

The Revival of Evangelical Scholarship

LEONARD HICKIN

The April 1977 issue of *Churchman* contained an article by Arch-deacon Marchant: 'The Unshakable Things Will Be Left.' In this article he alluded to the academic revival that took place amongst evangelicals during and after the Nazi war (1939-45). He rightly paid tribute to the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship), and its Theological Students Fellowship for the important part played by members of these fellowships in bringing about this revival.

The Evangelical Fellowship for Theological Literature

It must not, however, be forgotten that another fellowship, the Evangelical Fellowship for Theological Literature (EFTL), was in the 'forties and the two following decades making a most significant contribution towards the revival of evangelical theological scholarship. The origins of this fellowship go back to a meeting at Wycliffe Hall in 1941, when Max Warren and Raymond Scantlebury from Cambridge talked to Julian Thornton-Duesbery, Douglas Harrison and other members of the Wycliffe staff about ways and means of encouraging evangelicals to produce theological literature. As a result of this discussion it was agreed to form a fellowship which would bring together evangelicals who did not insist on hyphenating their evangelicalism with such qualifications as 'conservative' or 'liberal'; and those who joined this fellowship would pledge themselves to research and writing.

At the time when the EFTL was formed, evangelicals were producing little or nothing in the field of theological writing. Storr and many of his liberal evangelical contemporaries had passed away, and even they had written little of first-class quality.¹ At this period, 'serious theological writing in Britain was largely confined to Free Church scholars such as C. H. Dodd and Vincent Taylor, the distinguished members of the Westminster College staff in Cambridge; and Scottish divines like John and Donald Baillie; or to Anglo-Catholic scholars, as represented by men like Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, A. G. Hebert, and Kenneth Kirk. There was place for a school of thinking which could be a complement to these others.'² The aim of the EFTL was to provide such a school of thought.

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It was therefore agreed that the fellowship should have a strictly limited theological purpose, that of producing articles and books which made an evangelical contribution to the contemporary debate. It was in no sense to be a pressure group or to concern itself with church politics. An annual conference was projected at which a sermon would be preached, Holy Communion would be celebrated, and three or four papers would be read. These papers might or might not be published; often they were published either in book form or in journals.

It was also agreed that everything possible should be done to draw into the Fellowship younger men before they became involved in parish work and gave up reading for good (this occupational hazard was one to which evangelicals succumbed far too easily!). Informal groups were to be formed to encourage those interested in church history, sociology, and liturgy. Principals of theological colleges in the coming years were to prove most helpful and co-operative by encouraging their ablest men to join the EFTL.

The following April (1942) the staffs of the Oxford and Cambridge pastorates met with the staffs of Ridley and Wycliffe Halls. This meeting, held at Ridley, formed the EFTL with Julian Thornton-Duesbery as secretary. In the late summer he was succeeded by Gordon Hewitt, then Chaplain to Leeds University, who held the post for the next nine years and was then followed by Michael Hennell. In its early years the fellowship owed much to both Gordon and Michael; their wisdom and efficiency gave the Fellowship its stability.

The annual conferences rotated between Oxford and Cambridge, despite many attempts to get them held sometimes in the north, but the attractions of Blackwell's or Bowes and Bowes were too alluring. Moreover, in Oxbridge there was always a fair percentage of members already resident for whom attendance would be that much easier. Also, the majority of those members who were in parishes preferred strolling in the Parks or along the Backs to walking about Liverpool or Leeds.

Members and their interests

One by-product of the Fellowship was an annual register which recorded the names and addresses of members, their subject of research, and such publications as they had produced in the previous year. The first issue appeared in October 1944. At the beginning of the register was a collect³; this was always read at the opening of the first session of each annual conference.

By the time that the first register appeared there were already 96 committed members: 55 members had chosen their major subject of study, and some were able to record publications for which they had been responsible during the previous twelve months. Eight books

were in preparation. It may prove of interest to list them to show their range: Babbage, *Puritanism in the Church of England during the Primacy of Bancroft 1603-1610*; Harrison, *A Book on the Atonement*; Lavell, *The Problem of Evil in the Philosophy of Leibniz*; Moule, *A Syntax of New Testament Greek*; Pennell, *A Book on the Megilloth*; Ramsey, *Christian Ethics Today*; Stephens-Hodge, *A Sense of Direction—an Introduction to Christian Doctrine*; Trimmingham, *Christianity and Islam in the Sudan*. Ten articles in journals and two books by members were already listed in this copy of the register.

On the back of the register it was recorded that a new series called 'The St Paul's Library' was being launched with the following subjects and authors: *The Bible* by T. W. Isherwood; *The Church* by F. J. Taylor; *The Ministry* by F. E. Lunt; *The Prayer Book* by D. E. W. Harrison; *Baptism* by Bishop J. R. S. Taylor; *Holy Communion* by M. A. C. Warren; *Preaching* by F. D. Coggan; *The Inner Life* by W. F. P. Chadwick. Several of these books were to have a wide circulation when they were published by the Canterbury Press. One who gave great assistance and encouragement in the launching was the Rev. W. A. Kelk, the farsighted editor of *The Record* at the time of the founding of the EFTL. For many years a reader for Longmans, he was an enthusiastic promoter of theological writing. He was also an invaluable and highly competent critic. It was through his good offices that Longmans published in 1948 *The Triumph of God*, a book of essays on the Christian mission by a number of writers.⁴ A year earlier he had edited *The Ministry of the Church*, a much smaller book containing some essays that provided an effective response to *The Apostolic Ministry*, edited by Bishop K. E. Kirk.

It is interesting to note that of those listed in the first register certain members were to become in due course Bishops of Derby and Barking, Archbishop of Uganda, Archbishop of Canterbury (a future Archbishop of York joined later), an Archbishop in Canada, Bishops of Knaresborough, Tinnevely, Stepney, The Upper Nile, Salisbury, Hull and Leicester—twelve in all. And to these would be added in the coming years many others, not to mention several deans, an abundance of archdeacons, and a plentiful supply of university professors. Many members sooner or later went overseas as missionaries to teach theology and train the future leaders of the church in Asia and Africa. As one looks through this list of members in the first register, one gets a glimpse of the shape of things to come. This recently started Fellowship would soon be changing the face of the Church of England.

Making the rules

There was a brief document giving a set of principles of action, and rules of membership. There was at first an age limit: members must

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be under 50 when they joined. If a member failed to attend two consecutive conferences without any adequate reason, his membership lapsed. As the years went by some of the rules were revised. Max Warren considers that an unconscionable amount of time was wasted at the annual meeting of members when they had an opportunity of suggesting alterations in the rules! But the annual meeting, held at every conference, was a useful safety valve. It gave the wild asses a chance to quench their thirst, and these meetings could be hilarious occasions. No attempt was ever made to alter the main purpose of the Fellowship; members continued to produce theological literature, so no harm was done!

A small committee was appointed each year by the annual conference to plan the following year's conference as soon as members had agreed upon its *theme*.⁵ To ensure both continuity and change, members of this committee were carefully selected, and one member was always chosen from those who had not been in orders more than three years. The committee met in November to discuss sub-divisions of the subject proposed as the conference theme; they then decided who should be invited to read papers. The secretary convened a paper-readers' conference early in the New Year and then sent out details of subject, papers and bibliography to all members. Nothing further need be said about the conferences themselves except that they were invariably a real intellectual feast, most stimulating to those who, whether in parishes, administration, or teaching, needed the inspiration of first-class minds.

Practical results

Church leaders soon realised that the EFTL was a force to be reckoned with. Archbishop Fisher regularly received a copy of the annual register. He told Max Warren that he made use of it when choosing evangelicals to serve on church unity commissions and such like negotiations, as well as for other purposes.⁶ When in December 1947 he wanted a statement of evangelical beliefs and principles, he invited members of the EFTL to draw up such a statement. The result was *The Fulness of Christ* (1950), a book that was produced by a team of 17 scholars chaired by Douglas Harrison and all of them members of the EFTL. A group of men with Anglo-Catholic convictions had already been invited to state their position. From this group there came, in due course, a very important document, *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West*. The archbishop also asked a number of Free Church scholars to define the grounds of conflict between the Catholic and Protestant traditions. This group produced a no less valuable document, *The Catholicity of Protestantism*. All three books were the result of deep scholarly thought. Which of them was the most convincing? A leading Anglican

theologian, not himself an evangelical, told Max Warren that in his opinion *The Fulness of Christ* was far and away the best argued of the three books.

During the fifties and sixties a number of major theological works were written by members of the Fellowship, including G. W. H. Lampe (*The Seal of the Spirit*), J. E. Fison (*The Christian Hope*) and F. W. Dillistone (*The Christian Understanding of Atonement*). EFTL members took part in several activities that were not officially sponsored by the Fellowship. For example, the St Paul's Library already referred to was not launched by the EFTL; it was due to the initiative of the Rev. W. A. Kelk. And the two books to which reference has been made (*The Triumph of God* and *The Fulness of Christ*) were not given the EFTL imprimatur, though all members would have approved of their contents. Another example of an activity not sponsored by the Fellowship but engaged in by its members would be the meetings with Mirfield Fathers in the early 1950s. From these meetings emerged a small book containing essays by evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics on the subject of justification by faith.⁷

The Open Letter to the two Archbishops, commending reciprocal inter-communion and protesting against the statement of the subject by the 1958 Lambeth Conference, was signed by 32 theologians, several of whom were not members of the EFTL—but the letter was drafted by two men who were at the centre of the Fellowship. Draft Canon B 15a, 'Of Admission to Holy Communion', was initiated by this Open Letter, published on All Saints' Day 1961.

Several wealthy laymen contributed generously to our funds and so we were able for a number of years to invite as guests theologians from the Continent, in particular from Germany and Holland. And in some years we were fortunate in having scholars from the USA, who were in this country on study leave and were able to join our conference. A letter written by Max Warren to that great American evangelical theologian Dr. A. C. Zabriskie, dated 31 January 1944, shows exactly what Max and the other founding members of the Fellowship had in mind when it was formed. After describing the launching of the Fellowship, Max writes as follows:

We deliberately did not and do not want to be looked upon as a Society of Sacred Study, or a group of people concerned with fostering ordinary study. Rather we are seeking to provide a link binding together specialists in one branch or another of theological literature. I say this because it makes clear that we are in no sense a new movement. . . . As regards theological position, we determined to resist any temptation to hyphenate the word 'evangelical'. We believe that word can stand on its own merits as enshrining a great tradition within Anglicanism and wide enough to embrace theologically conservative and liberal elements. The original company who met at Cambridge represented every wing of evangelical thought, and our group, now grown much larger, still does so. . . . From the start we saw the need to be in close touch with others of similar persuasion overseas. We have already got a number of missionary members.

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And my visit to Canada has been fruitful in establishing a firm link with a group there. I very much hope that through you and your company we may be able to have a link with you in USA. . . .

Earlier in this letter Max had stressed the fact that the Fellowship expected of its members a high academic standard. Membership of the Fellowship was to be limited to those who academically speaking were at least possible candidates for the BD degree either at Oxford or Cambridge.

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What did the Fellowship achieve during the 30 years of its life?⁸ Undoubtedly it did much to encourage serious scholarship amongst evangelicals. We have seen that in 1942 evangelicals were making little contribution in this field, but by 1972, when its work was done, the Fellowship could number among its members the Regius Professors of Divinity at Oxford and Cambridge, the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, the Lady Margaret Professor at Cambridge, and the Lightfoot and Van Mildert Professors at Durham. In addition there was a considerable number of men actively engaged in serious writing: men like Dr Henry Chadwick and Dr F. W. Dillistone. The membership, at its peak, had been in the neighbourhood of two hundred. The missionary cause had been greatly strengthened by many able men, members of the Fellowship, who had responded to the needs of the younger churches. The EFTL had not only put new life into Anglican evangelical scholarship; it had also brought evangelicals into the forefront of the church's life and leadership.

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NOTES

In writing this article I have drawn on material from an article by Michael Hennell, 'An Episode in Twentieth Century Church History', which appeared in *Theology*, September 1973. I am also greatly indebted to Dr Max Warren, who has kindly put at my disposal much valuable information about the Fellowship; some of this information has not been made known until now.

- 1 Michael Hennell in the article referred to above points out that the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement, and the liberal evangelical viewpoint that it represented, was now in decline as biblical theology had become the major theological trend.
- 2 Max Warren, *Crowded Canvas* (Hodder & Stoughton: 1974) p 224.
- 3 Here are the words of the Collect specially written for use at conferences and other meetings: 'God of all wisdom and grace, who hast given us both the will to learn and the power to believe; grant us by Thy Holy Spirit such discipline of mind and increase of faith, that we may become worthy interpreters of Thy Gospel to the world: through Him who is Thy Truth made manifest, even Jesus Christ our Lord.'
- 4 Warren, *op. cit.*

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- 5 The 1971 register gives the following list of conference subjects:
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| 1943 Authority | 1958 Man |
| 1944 Revelation | 1959 Theology of Mission |
| 1945 Baptism and Confirmation | 1960 Reconsideration of <i>The Fulness of Christ</i> |
| 1946 Church and Ministry | 1961 Liturgy |
| 1947 Eucharist | 1962 Power |
| 1948 Gospel and Moral Law | 1963 The Thirty-nine Articles |
| 1949 Eschatology | 1964 Conversion |
| 1950 Justification by Faith | 1965 Anglican Understanding of the Ministry |
| 1951 Atonement | 1966 Humanism |
| 1952 Holy Spirit | 1967 Sociology of Religion |
| 1953 Scripture and Tradition | 1968 Church and Nation |
| 1954 Priesthood and Sacrifice | 1969 God's World |
| 1955 Law and Justice | 1970 Prayer |
| 1956 Communication | 1971 Grace |
| 1957 Sanctification | |

Papers were often published in *The Churchman* or made available in duplicated form.

- 6 Future church historians should take careful note of this particular item of information. The writer has been given it on the authority of Dr Max Warren, who was told this by Archbishop Fisher himself.
- 7 EFTL members took part in the production of two other books:
- In 1959 the bi-centenary of Simeon's birth was celebrated by a symposium written by eight EFTL members. It was edited by Michael Hennell and Arthur Pollard and the title was *Charles Simeon 1759-1836* (SPCK: 1959).
 - Grounds of Hope*, edited by R. R. Osborn (James Clarke: 1968). This collection of essays was produced as a sequel to *Soundings*, the volume of essays edited by Dr A. R. Vidler (CUP: 1962). *Soundings* admitted the existence of much theological fog but claimed that soundings could be taken. In *Grounds of Hope* the writers stated that, though the fog had not dispersed, there were grounds sufficient for any ship to drop anchor before a fresh wind of the Spirit began to blow and moved the ship forward. 'These grounds are composed of Christian tradition and history as well as of Christian aspiration and adventure, and so they constitute Grounds of Hope.'
- 8 Why was it that EFTL ceased to function? Many former members would say that it was because Max retired from the Fellowship in 1971. Max, naturally, did not agree! In a letter written to me on 3 August 1977 he said: 'Strictly speaking my retirement had nothing to do with the EFTL packing up. Its job really was done. Its ablest members were by now so heavily involved in major international conferences that they could rarely, if ever, attend. This, plus cost of travel, meant that fewer folk felt able to attend conferences, and this involved a financial crisis . . . What I do think is that there could be a place for a revived EFTL on a quite different basis, consisting of a group of evangelicals specifically concerned with wrestling together over some of the great issues of today: race, other religions, the working of the Holy Spirit etc.—not a big group like EFTL, perhaps a dozen at most, an evangelical 'think tank'. I believe this could be very valuable, and it is not being tackled by the 'conservative' brethren who are moving forward in such an encouraging way.'

A postscript

When I wrote this article, I wished to say something about the unique contribution that Max gave to the EFTL; but Max insisted that any such tribute to him should be omitted. 'The real spade work', he wrote, 'was done by Gordon Hewitt and Michael Hennell.' No one would deny that Gordon and Michael did much to establish and continue the work of the EFTL, but all members of the Fellowship would agree that Max was (if the colloquialism may be forgiven) 'the life and soul of the party'. He was the real founding father of the Fellowship and his presence at any conference was a guarantee that it would be a lively one. Nothing in which he participated could ever be dull!

During the discussions that took place after a paper had been read, he would often sit in silence. But when he did intervene, he always did so with great effect. I remember at one of the conferences in the early sixties how the then newly emerging charismatic movement came under discussion. Someone from Sheffield said that he could not see such a movement making any impact at all upon the industrial workers of South Yorkshire. Max immediately gave us a glowing account of the renewal movements in Indonesia and South America and concluded by saying: 'Remember, Sheffield isn't the only place in the world!' His disarming smile and the mischievous twinkle in his eye took away any sting that there might otherwise have been in this final remark.

Many EFTL members sooner or later found themselves working overseas. Max knew just where to place members in strategic posts in the mission field (often the posts were in theological colleges), and the missionary cause was greatly strengthened by the succession of able men who responded to the needs of the younger churches. Not only were key posts overseas filled by EFTL members, but more and more of the bishops in our own country were being drawn from the ranks of the Fellowship. It is now no secret that Max was often consulted with regard to appointments to English sees. Diocesan bishops also asked Max's advice when they were looking for a suitable suffragan.

Max with his Christ-orientated dynamic personality radiated enthusiasm. He had much in common with his great missionary hero, Henry Martyn. Like Martyn, he won high academic honours at Cambridge. Like Martyn, he dedicated himself to missionary work amongst Moslems. Only the mercy of God prevented him from going, as Martyn did, to an early grave: after his return from Nigeria, for many a month his life hung in the balance. One remembers what Simeon used to say when he looked at the portrait of Henry Martyn hanging in his dining room: 'He never takes his eyes off me, and seems always to be saying, "Be serious—be in earnest—don't

trifle''.' And that was the challenge that Max threw out to his contemporaries. His earnestness was combined with a delightful sense of humour, and that made his zeal all the more contagious. Man after man caught fire from his burning enthusiasm.

And he radiated vitality. He was amused and delighted in his Ridley days when Edward Woods (then Vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge and later Bishop of Lichfield), greeted him in Trumpington Street with these words said with all Woods' inimitable heartiness: 'Hallo, you bean of life!' I can think of few other men who have exercised such a powerful and vitalizing influence for good upon the life of today's church. Max once told me that he would not be happy in heaven unless he could still do missionary work! We may be certain that he will be employed to the full 'in such great offices as suit the full-grown energies of heaven.'

Max has been a burning and a shining light—a prophet, a pioneer, and a true apostle of Christ. 'Through such souls God, stooping, shows sufficient of his light for us in the dark to rise by—and we rise.' By the grace of God may we too, at our last day, rise to the life immortal through him who on the cross won that 'strange victory' which enabled Max to fight the good fight and to overcome.