

# The Essence of Evangelicalism

## A Symposium

### I

#### THE PROVOST OF BRADFORD

**W***E are concerned with Anglican Evangelicalism.* The worship and witness of Evangelicals must in all respects be thoroughly loyal to the Church of England, the Catholic Church of this land. Part of that loyalty is to recognize that it is of the character of the Church of England to comprehend in its fold those who hold the Truth with an emphasis different from ours. God has given to Evangelicals to see some things which others have not seen ; to others some things which we have not seen. It is this belief that makes the Church of England, as no other Church, both Catholic and Protestant. This comprehensiveness is an attempt, not to avoid definiteness, but to hold together two sorts of definiteness—a knife-edge position, with the abyss of totalitarianism on the one side and licence on the other. The best description of the Church of England is that it represents a tension between Catholic tradition and the positive insights of the Reformation. It follows that the best service that Evangelicals can do for the Church of England is to keep steadily in view and to proclaim those positive insights. *And* to be ready for new light to be seen ; we are to make tradition, as well as to preserve it. For example, in the intractable problem of the Reunion of Christendom, while the importance of the appeal to the past is recognized, the belief that the Holy Spirit will lead in new ways is overriding ; the term “Catholic” is a term of the future.

*We are concerned with the Evangel in the Church.* Evangelicalism is not an end in itself, but a constituent part of the larger whole, making its distinctive and indispensable contribution. Our concern is not primarily with Evangelicalism but with the Evangel—to glorify God and to win men to the Gospel and the Church.

It is really a matter of the horse and the cart ! The Church of England to-day is in some danger of putting the cart (the Church) before the horse (the Gospel). Consider this bit of evidence—that, while we have seen a steadily increasing number of celebrations of Holy Communion, the records show a steadily dwindling number of communicants. Decidedly, it is not the supreme importance of the most comfortable Sacrament that is in question, but a misplacing of it in the scheme of the spiritual life. Its place in that scheme is indissolubly linked with the reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, with personal appropriation of forgiveness and strength through the Cross. In Holy Communion, grace is received and faith is confirmed and, in a fuller measure, conveyed to the believer. The preaching and receiving of the Evangel are necessarily antecedent to the fruitful use of the Sacrament. In a word, Holy Communion is not only an ordinance of the Church, but the essential means of the grace for the converted.

The Evangel comes before the Church, in the sense that it is that which makes the Church move. The horse, indeed, comes first, but

it is firmly attached to the cart ! The tractive power is the Evangel ; the vehicle is the life and liturgy of the Church. As Canon Charles Smyth has written of Charles Simeon, the great Evangelical Churchman of the nineteenth century : " Living in an age of political, economic and social revolution, he became one of the architects of a moral revolution, not through the process of innovation, but through a penetrating insight into the worth and value of the tradition he had inherited and which he believed could be charged with all the dynamic of spiritual revival ".

His basic conviction was that, in the liturgy of the Church of England, there was a form of worship which most perfectly abased the sinner and, at the same time, exalted the God Whose holiness was known in His redeeming love. The revival of Evangelicalism as the power-house of the Church of England depends on our re-learning that lesson. There have been periods when those who bore the name " Evangelical " behaved rather like Free Churchmen in surplices. That day has gone and we now see the liturgy of our Church as our first and best opportunity for presenting the claim of the Gospel.

*We are concerned, not with a set of peculiar doctrines, but with a set of priorities.* There are, of course, doctrines which most Evangelicals hold in common—the supremacy of Holy Scripture, justification by faith, assurance of salvation and others—but as biblical doctrines they are held, if in a subordinate position and with different emphasis, by others. But we ought to be distinguished chiefly by our priorities :

(a) The Necessity of Conversion : not in terms of emotional appeal, though clearly the emotions must be engaged, as the mind and the will, but in terms of biblical truth. We preach for a verdict, leading to personal response.

(b) The Duty of seeking others. The moment Christ has found a man, His voice is heard saying " Other sheep I have ". The same challenge rings in the ears of any " congregation of faithful men ". If they settle down to enjoy their worship, heedless of the outsider, there will be (in the gorgeous words of Dr. Warren) " the unmistakable sound of the death-rattle in the pulpit and the steady progress of rigor mortis in the pew ". Worship without witness is a delusion and a snare. The Church of England to-day needs to heed this, as it has often in its long story needed to. Dr. Vaughan Williams, writing about Walford Davies, reminds us that " there is an eternal problem that confronts all those who feel that they have the creative impulse. ' Shall I shut myself up from the world, or shall I go down to the world of men and show them what I have learned of eternity and beauty ? ' ". With the change of a few words, that is the problem facing the Church of England to-day. Shall we shut ourselves up, hedging ourselves about with ecclesiastical barriers, or shall we go down to the world of men ?

(c) Belief in the Holy Spirit. Don't we all share that ? Put it in the form of a test-question—what is our pastoral method with the convert ? Do we allow him to think of himself as a spiritual hypochondriac ? Or is our aim to make him independent of us and dependent on the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit ? Outside Evangelical circles, the predominant view is that the faithful remain patients needing hospital care to the end—they cannot stand on their

feet. But two postulates (both Scriptural) are needed to support our view. First, that the Holy Spirit is given, not for enjoyment, but as equipment for God's work; secondly, that the Holy Spirit trains the individual in the body of believers. Hence the value we set on groups for Bible study and corporate prayer. It must be added that many clergy need to trust both the Holy Spirit and their people enough to allow such groups to be led into activities and adventures that they themselves would never have thought of.

(d) The Priesthood of all believers. The greatest obstacle, apart from the disunity of the Church, to bringing men and women to-day into living touch with God is that the Church appears to them to be no more than a venerable institution and not a vital fellowship. In the community of the Church, because it is a human as well as a divine society, there will be different functions—Bishop, priest, deacon and layman—but the standard of holiness and responsibility is the same for all. In particular, the responsibility for introducing others to Christ is the same for the unordained as for the ordained. (Incidentally, this carries with it the right of the laity to take equal share with the ordained ministry in the councils of the Church, in matters of doctrine, discipline and worship.) This is a crucial issue to-day, both in Church and State. In both there is a progressive denial of any effective voice in the direction of affairs. In the State, this tendency springs from a low valuation of the ordinary man's idea of citizenship and its responsibilities; in the Church, from a low valuation of his potentiality as a man of God. In our parishes, we haven't begun to call forth the enormous untapped resources of consecrated, imaginative and practical lay-witness. Until we do, we shall go on producing that horrid person, "the ecclesiastical layman," instead of what the world so desperately needs, "a secular form of sanctity" (Maritain).

Let the words of Bishop Ken tie all this together: "I die in the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith, professed by the whole Church, before the division of East and West. I die in the Communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from all papal and puritan innovations, and as it adheres to the doctrine of the Cross".

## II

THE REV. W. C. G. PROCTOR, M.A.

**E**VANGELICALISM, used as a term to denote a particular school of thought, is to be distinguished from Catholicism and Modernism (or Liberalism). The following is a description of each:

By Evangelicalism is meant the effort in each generation to represent the Apostolic experience of Christ, guided solely by the record of that experience recorded in the New Testament. By Catholicism is meant the particular way the Christian religion has been developed by the Church in history; and by Modernism is meant the effort to express the Christian religion in the light of present-day knowledge and experience without hindrance of any kind from traditional views.<sup>1</sup>

Two principles seem to give Evangelicalism its distinctive character:

<sup>1</sup> From *Evangelical Thought and Practice*, p. 9, by the present writer.