

# Editorial

## Anglican evangelical journals

The history of Anglican evangelical journals provides an instructive insight into the aspirations of, and the tensions within, evangelicalism over the last one hundred and eighty years. The story commences in 1802, when the initiative of the Eclectics led to the establishment of the *Christian Observer*. It had Zachray Macaulay as its editor and was given financial and moral support by the Clapham Sect.

Its moderate tone did much to make the thinking of evangelicalism known and appreciated more widely, but by the 1820s there were more strident voices to be heard and it no longer satisfied all. As a result, in 1828, the *Record* appeared. It was an altogether different production, publishing three times a week and giving vent to what the *Christian Observer* regarded as 'violent party spirit', 'utter lack of good temper' and 'advocacy of whatever is arbitrary and bigoted' (G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, Longmans, London, 1909, p.206). Indeed, Balleine judges that 'much of the dislike which evangelicals had to endure later, was due to the fact that for many people Evangelicalism meant the *Record*' (ibid., p.207).

Evangelicalism now had two journals. As the years went by the *Record* became a much more respectable paper, representing evangelical opinion fairly widely. Indeed, by the 1860s it was distinctly unsatisfactory to the more militant elements within evangelicalism, who in 1868 started the *Rock*, which coined the word 'Neo-Evangelical' and spent much energy firing salvos at the dangerous compromises which were being perpetuated by the likes of Canon J. C. Ryle.

The fact that there were three papers within evangelicalism is characteristic of the range of opinions which prevailed amongst those united in agreement about their adherence to evangelical principles. Henry Venn, who edited the *Christian Observer* for a brief period, reminded his readers that the existence of differences must be accepted:

[It] must ever be borne in mind that while the Evangelical body are united by certain great principles essential to the life of the soul, there always has been, and there always must be, differences on many points, without compromising those principles, arising from the natural bias of mind, or individual relations, or, it may be, from idiosyncracies which call for mutual forbearance, candid construction, and charity which is the bond of perfectness. To cherish these Christian graces, while upholding the standard of Truth, has been the aim of the *Christian Observer*, from its first commencement, nearly seventy years ago (*Christian Observer*, 69, 1870, p.691).

In 1879 *The Churchman* replaced the *Christian Observer* and it

## Churchman

continued very much the same tradition. The editor was most anxious that it remained totally loyal to evangelical principles. He was at the same time very aware that 'wide variations of opinion, even on points of doctrine, have always existed, wider, indeed, than persons conversant only with the history of their own times' were 'probably aware'. He regarded such differences as 'inevitable' within a school of thought which put such emphasis on 'private judgment':

Profound reverence for the absolute authority of the Word of God, and devout belief in Christ's promise of the gift of the Spirit of truth, encourage an independence of judgment, which calls no man master. It would be strangely foreign to all past experience of human nature if such a tendency did not sometimes run into excess; but in itself it is right and good. If on one side it renders a close organization and anything approaching party discipline impracticable, it nurtures on the other side a free vigorous life, which grows by exercise and is full of spiritual force (*The Churchman*, 1, 1880, Preface iv,v).

With such a tradition and such objectives it is somewhat ironic that the assertion should be made that *Churchman* has always been owned by one society and that it should therefore reflect its opinions (cf. *CEN*, 7 July 1983, p. 12). It has not always been owned by that society and it has traditionally sought to reflect many opinions within evangelicalism. It is because of this that we are most pleased to be able to publish the first part of a reply to Professor Dunn's articles. This reply was commissioned by the Editorial Board before the present crisis, and it exactly reflects its commitment to open debate on issues of concern to contemporary evangelicals.

If, however, that has been the tradition of *Churchman*, it has not been the tradition of every journal within evangelicalism. Others have sought to give a more exact expression to points of view within evangelicalism. They have done so with integrity and in a way which has been of benefit to the evangelical constituency as a whole. If, therefore, as seems very probable at the time of writing, the prospect is of two journals, it should not cause undue disquiet. It is neither a new nor a necessarily and inevitably divisive phenomenon.

Evangelicals are not agreed about everything. They seldom have been. It depends in large part on the stage the debate is at, the personalities involved, and the needs of the constituency represented, how this debate can best be taken forward. If, as in the nineteenth century, it is best forwarded by more than one journal, that does not imply a split, nor it is hoped any spirit of animosity between the journals and their respective readers. Indeed it is anticipated that there will be overlap in subscribers.

There is, however, pain at moments of parting, and the outgoing Editorial Board has been profoundly aware of the responsibility laid upon it and of the desirability of reaching a solution which would

perpetuate the one journal pattern of more recent decades. It agonized over the choices and sought to establish common ground with the owners. In the last analysis there were differences of emphasis and, as often happens, positions had been taken which were difficult to abandon. This cannot but be regretted though, in the providence of God, our prayer must be that this will lead to a sounder grasp of the great fundamentals which unite and to a patient and understanding attitude to the differences which will to a greater or lesser degree inevitably remain.

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