood other than Christ's, and imposes rites and ceremonies as the means, and it sometimes seems the only means, by which access is rendered possible. The right of access is made indirect; and the media are the Church, the priesthood, the rites and ceremonies of the Church. The Evangelical points the soul direct to God, direct to Christ, to

accept His gift of salvation, to listen to His Word, to receive His absolution. No priesthood, no authority of the Church, no auricular confession intervenes. The ministry has its place, the Church has its place, the ministering of the Word in moments of doubt, difficulty, and sin has its place. But each points straight to Christ, and for the good of men's souls it is better so. One cannot do better than quote Dean Wace on this point: "Put the Roman and sacerdotal system at its best," he says, "and it amounts to a sincere attempt on the part of men to do the work of God; and its inevitable tendency is, by exaggerating the work of the Church and the priesthood, to diminish and weaken the soul's apprehension of immediate communion with God and its reliance on Him."

2. We turn to the second principle, "The all-sufficiency of Christ as Saviour of all who come to Him." This does not mean there is no need of a Church, or a ministry, or forms of worship. The Church is Christ's foundation, into which His followers come as they turn to Him; a ministry He founded, too, to point men to Him; and the duty and privilege of worship follow as a natural sequel, to be orderly arranged in all its parts—for all point to Him. No, the all-sufficiency of Christ magnifies and illumines all the means of grace, and all the organizations of ministry and Church, if so be they all point to Him; but if they begin to acquire an importance apart from Him—and, alas! they sometimes have done—we need to be reminded of our principles. They may be, indeed are, essential to the *bene esse* of the Church; but they are not the essence. Christ is all-sufficient—the only one way of salvation.

3. "The gift of the Holy Spirit to everyone who accepts Him." Evangelicalism emphasizes the freeness of the gift to everyone who in faith asks for it. The Church of Rome emphasizes the channel—and that an ecclesiastical one—through which alone He may be received. Evangelicalism ever protests against the tendency to accept even a modified view of the Roman position. The dogmas of Apostolical Succession and Baptismal Regeneration, as sometimes taught, lie at the root

of the position, which denies the freeness of the Spirit's gift. They assume that—to quote Canon Aitken—"God has been pleased to attach the power of the Holy Spirit to certain mechanical acts accompanied by the recital of particular formulæ, so as to produce consequences of a distinctly supernatural order whenever these mechanical conditions are complied with." Canon Aitken states the theory in the baldest possible way in order to secure its repudiation by the spiritually minded of other schools of thought. I have repeated his statement because I would have us realize the importance of spiritual religion and the impossibility of its attainment if we allow ourselves to be tied by any such theory as this. I hope to deal with it from a practical point of view ere I have done, but it is necessary to point out now that the evangelical position, to which such a theory is abhorrent, makes for a religion which is practical in its living and void of superstition in its hold on the minds of the people.

Thus far statement of principle ; but my task is not complete. The statement of principle is one thing, the demonstration of the power of those principles in practical working is another. We make an appeal. What is its nature and character ? Is it doing the work the Lord of the Church has given us to do ?

(a) The appeal which the Evangelical school makes, the appeal which has reverberated from thousands of pulpits from the days of the Evangelical revival—nay, farther back still, from the days of the Reformation and of primitive and Apostolic Christianity—is at the very outset an appeal to the individual, aiming at his conversion and consecration to God. We have been twitted with our individualism. We have been reminded that Christ came to found a Church, a Society, and that we are ignoring the social aspects of our religion. I deny the charge involved *toto cælo*. I believe it to be based on false premises. Christ did come to found a Church—it was not the only or most essential purpose of His mission—but it was always to individuals that He directed His call. He collected His Church from the crowd by individual calls, and His aim ever remem-

bered that it was the character of each component member of the body which would eventually define the character of the whole body. Hence one by one men enter the kingdom, by the pathway of repentance and faith; one by one we stand to our Master in the service of this life, and one by one we shall render our account in the life to come. This individual aspect of our appeal has led necessarily to an attitude to the Church of Christ distinctive of Evangelical teaching, and, I believe, most valuable in its bearing on the work of the whole Church. We recognize Christ's Church as a visible communion, bound together by the presence of an ordered ministry, a sacramental system, and a community of adherents; but we recognize also an inner aspect—viz., that of a community of saints bound together by the possession of the very life of Christ, as forming the body of which He is the Head, through His Spirit, thus marking a certain clear distinction between those who profess and call themselves Christians and those really led and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. This renders belonging to the visible outward Church a different thing to belonging definitely to the Body of Christ, and demands of each individual a definite testing of himself as to the reality of his own answer to the appeal thus made to him. There is a tremendous danger of confusing the semblance with the reality, of mistaking mere profession for real confession, and it redounds to the strength of Evangelicalism that it makes quite clear at the outset that mere membership of a body is of little avail unless it be coupled with real participation in Him Who is the Life of that Body.

It is important, moreover, to note the aim of the appeal—conversion and consecration. Let me admit, with the utmost readiness, that the preaching of conversion is not now, at any rate, the peculiar attribute of Evangelicalism. One thanks God, and takes courage that so many of our brethren from whom we differ are aiming at conversion in their preaching and teaching. One thanks Him, too, that He has raised up in the days that are gone an Evangelicalism which has left so definite a mark on the life of the Church.

But, admitting all this, and gladly, one cannot help realizing that the Evangelical presentation of the doctrine of conversion is all the freer and more effective in that it is bound by no mechanical theory of baptismal regeneration. If the Gorham judgment, which once for all gave the Evangelical attitude towards Holy Baptism a *locus standi* in the Church of England, had gone the other way, it would have made our position in the Church hardly tenable, simply because it would have impeded the preaching of this doctrine of conversion, which we believe to be demanded alike by New Testament revelation and by experience in dealing with the souls of men. Conversion implies a definite change of attitude towards God in the will and affections of the converted man. It implies the seeking and finding of forgiveness, and the commencing of a new life in the soul and in the world. Its essential accompaniments are repentance and faith; it is tied to no ordinance, depends on no organization, save that the preaching of the Word is the normal instrument in effecting it. On God's side it is brought about by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and is called regeneration. It is the starting-point in a new life—a life that is joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit, and eventuates in the consecration of the individual to a life of increasing holiness and usefulness; and we adhere to our Evangelical position because we believe it gives us the best vantage-ground—and perfectly Scriptural vantage-ground—for the attainment of this result. And this, without the slightest prejudice to the many who would not use this party name, perhaps would not use any, but who are converted in the truest sense, and who are living consecrated lives.

(b) I now return—and it is my concluding point—to that which I have referred to before—viz., the fact that Evangelicalism depends for the advocacy of its appeal on the spiritual rather than the mechanical. Its watchword is—“Spiritual men and spiritual methods for spiritual work.” We maintain that no power is *ex opere operato* attached to the ministry or ministrations of the Church. We value the Church, the ministry and the Sacraments. I dare to say we value them all the more highly

because we demand for the efficacy of their powers and the fulfilment of their ministrations spiritual conditions. We believe that the Episcopate is an historic fact for all practical purposes, and we accept as of the *bene esse* of the Church the three orders of the ministry ; but we refuse to believe that the power of the Holy Spirit, the grace of orders, is absolutely conveyed to the ordinand by the laying-on of hands, unless he be such as humbly desires the gift, and, by repentance and faith, is in such conditions that the Holy Spirit can grant His presence and His blessing. And we take a similar attitude to the two Sacraments ; they are means of grace, not *the* means of grace ; and, after all, only means in so far as they are accompanied by the essential conditions of spiritual blessing, faith, and repentance. They are signs and seals of grace, not pipes and channels. The faith of Cornelius or of the Ethiopian eunuch was signed and sealed by baptism, while in the case of Simon Magus baptism was probably a mere empty form, because real repentance was non-existent. It would take too long here to argue the question of Infant Baptism, but the Evangelical position cannot and will not admit that the benefit of regeneration—to quote Canon Aitken again—“is made absolute until faith has steadfastly believed the promises of God made to us in the Sacrament of Baptism.” Infant Baptism is provisional, and is of a covenantal character, wherein God’s promises are sealed to the baptized person on the assumption that the latter will rise to a due sense of his own responsibilities in the matter when he is capable of such realization. So, generally, Evangelicalism is a force which makes for spirituality in our religion. It does not ignore forms and ceremonies ; it observes their necessity, and, by insisting that they must be kept in strict subordination to the life-giving influence of God the Holy Spirit, it really enhances their dignity and importance. On this ground it aims at reasonable simplicity of worship, it believes in decency and order, but it protests against the introduction of practices of ritual, whether medieval or modern, which tend to make our religion one of sense rather than of spirit. Materialism is in

the air, it allows, strangely but inevitably, the entrance of superstition, and it behoves true followers of Him Who revealed to us the easily forgotten yet extraordinarily important truth that God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, to make a determined stand for the spiritual character of our Christian religion.

To sum up. Man is born anew into the kingdom of God by a spiritual process. I know no better word for that process than conversion. Regeneration describes it from God's point of view, conversion from ours. Baptism is the sign and seal of the new birth, but it is not the new birth itself, because faith and repentance are essential to conversion, and they are not always the concomitants of baptism. The new life is maintained by the grace of God; the means of grace are aids to its maintenance; but, while using them to the very full, we must remember that they do not, cannot, maintain life. Only the Lord of life can do that, as by His influence and indwelling He unites us to the life of Christ.

Nothing can be said on questions of ritual. Evangelicalism is not a matter of ritual, it is a matter of doctrine, and ritual is only important as it helps or hinders the expression of doctrine. An attempt has been made in this paper to formulate in rough outline the main positions of Evangelicalism as the writer understands them. Some of them are perhaps becoming the common heritage of the Church, some of them will be rejected by many Churchmen as ill-expressed or inadequate; but the writer believes that the main position which makes the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ a religion which brings the individual sinner into direct and spiritual contact with his Saviour and his Lord is a position which is irrefragable in the light of the New Testament, and is an essential contribution to the teaching of the Church to which Evangelicalism may humbly claim to have given, and to be still giving, rightful emphasis.

