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The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion

EVANGELICALISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

BY TALBOT MOHAN

ANY consideration of the present position and the future prospects of Evangelicalism must take account of the strains and pressures of the contemporary situation. The prosperity of Evangelicals as a "party" may not in itself be of any importance, but the survival of the truth for which Evangelicalism stands is of the utmost importance. Therefore, what we are really concerned with is the success or failure of the evangelical witness upon the community in which we live.

Our present population has lived in a period during which the spiritual quality of the nation has steadily declined and the Church's influence on the national character has progressively weakened. A glance back to the past reveals with a shock from whence we have fallen and how considerably less is the impact of Evangelicalism upon church and nation today. The late Sir R. C. K. Ensor, the Oxford historian, gives a vivid description of the power of Evangelicalism to mould the nation's character. Victorian England, he says, was one of the most religious countries the world has ever seen. Its particular type of Christianity laid great emphasis upon conduct and dominated churchmen and nonconformist alike, and was, "using the term in the broad sense, evangelicalism". It was practically the religion of the Court and it gripped all ranks and conditions of society. It inspired nearly every front rank public man, save Palmerston, for four decades. "Nothing is more remarkable than the way in which evangelicalism in the broader sense overleaped sectarian barriers and pervaded men of all creeds." The English were the people of a Book. English merchants earned the reputation of being the most honest in the world. Other-worldliness became an everyday conviction. Of three successive Lord Chancellors, each taught in a Sunday School nearly all his life. Family prayers were almost universal. The observance of Sunday was almost a religion in itself. The habit of rest and serious thinking deepened the character of the nation. High peaks of literature became familiar to very wide classes who, today, would never read anything on that level. The nation put pleasure in the background and duty in the foreground to a quite exceptional degree. (*England, 1870-1914*, chap. 4.)

The evangelical quality associated with our nation in the minds of Roman Catholic countries, and seen in the character of our people, has not entirely left us. It shows itself in great national crises, but the inherited capital is almost exhausted and the image has become tarnished. Strangely, the Profumo case at first helped to restore the image abroad by the prompt judgment with which it was handled, but

after the revelations which followed, admiration gave way to shock. How was it possible that such things could happen in Britain?

The transformation has taken place so gradually that we may not have noticed that our evangelical history as a people is past. We are now a nation with a passion for pleasure, ignorant of the Book which helped to make us great, and as uncomfortable in a church as a beggar at a palace banquet. Lust is openly displayed in our newspapers, our advertisement bills, and in our public parks. The loss of that evangelicalism, which Ensor said "laid great emphasis on conduct", has warped our sense of right and wrong. The most shocking symptom of our decline is the adjustment of orthodox moral standards to make our immoral indulgence respectable, with the open encouragement of some church leaders. It ought not to be surprising that "the new morality" is often allied to a "new religion" propagated by church leaders who openly question the relevance of orthodox Christian belief.

Such is the grave and dangerous crisis in which we seek to evaluate our position and prospects. As we have said, we cannot approach this assessment merely from the angle of our own prosperity, except in so far as it indicates an effective impact upon a situation which presents just such a challenge as Evangelicalism can answer, and at a time when all true church people are shocked into readiness for a remedy from whatever quarter it may come.

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The Englishman has abandoned his inherent and perhaps unreasoning antipathy to Rome. His benevolent indifference to religion embraces that church also, and the high-pressure publicity given to all things papal today has completely changed the position and prospects of Roman Catholicism in this country. In a recent radio programme a question which related to religion received the usual woolly replies. One speaker, an M.P., denounced the "religious emotionalism" associated with Billy Graham and spoke in sentimentally approving terms of the "kind of religion" of the late Pope John. The whole panel was in significant agreement.

The attitude of the Church as a whole is much the same. It tolerates, and sometimes encourages, what it calls broadminded and enlightened Evangelicalism, but traditional Evangelicalism is often misnamed "fundamentalism", and is frowned upon and every effort made to discourage it. The most extreme forms of churchmanship (however opposed to the Church's professed beliefs) can be welcomed in our "comprehensive" Church, but not so-called "fundamentalism". We must not dismiss this attitude with contempt or treat it with resentment. Basically it stems from a rejection of what it considers too extreme an interpretation of the Christian faith, and a curious reluctance to allow the Almighty to intervene in the affairs of men by any means except that which we ourselves would adopt. But we recognize that Evangelicalism does make demands and call for a response. It does have a certain severity and simplicity. It is not content that spiritual barrenness should be cloaked by an outward veneer of décor and ceremony. But we must, therefore, be all the more careful to commend both the goodness and the severity of God by a loving and

winsome ministry which will break down prejudice by its very sincerity and joyfulness in the Lord. Many an Evangelical has carried his people with him by sheer enthusiasm and goodwill which they could not resist, while some others have never passed the stage of open opposition, because of a rather stern and cheerless approach, unrelieved by humour and persuasive leadership. We must not be indifferent to current popular sentiment about colour and dignified order where they can be used without unscriptural implications and distraction from worship in spirit and in truth. There is a spiritual immaturity about our generation : they need helps which our fathers would have called " kindergarten ". Above all we must beware of giving any justification to the familiar, and not always deserved, criticism that Evangelicals are dull and careless and slovenly in their worship. But we may comfort ourselves by remembering that even when Evangelicalism was at the zenith of its power Evangelicals were not popular. They were treated to the same contempt which is shown to " fundamentalism " today, and their success was achieved in spite of persecution.

The evangelical minister in the Victorian era was on a very easy wicket in comparison with his modern counterpart whose task is probably more difficult than it has ever been in our history. While there are many parishes where a splendid and successful work is in progress, there are some Evangelicals working alone, often isolated, with little to show for their labours, but ministering faithfully to people who resist the Gospel and resent a religion which demands commitment. The temptation to adjust themselves to the prevailing pattern is very great. It would be the easiest thing in the world to become popular. All that is necessary is to allow the outward forms of worship to provide its atmosphere ; to substitute for biblical exposition brief comments of topical or ethical interest ; to depend for fellowship upon social entertainment (with perhaps bingo and an occasional raffle), and the parson will be held up as the model clergyman. But few Evangelicals fall to this temptation. They struggle on manfully, though sometimes they become resigned to failure and thus their witness falls into disrepute. They need our prayers that they may hold on in the dark day, and that the revival which could transform their ministry and their people might soon come.

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The picture we have drawn is gloomy, but it is not the whole story ; there are many things to encourage us. The liturgical movement in the Church of Rome moves in some ways towards our own church's evangelical position, though at present there is no certainty of a reform of unapostolic doctrine. The liturgical movement in our own church goes to meet the Church of Rome. Though there is a rejection of some of the crude ideas of the Mass, there is a more or less official acceptance of the doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice based on the modern conception that we and God together are making atonement possible. This is unacceptable to Evangelicals, but there goes with it an attempt to bring them into the conception of the Anglican communion. In St. Paul's Cathedral last July there was a series of sermons by Evangelicals on great evangelical truths. *The Times* for

the 27th July carried a notice of "an administration of the Lord's Supper" following the last of the evening sermons. In a diocese where the bishop is a controversial figure five Evangelicals have been made honorary canons since his consecration. There are many parishes where success is evident to the whole Church. There are a number of dioceses where Evangelicals are exercising a powerful influence on diocesan life. In the Church Assembly their voice is effectively heard, and the lay representation is particularly strong and persuasive. In the correspondence in *The Times* following the outburst in Southwark Cathedral on the Thirty-Nine Articles, letters from Evangelicals took pride of place and power. In the realm of literature, tape recordings, and film strips to assist the work in the parishes, to establish young Christians, and to instruct and confirm all Christians in their faith, the evangelical contribution is second to none. The evangelical societies are vigorous and active and during recent years one or two have received a new impetus. Work among youth is an outstanding feature of evangelical parishes with the development of camps and house-parties and the remarkable growth of modern youth movements. The result is seen in the notable flow of evangelical ordinands, men of strong conviction and ability, who are filling our colleges to bursting point, so that in several of them additional building is proceeding as an urgent necessity. A considerable proportion of recruits for missionary service overseas comes from evangelical parishes. There has been a welcome revival of evangelical scholarship with the prospect of a weighty contribution to those debates which will engage the next Lambeth Conference, and on which some fateful issues may depend. The establishment of Latimer House at Oxford is a noteworthy achievement, and there are high hopes and many prayers for its success.

In the universities and public schools a quite remarkable work has been done through Christian Unions and the local evangelical churches—whereby the Church has been enriched and the ministry strengthened by the calling out of men of personality, ability, and deep spirituality. The Islington Conference has greatly increased in numbers and influence. The Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen goes from strength to strength with a consistently growing attendance. The newly-born Cambridge Layman's Conference made an excellent beginning last year, and this year saw the highly successful inauguration of the York Evangelical Conference.

Evangelicals are ahead of many of their brethren in their ecumenical demand for a more biblical and Christian attitude to the Open Table, and in their maintenance of the church's traditional policy of welcoming communicants of other denominations as guests at the Lord's Table. Surely this must be at the very heart of any genuine ecumenical movement?

The most promising pointer to the future lies in the phenomenal increase of evangelical ordinands of good quality and strong convictions. But we must be realists. Some, full of high hopes, but not fully aware of the problems they have to face, and perhaps with too easy an assurance of success, become discouraged and disillusioned and succumb to the pressures brought to bear upon them. They need a great deal of

encouragement and sympathy. They need also the reminder, given by the Archbishop of York in a centenary sermon to the London College of Divinity, that the ministry is a battle. The soldier expects to endure hardness. It is often said that Evangelicals are not so ready to face tough and unattractive parishes as are their Anglo-Catholic brethren, and that they are more concerned with securing their "entitlements". There is sometimes truth in this charge; but the welfare state, the shortage of clergy, and the consequent speed with which curates are appointed to livings (often important livings) after two or three years in the ministry must bear the major part of the blame. But having said this we may thank God for a splendid reinforcement of dedicated young men and we may face the future with high hopes.

There is no doubt about the overall strength and potential influence of Evangelicalism in this day of crisis, but we are all conscious of a malaise which hinders us from demonstrating on a big scale the proof of our claims for the evangelical "way". It is not easy to suggest any one cause of this infection. It may in part be due to a minority complex which is particularly evident in public conferences where evangelical speakers so often spend time "debunking" Evangelicalism. Another symptom of this weakness is the Athenian craving for some new thing, the assumption that success can only come through a breakaway from tradition and the presentation of Evangelicalism in some modern guise, as if the power of God depended upon our cleverness rather than upon our faithfulness.

Perhaps a major cause of our failure is the characteristic evangelical inability to unite. The cause of division is rarely disagreement on principles. It is invariably inability to agree on how far they should compromise with the pressures of other groups within the Church. This might be overcome by resolute leadership. There is no lack of outstanding Evangelicals but there is no one to whom *all* Evangelicals look and whom they are ready to follow.

The problem is intensified by our climate of easy-going carelessness about what is right or wrong. It has been called the age of the "shrug". Nothing really matters. There are few lines of demarcation. There is a prevailing tolerance which allows almost anything to pass. To take a stand for principle is to invite the charge of breaking the fellowship. Thus the process of "catholicizing" the church proceeds apace with little resistance. Thus, too, in this artificial atmosphere, the very existence of differing groups within the church, which is inevitable in any community where there is liberty of thought, is frowned upon. A bishop, whose advice was asked about the formation of an Evangelical Fellowship in his diocese, expressed strong disapproval because it would emphasize division in a church working towards unity.

With this contemporary indifference to the things that differ, there often goes a lack of insight and discernment, an inability to judge not only what is wrong but what is inexpedient and dangerous to the Gospel in the present context. Some Evangelicals who emphasize their demand for sound doctrine seem indifferent to the use of ritual and ceremonial which expresses and teaches doctrine which they reject. They brush objections aside impatiently—"it doesn't matter, we are

not interested in the controversies of our fathers"—forgetting that the success of Anglo-Catholicism was achieved, not by insistence upon doctrine, but by a campaign for "The Six Points" of order and ceremonial. It is important that we should examine carefully any new insights and, if thought right, appropriate what is valuable and doctrinally unexceptionable in the liturgical movement. But the careless abandon with which some would surrender the Prayer Book, and the light-hearted criticism of this monument of the Reformers' spiritual insight, is deeply disturbing at a time when its evangelical character is in mortal danger. If, in our enthusiasm for whatever revision is necessary, we cast away our heritage, the Church may never see the like again, and future generations will justly bewail our criminal lack of stewardship and foresight.

There is an urgent need for more teaching. Perhaps we have mistakenly assumed that teaching in churchmanship is unnecessary. There has been a phenomenal output of literature to redress this balance. It is very important that committed Christians, and especially young Christians, should be instructed in the doctrinal and spiritual implications of the tradition in which they have been reared.

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What of the future? The accelerating process of the catholicizing movement will force Evangelicals either to accommodate themselves to a very uncomfortable compromise, or to demonstrate their solidarity by making their position clear in regard to such things as intercommunion, reunion, episcopacy, the ministry, and the sacraments, and the limits within which their co-operation can be expected. Such a pronouncement must include both doctrine and practice. In an age when symbolism is increasingly popular and thought-forming, it would be fatal not to recognize the indissolubility of doctrine and its expression in worship.

All that we have been saying does not go to the root of the matter. If men and women are to be brought to new birth in Christ; if our nation is to be rescued from inevitable judgment and brought back to faith in God; if our national character is to be purified and ennobled so that we are a people whom God can use to fulfil His purposes in a world at the mercy of evil; then the dominating consideration is not evangelical popularity but evangelical success, not whether our claims are accepted but whether they are being vindicated. While we can thank God that Evangelicals are helping to maintain within the Church an emphasis which can only be for its good, and are offering a resistance to a trend which must inevitably frustrate its true purpose, yet we long to see all our churches filled with dedicated Christians rejoicing in the Saviourhood of Christ and consumed with a desire to win the outsider for Him. We long for national repentance and national righteousness so that once again we can be called a Christian country. God alone can accomplish this revolution. Revival is our urgent need. The solemn duty of Evangelicals is to humble themselves before God and seek for that holiness which was ever a noted quality of true Evangelicalism; that we should unite together in reliance upon God, in humble and happy confidence, with a gracious and winsome compulsion which will commend the Saviour we offer and the Evangel we proclaim.

TORONTO, 1963

With churchmen converging on Toronto from every corner of the globe for the Anglican Congress, Evangelicals made the most of their opportunities for organizing a variety of functions prior to the actual commencement of the Congress. On the evening of Sunday 11 August St. Peter's Church was filled to capacity to hear the President of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, the Most Reverend H. R. Gough, Archbishop of Sydney and Primate of Australia, speak on the subject of "Evangelical Essentials".

On the following day, at the invitation of the Canadian Anglican Evangelical Fellowship, Evangelical delegates to the Congress met with their Canadian brethren at the Church of St. James the Just, Downsview, for fellowship and discussion in the form of a brains trust (with a panel composed of the Rev. A. T. Houghton, the Rev. Dr. P. E. Hughes, and the Rev. Dr. R. A. Ward, under the chairmanship of the Ven. D. C. Hunt, Archdeacon of Kingston).

After lunch, a meeting of the Council of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion was held at All Saints' Church, with Archbishop Gough in the chair. Delegates from the following member groups were present :

- The Canadian Anglican Evangelical Fellowship
- The Church of England Evangelical Council
- The Chilean Evangelical Anglican Fellowship
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Sydney Churchmen
- The Evangelical Fellowship of the Church of England in South Africa
- The New Zealand Evangelical Churchmen's Fellowship
- The Tanganyika Anglican Evangelical Fellowship
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Victoria.

La Asociacion de Anglicanos Evangelicos de Chile (The Chilean Evangelical Anglican Fellowship) was welcomed into group membership of E.F.A.C.

That same evening, the Executive of the Canadian Anglican Evangelical Fellowship acted as hosts at a dinner for the Council of E.F.A.C., at which Archbishop Gough spoke informally. Among the distinguished guests present were Bishop Chandu Ray of Pakistan, Bishop Goodwin Hudson of Australia, Bishop Kahurananga of Tanganyika, Bishop Wiggins of Victoria Nyanza, Bishop Hunt of Toronto, and Bishop-elect Howell of Chile, Bolivia, and Peru.

TANGANYIKA

The first meeting of the Tanganyika Anglican Evangelical Fellowship was held at Msalato Girls' School, a few miles outside Dodoma, with the Rt. Rev. Alfred Stanway, Bishop of Central Tanganyika, as chairman. A paper on the Biblical Doctrine of the Ministry, given by the Rev. Ted Newing, was followed by spirited discussion. Because of the size of the territory and the scattered nature of the population, frequent meetings will not be possible, but further gatherings will be arranged to coincide with other occasions which bring people together.