

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## Editorial

**T**HERE are two difficulties inherent in the conditions of the task laid upon the Editor and his co-workers, of which it is desirable that all friends of the cause should form a clear and adequate conception. One arises from the limited space of a monthly serial containing only eighty pages : another from the constitution and circumstances of the Evangelical body.

“ The first affects the details of management. Two classes of readers have to be consulted. The one asks for readable articles on general subjects ; the other for the complete and exhaustive treatment of questions of a higher order. Papers of this latter kind cannot possibly be short. If excessive condensation be employed, all grace and vivacity of style are necessarily forfeited. If the length be excessive, they not only weary ordinary readers with their prolixity, but they occupy so large a portion of the space at command as to render variety of subjects impracticable. To adjust the mutual claims of the two modes of treatment is a task of equal difficulty and delicacy. Should the Editor sometimes be thought to miss the happy mean, he can only deprecate severity of judgment, and appeal to the forbearance of the student and the patience of the general reader.

“ Nor is the task less difficult to regulate the allowance to be made for diversities of opinion on secondary points, consistently with the firm and most unflinching maintenance of the distinctive principles of Evangelical truth. 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, are probably aware. It is inevitable that this should be the case in a School, of which a primary principle is the bounden duty of 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 to party discipline impracticable, it nurtures on the other side a free vigorous life, which grows by exercise and is full of spiritual force.

“ That the difficulty of adjusting these two various claims has been felt by the Evangelical Fathers of the past generation will be seen from the following extracts. They proceed from the pen of the Reverend Henry Venn, whose sagacity of judgment was as eminent as was his jealousy for the truth of God :

No one intimately acquainted, by tradition or by the careful study of the biographies and letters of the early Evangelical ministers, will be surprised that such differences as those alluded to should arise within the Evangelical body. Differences on secondary matters always have existed, often to a far greater extent than at present ; many such differences have been precisely of the same character as some at this day—many on far more important theological questions.

He sums up the whole question as follows :

In addition to the cautions here given respecting the treatment of young and immature inquirers after the truth, 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 have been, 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 idiosyncrasies which call for mutual forbearance, candid construction, and charity which is the bond of perfectness.

“ On these lines THE CHURCHMAN will be conducted. The Editor earnestly asks the prayers of those who are alive to the necessities of modern controversy, that a work, commenced out of a single desire to promote the glory of God, may be guided by His Spirit, and effectually prospered to the maintenance of His truth.”



With the above words did the first Editor of the CHURCHMAN embark on his perilous voyage of steering the new magazine through the difficult waters of Evangelical

opinion. We are in much the same position. We would echo his wise words and seek to follow the principles he has outlined.

He has drawn attention to "the wide variations of opinion even on points of doctrine" amongst evangelicals, and he ascribes it to the fact that the Evangelical school holds as "a primary principle the bounden duty of private judgment." This draws attention to one of the main difficulties of an unfortunate Editor, and the whole question of Evangelical Cohesion. In our contemporary, *The Church Gazette* of February, there appeared a striking article under the title of "Evangelicals at the Cross-roads" by one who styles himself "Ignoramus." That article emphasizes this very problem and the need of some real unity amongst evangelicals, even if uniformity is impossible. Ignoramus draws attention to the fact that the strongest link that used to exist, namely Unity on the Bible, is now broken by differing theories of inspiration. He goes so far as to remind us that the Third Person of the Trinity is not the Bible, but the Holy Spirit. Of course he has been attacked for this, as though he was throwing the Bible overboard, and wished to rely only on "the inner Voice." We do not believe that he intended any such thing, but would heartily agree with what our first Editor says above, that two things are necessary, "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." (Though Ignoramus might reverse the order.)

In this same first volume of *THE CHURCHMAN* appeared an article by that great leader of Evangelicals, J. C. Ryle, later Bishop of Liverpool. The whole is so instructive that we are reprinting it in this issue. Ryle describes the rather incohesive state of Evangelicals in 1879 but he encourages all by his survey of the progress of the Evangelical School in the Church during the previous fifty years. As he closes he wonders how we shall be going on fifty years hence! Ryle's great message is, "We cannot do better than stick to our sling and stones—the Word of God and prayer." In these words are the main characteristics of Evangelicals. As prayer is reliance on the Spirit of God, so our strength is the Word and the Spirit. To omit either is equally hopeless.