

Evangelical Churchmanship as a Layman Sees It

By A. F. WALLIS.

THE late Rev. Charles Hole of King's College, London, in his pamphlet entitled "An Historical Review of the words "Evangelical" and "Protestant" affirms that the former has its root in *Evangelium* which the German Reformers associated with the Free Love of God; a singularly appropriate term when Western Christendom was rife with the pernicious system of Indulgences. *Evangelium* was evidently spoken of at the Council of Berne in 1523, whereas "Protestant" was not introduced into public debate until the Second Diet of Spiers in 1529. The latter term, however, marked the dividing line between the *Evangelici* (men of the Gospel) and the *Pontifici* (Papal men), and although in Anglo-Saxon speaking countries it now represents the distinction between Romanists and non-Romanists, on the Continent of Europe the word "Evangelical" is more commonly applied. In the Anglican Church, "Evangelical" refers to a school of thought born and nurtured by the Revival initiated by Wesley and furthered by Churchmen like Simeon, Venn and many more. Lecky, the historian, attributes the great spiritual change that came over England to this revival, whilst Dr. H. H. Moule in his "Life of Simeon" states that the revived consciousness of corporate life and duty in the National Church was due to the work and witness of Simeon rather than to the Oxford Movement begun by Newman, Pusey and others, and Bishop Charles Wordsworth adds that "he had a much larger following of young men and for a much longer time." Can this be said of the present? Can it also be said that Evangelicals command a majority even among laymen? Surely not. One of our post-war aims should be to regain the lost position and build up a strong representation in the Parochial Church Councils, the most important strategic point in the Church of England organisation. The Protestant outlook of Englishmen generally, on matters of religion, gives us every encouragement; the growing menace to the liberty of the incumbent by the steady encroachment thereon by central diocesan authorities on the plea of war-time and post-war emergencies, should provide an added stimulus, and be the means of drawing the rank and file of the clergy and the laity more closely together. They are the backbone of the Anglican Church, for is not the incumbent and the layman in daily life closer to the masses who have yet to be won for Christ than the principals of a diocese? Evangelicals are in an excellent position to take the lead, for although they do not belittle the governmental value of episcopacy they do not consider it to be *an essential* to the spiritual life or offices of the Church, so that any justifiable criticism of episcopal authority or proposals can be fearlessly advanced.

Endeavours to win the laity to the Evangelical cause must take into account probable changes in the post-war economic world whence

conditions may compel a reliance less upon large subscriptions from the few, and more upon small subscriptions from the many. The need for wider support from the less wealthy classes of the community will be apparent, and as to a very great extent they remain uninstructed upon the doctrine of our Church and the principles of Evangelicalism, as well as being ill-equipped with a knowledge of church government and legal matters, an important phase of the task is to educate them. Whilst the basis of Evangelicalism is of a spiritual character, none will say that common sense and reasoning is out of place. Simplicity in defining doctrinal basis, in the observance of public worship and in dealing with individuals, will be of the greatest asset. Nor must there be any neglect to impress upon them the absolute necessity of defending our Protestant heritage against the attacks that will surely be made upon it.

Doctrinally, the "Free Love of God" is a clear and simple definition of the basis for constructive Evangelical teaching, and one that will reach the hearts of men and women. It is the spiritual content of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, beginning with the recorded Fall of Man, reminding us that God made an *immediate* provision for his restitution that became operative long before the institution of any priestly system. John 3, 16 is decidedly Evangelical, for therein we read that God *gave* His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and that the reception of the *Gift* implies the exchange of eternal death for eternal life. The Gift involved the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, *substitutionary, satisfactory and sufficient*. It cannot be earned by works of merit, otherwise it would not be *free*. Its inclusiveness is covered by the "whosoever will" which also suggests that some may be minded to reject it. It involves membership of "the church of the freeborn whose names are written in heaven," the Invisible Church as distinct from the Visible Church. This Visible Church with which one is under no obligation to have association in order to obtain eternal life, is nevertheless divinely appointed; those who stand aloof from it, do so either from conviction of conscience or dissatisfaction with its methods, and sometimes alas, with the lives and conduct of its members. The failure to grasp the vital difference between the Invisible and Visible Churches partly explains why so many well-meaning folk cannot understand the great gulf that yawns between Evangelical and non-Evangelical Christianity, or between the Protestant and the Roman or "Orthodox" Churches of the East. There is no doubt that the Reformers fully appreciated the difference, so that whilst they displayed an understandable reluctance to introduce violent changes at the start, their policy concerning doctrine and practice lay in the Evangelical direction. It is not unreasonable therefore, to contend that Evangelicalism and Protestantism are inter-changeable terms. The Evangelical accepts the fact of the existence of the Invisible and Visible Churches, but declares that membership of the latter does not automatically include membership of the former, into which the only entry is by the "new birth" so clearly enunciated by Our Saviour in His talk with Nicodemus.

Doubtless, all Evangelicals in the Church of England, conservative and liberal, would abide by the "Free Love of God" as being a simple definition of our fundamentals, but the increasing desire for

comprehensiveness has tended towards a careless indifference as to what is and what is not Evangelical doctrine and practice. The situation has developed to a point requiring a corrective if present and future Anglican Churchmen are to know exactly where Evangelicals stand, and the latter to know their own mind. The state of the world and the condition of the Church generally, calls for an united Evangelical front, in which the initial step is to frame a policy that should be broad enough to justify the adjective "Evangelical," but sufficiently safeguarded against an invasion by those who would unquestionably accept the fundamental belief in the Free Love of God, but at the same time display a "looseness" concerning Evangelical teaching and practice. Unity in diversity harmonizes with English character, but certain Evangelicals have carried the idea too far. It is necessary, therefore, that the policy should bear the marks of clarity as well as unity if hopes to win the laity to the Evangelical cause are to be fulfilled. There is sure to be opposition from Anglo-Catholicism and Modern Theologists with increasing intensity during the post-war years. Clarity in the policy must include an appreciation that certain definable limits are necessary to prevent anarchy, but before discussing that aspect, it may be profitable to visualise the means whereby the Anglo-Catholic and the Modern schools of thought hope to win the people to their respective sides and what chances they have of achieving success.

Concerning Anglo-Catholicism, the inability or unwillingness of those in authority to maintain discipline in our Church has left a legacy of almost unlimited licence whereby a large number of Services are conducted in a manner totally alien to the Reformation or the general desire for simplicity compatible with dignity. Their Romish character produces a familiarity that will not make difficult the final step to outward organic re-union with the Papacy when deemed to be logical and desirable by ecclesiastics labouring for that end. Only a few years ago a large gathering of Anglican clergy assembled in London and pledged themselves to work by every available means for the return of the Church of England to the Roman fold. Many are apologetic for the Reformation, whilst more are half-hearted as to its necessity. Were there more confidence that the solidarity of English Protestantism could be mobilised for a successful resistance before the evil is done, or that such a solidarity is impervious to mining operations by more subtle methods, we could afford perhaps to rest upon our oars. Unfortunately recent proposals concerning the Holy Communion can be taken as indicative of the intense opposition to the Reformed and Protestant character of our Church. Experience generally has proved that enthusiasts are never satisfied with half-measures for very long and will, therefore, make further demands. Subtlety often succeeds where more open methods fail, in which the modern craze for perpetually "doing" something or "seeing" something provides excellent recruiting ground for Anglo-Catholicism, particularly amongst the younger generation. Secular educationalists lay great stress upon the gift of Sight as a means of imparting knowledge or creating impressions, and is it to be expected that Anglo-Catholics will lag behind in this respect, having at first hand a vast accretion of complicated and fascinating ritual? Last year an Anglican

Diocesan Bishop declared that "seeing ritual" is a useful contribution towards a Religious Education. To the emotional, the mystic and the ascetic, Anglo-Catholic ritual has a dramatic appeal that is fortunately absent from true Evangelical practice. Contentment with a popular attachment to an outward form of institutional religion, in contrast to the Evangelical view point, relieves men and women of the obligation to seek Salvation as a personal responsibility through Christ alone. To the seeker after spiritual things the Sacerdotalist offers the services of an episcopally ordained priesthood, whereas the Evangelical allows him the right of private judgment. There is a great reverence for this centralised authority on the part of those who have been nurtured therein from childhood, and where such as are not associated with any religious school of thought, even they are sometimes inclined to the "catholic" view, because they see in it a possible chance for a permanent and more or less perfect ordering of international affairs, with the Bishop of Rome as dictator in all matters both spiritual and temporal. Totalitarianism either in Church or State is not a welcome bed-fellow for true Protestants.

If the tenets and worship ascribed to Anglo-Catholicism prove attractive to one set of people, it may be supposed that Modernistic Theology will be a draw to the "intellectuals," the rationalists, and such as long for and oftentimes forecast a better order in society resultant solely upon a co-operative human effort. They do not dispense with the necessity for some sort of a spiritual foundation to nerve a weak endeavour, and on minds untutored in the Scriptures and lacking that definite spiritual experience which Evangelicals call "conversion," they are naked and ready to receive the garment of man's righteousness, so long as it is composed of Religion and Reason, with more emphasis upon the latter. Complementary to this philosophy and indeed as a part of it, is the attack upon the *authority* of the Scriptures by first casting doubt upon their *accuracy* concerning statements and historic events recorded therein. These "higher" critics base their contentions mainly on modern scholarship and biblical research of a certain type, whereby they delude many into thinking that their conclusions are a repository of truth, and that a final pronouncement has been made upon perplexing biblical utterances having a bearing on moral issues. To a world that dislikes prohibitions the Decalogue is not binding upon peoples enjoying the benefits of a Christian civilisation, nor are the nature miracles consistent with the results of science. Individual sin is only an incident in the process of an evolutionary movement from animalism, wherein man's "fall" is an upward rather than a downward occurrence, the evil in his heart being but the dissatisfaction at seeing his capacity for goodness constantly thwarted. Such frustration is due to ignorance which education and mutual improvement can dispel. Therefore, the death of Christ is but an historic fact and the offering of a good man's life in the interests of the social welfare and the common brotherhood of mankind, over which the fatherhood of God presides. The Kingdom of God thus becomes "the Commonwealth of God" so that without a "kingdom" there is no necessity for a returning "king." The benefits of the "kingdom" are sought after, but the "King" Himself remains rejected still.

If this emasculation of Holy Writ and of the Gospel were but the harmless pastime of a few theologians it might well be ignored, but for the sake of thousands who grope their weary way through the half-lit labyrinths of speculative theories, Evangelicals must meet their need out of the Book that has been tested these two thousand years, believing that the spade has yet to endorse much that is supposed to have been disproved. It will be difficult enough, for the arguments of the pundits of Modern Theology are sufficiently plausible and attractive in an age that delights in man's achievements in the physical world, prone to worship at the shrine of Intellect, and hopeful that out of his own unaided efforts he will one day signalise the Triumph of Man.

I have endeavoured to show how serious will be the twofold challenge of Anglo-Catholicism and Modern Theology to the Evangelical position, and how they hope to capture the Church of England from two opposite extremes. One is tempted to dwell upon the effect produced on the national life were either or both efforts crowned with success, but a more constructive task is to suggest a few ways and means whereby Evangelicals might with God's special blessing meet and overcome the opposition. Since the last war Evangelicalism in the Anglican Church has undergone a considerable change fraught with serious consequences to its existence and its power as a witness to the Truth. In the first place certain Evangelical churches have become too colourful in the observance of the authorised Services, and in particular Morning and Evening Prayer. Processions with banners, wearing of coloured stoles, changing them during the period of worship, complicated high-brow music and a general departure from what only twenty years ago or a few more, was recognised to be decidedly Evangelical worship. Some of these innovations I have personally witnessed and have always felt that something definitely spiritual was lacking and that material things had taken its place; there was also on the part of clergy and choirmen the "professional touch." The fact that to a certain degree the sermon was evangelistic did not make good the feeling of depression or that the time was profitably spent. Congregational singing was spoiled by the type of music, and I came away with the impression that absolute sincerity was absent, with the added unhappy feeling that it was not the type of service to which one could, with some hope, invite a soul seeking the way of salvation and light. Moreover, one is still unconvinced that attempts at approximation to High Church practices as a gesture in the interests of peace in the Church are anything but futile. Appeasement will fail, as we all know it has failed in international affairs. Nor has it any better chance of success by adopting the un-Evangelical practice of the Eastward Position when consecrating the Elements.

The fact that this practice was made "not illegal" many years ago, subject to the manual acts being seen by the communicants, does not make it doctrinally in accord with Evangelical teaching concerning the Lord's Supper or the intention of the Reformers. From the standpoint of history, it is undeniable that its use is associated with the idea of a propitiatory sacrifice harmonizing with the erroneous and anti-scriptural doctrines of Rome. Without entering into a descant upon its theological aspect, if the practice is *not* associated

with Roman teaching, why was the concession when made, hailed by the extreme High Church party as a great gain, and why did they continue to press for it all those years before? The answer surely is that they knew exactly what they wanted and why they wanted it. This did more to strengthen the Oxford Movement than all the ground work put in by Pusey, Newman, Ward and others during the " thirties " and " forties " of the last century. The rift thus caused between Churchmen in almost every part of the world cannot make its adoption the offering of an olive branch of peace to those whose determination is to wreck the Catholic, Apostolic, Reformed and Protestant character of our Church. Nor could it be anything but a disruptive policy from the viewpoint of Evangelical unity, and the surrender of a trust committed by Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer and many more to this and every succeeding age. There is no virtue in it, but it tends rather to obscure the spiritual significance of the Service and substitute for it a material interpretation of the Sacrament, bringing it into line with the Papal offering of the sacrifice of the Mass through the offices of a sacrificing priest, who at least adopts the position with some consistency. The framers of the existing Rubric, who lived closer to the pre-Reformation period than ourselves, had no doubt upon the absolute necessity of making a clear cut from the practice. They fully understood its meaning, and showed their consistency in authorising only the north side of the Table as the proper place for the consecration of the Elements.

The real importance of the matter to Evangelicals is that, being of a doctrinal significance, Eastward Position is the border line between Evangelical and Sacerdotal teaching. It is something more than an individual preference or custom of any particular church or cathedral. If therefore, Evangelicals who favour this practice or are not particularly opposed to it, will place their loyalty to Evangelicalism and seek its true welfare before other and less important considerations, and as a token abandon it or refuse to condone it, they will have made a valuable contribution towards a settled Evangelical policy and played a great part, at some personal cost, in the overthrow of the attempt to re-paganise the Church of England. It is to be hoped that the last will soon be heard of this subject within Evangelical circles and its disposal facilitated in the way suggested.

Other matters of no less importance must claim attention. A return to simplicity in public worship where a departure therefrom is now the order of the day, would go a long way towards regaining the active support of the men-folk in the life and work of the Church. The disproportionate attendance of women as compared with men at the Morning and Evening Services is largely traceable to the less simple form of worship which once characterised Evangelical Churches. Unless of a musical turn of mind the majority of men feel out of place where music is allowed to predominate, and quite apart from that, the general trend is towards the suppression of congregational singing which has always been a feature of Evangelicalism. The feeling that a congregation has assembled to be entertained ought to be discouraged, and the object of worship " in spirit and in truth " constantly put before the people by exhortation and example. Musical talent could be given an outlet by an occasional special mid-week

Evening Service where the choir might render some special music portraying Bible incidents and characters. The concentrated practice required would not prove irksome to real music lovers, actually they would derive some pleasure from it, and furthermore the occasion would provide an opportunity to reach the non-church going classes of a certain type if the programme included a short and concise evangelistic address. The shortening of Morning and Evening Prayer from the prescribed order, is a question that calls for minute examination in Evangelical churches as to whether the restrictive use, amalgamations and omission of certain prayers, has sacrificed the sense of Reality in the interests of speed in order to satisfy the complaints of the type of churchmanship that has not advanced beyond the stage of conventional observance. How long will the clergy continue to rob pious souls of their right to a full and proper Service as ordered at the Reformation by men who knew what they were about by legislating for the future as well as for the present? That any criticism at all should be levelled at the length of the authorised services proves the inability of the critics to understand their Scriptural foundation, and incumbents would gradually dispel the objections if one or two sermons a year were devoted to this subject.

A still more serious problem for the future is the appalling lack of knowledge by laymen generally as to the doctrine of the Church of England. Some of this ignorance is pitifully displayed at Parochial Church Council meetings. Do Evangelicals fully realise that Anglo-Catholicism thrives upon ignorance more than upon learning? Yet how often do we hear even a few sermons on Anglican doctrine? In Hosea 4, 6, the prophet cries, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," that is, knowledge of the things concerning God, His Laws, His Institutions, His Worship and His Witness. All these things are enshrined in the doctrine of the Church. How important to remember that the knowledge of true doctrine is full-proof armour against false doctrine. It should be a recognised Evangelical policy to use the pulpit for the purpose of preaching, rather than rely upon the people reading the excellent books and pamphlets on doctrinal standards, which they seldom do, as personal experience in management of a small church library has proved. Akin to doctrine is Church History, upon which a great deal of ignorance is also apparent. History as taught in the secular schools does not make good the deficiency, so that it is incumbent upon churchmen to see that this is done as an integral part of corporate church life. It is hardly a subject for the pulpit, and to some a little uninteresting, if handled only in lecture form, minus the lantern. All Evangelical Societies which have as their principal object the defence of the Protestantism of our Church, would be doing a fine service if they jointly approached the Religious Film Society for the production of a series of films featuring the story of the Church of England. There could be no sound objection to the use of the film for this purpose, in fact its use is essential if it is desired to capture the imagination of the young and turn it to good account. The films could be loaned to parishes for a small sum, plus transport cost. All that is required is some well conceived plan whereby those churches who suffer from low finances can receive monetary assistance from a pooling of resources organised

and controlled by a Joint Committee of the Societies. It is to be hoped that no Evangelical Church will, after the war, be without its film apparatus for want of funds.

Membership of the Church of England carries with it a still deeper responsibility. The parochial system gives the incumbent a claim upon his parishioners and they a claim upon him. Whether they attend his church or some other, or none at all, they come under his cure, but can it be said that in every parish full advantage is taken? A complete answer to this question cannot be given here, but it is common knowledge that adverse conditions exist in many parishes that discourage regular visiting. Nevertheless, there are persons who conscientiously feel that dogged persistence must be continued with small prospects of reaping a good harvest of souls. The temptation to abandon it for the pleasant and more fruitful work of building up the spiritual life of the congregation is great. Yet at hand there lies an alternative, waiting to be called into service. The "Priesthood of the Laity" might be transformed from a belief to a practical reality by the employment of men District Visitors drawn from the congregation; men "whose hearts God has touched," filled with the Holy Spirit and willing to spend and be spent in His service in the parish. Their function would be to visit the men of the parish with some reasonable degree of regularity in their spare time, concentrating principally upon such as are hostile or apathetic to any form of religion. These may "open up" to such a caller, whereas to an ordained minister they are merely polite for decency's sake, and remain reserved when a heart to heart talk is attempted. To the parishioner this District Visitor is "an equal" in the sense that he is not performing this office as a part of a profession. That he does it gratuitously with much personal sacrifice has a special appeal. Prejudice may, by this means, be broken down and a link formed with the church, however slender, that may lead on to greater issues. The visitor should be prepared to talk upon all sorts of subjects as points of contact, to do a lot of listening as well as talking, and try to be impervious to shocks. It is not suggested that the noble work of the women District Visitors should be dispensed with, but the state of the country and the homes of the masses from a religious standpoint, are a grave menace to the welfare of the next generation. The Church, particularly the Evangelical section, must no longer neglect the father who has been permitted by God to bring a family into the world, to be its head, and to be responsible for its spiritual and moral welfare. With the manly influence absent to a large degree from the Church, her witness has become almost effete. England needs a more masculine type of Christianity if she is to weather the storm of the post-war years. Evangelical Churchmen should pay special attention to this important business of winning the men for Christ.

A short-term training may be necessary for this type of work, in which the handling of the Word of God must play a major part, as in all forms of personal evangelism. There is great need for a series of Central Bible Colleges on the lines proposed some months ago in the Evangelical press, where a course of studies in the Scriptures could be taken at comparatively small cost to the trainee. Other relevant subjects might also be included in the curriculum, but to

obtain the maximum results, every endeavour must be made to space the Centres evenly over the country at points accessible to the public passenger transport services, because provision for such as could only attend after working hours is essential. The proposals are capable of wider application and the co-operation of the Evangelical Free Churches should be sought.

The criticisms, opinions, hopes, fears and suggestions contained in this article are but the meagre effort of a layman who has not enjoyed educational privileges open to others. It is an attempt to gauge the present Evangelical position within the borders of the Anglican Church and to offer a few possible solutions to the problems which must be faced in the immediate future. They may be considered worthy enough to be a basis, along with more commendable material, for a free and frank discussion among all Evangelical Churchmen at a conference which ought to be convened before it is too late. A conference where, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may hope to discover a policy that shall unite all Evangelical Churchmen in the great redemptive work of making known the Free Love of God. The post-war period, when by God's grace it arrives, may prove to be the final opportunity for the Church of England to justify her privileged position as an established church. There need be no doubt as to what will happen, if within her borders there is a united Evangelical Party, tried and purged, spiritually re-inforced, fully equipped with well-proved scholarship, and an organisation that has its parts fitly joined together. Whether they are in the van of leadership, or the vital invisible force behind the higher temporal authority does not matter one iota, so long as Evangelical Churchmen are faithful in their witness. A weak Evangelical witness means a weak Anglican Church witness, and the latter would be written down by future historians as a great Church that lost a great opportunity.
