

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 11

Volume 11 • Number 2 • April 1987

**Evangelical
Review of
Theology** p. 99

The Evangelical Heritage of Australian Protestantism

David Parker

Reprinted with permission from Evangelical Quarterly January, 1985

(This thoroughly documented article by David Parker gives an historical perspective on Australian Evangelicalism up to the early eighties. It traces not only the strength and the growing influence of Evangelicalism in this continent but also honestly faces the question of polarisation among the Australian Christians as well as the need for greater theological creativity. The article also reveals that Australian evangelicalism is closer to its American counterpart than the Asian!)

—Ed.

Australia's oldest Protestant heritage is evangelical. It has persisted as an important force in the religious life of the country for almost two hundred years, even if it has not had the same prominent impact that the 'Born Again' movement and revivalism in general has had in U.S.A.¹ There have been periods, however, when the evangelical strength has been considerable and its influence widespread.² The Graham Crusade of 1959 was perhaps the most notable of these occasions.³

However this was not an isolated occasion; around the turn of the century, for example, the visits of Rev. G. Grubb and evangelists R. A Torrey, J. W. Chapman and C. M. Alexander aroused wide interest and created a deep and lasting impression.⁴

I. THE EXTENT OF EVANGELICALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Evangelicalism in Australia, as in other countries, flourishes within the Protestant denominations and also in a large number of para-church or inter-denominational agencies. P. 135

¹ R. Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (New York, Harper and Row, 1978), 3f. *Newsweek*, June 20, 1970, 42-47.

² J. E. Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in the South Seas* (Minneapolis, Bethany, 1976), chs. 8, 15, 20, 21.

³ C. P. Skinner, 'Australia's 1959 Awakening', *The Australian Evangelical*, vol 5 no 2, Nov-Dec 1977, 7-9. *Current Affairs Bulletin*, June 1959, 'Billy Graham in Australia'. S. B. Babbage and I. Siggins, *Light Beneath the Cross* (Kingswood, The World's Work, 1960), 2f. A. Nichols and W. Olsen, *Crusading Down Under* (Minneapolis, World Wide Publications), 1970, 6.

⁴ E. C. Millard, *What God hath Wrought* (London, E. Marlborough, 1891 (?) C. P. Skinner, 'Giants in the Land', a 10-part series beginning in *The Australian Evangelical*, vol 2 no 4, Jan 1975, 9.

Denominational Evangelicalism

Australia's colonization coincided with the development of the evangelical revival in the United Kingdom, so that it was not surprising to find that as the other denominations began to work alongside the Church of England in Australia, the evangelical tradition should be well represented among them as well. The colonies did not, however, benefit to any extent from the rapidly developing missionary movement, for being British colonies, they did not qualify as non-Christian countries!

By the end of the first century of settlement, the British churches had all been firmly established in Australia, complete with many of the characteristic features of religious life at home.⁵ The evangelical Protestant interpretation of the Faith was the norm for the nonconformist churches, and the evangelical party of the Church of England was to the fore in Sydney and Melbourne.⁶

It seemed that the pattern was set for the future. The Baptists, for example, were drawing heavily on the graduates of C. H. Spurgeon's Pastors' College for ministers and evangelists, and Methodist evangelists such as Rev. W. G. Taylor swept through the country in the spirit of their founder.⁷ As if to clinch it all, the Presbyterians in Victoria successfully opposed one of their number, Rev. Charles Strong,⁸ whose attitude to the traditional views of salvation and the Bible/ science issue in particular caused offence. His 'Australian Church' commenced in 1885 with a flourish, and survived until 1957.

But, as Willis B. Glover points out in his study of English nonconformity,⁹ by 1895 a change had come over the British evangelicals as a result of the virtually complete acceptance by scholars of the new type of interpretation of Scripture known as 'the higher criticism' which for the first time applied rigorous historical and critical methods p. 136 to the study of the Bible.¹⁰ Although it was not accompanied at that time by any serious alterations to the received doctrines, as had been the case on the Continent where the new discipline had originated, higher criticism with its emphasis upon the human origins of the Bible and its abandonment of the concept of biblical inerrancy did mean a new approach to Scripture. It paved the way for a critical approach to Protestant doctrine, which was to have increasing impact as time passed.¹¹

⁵ R. W. Dale, *Impressions of Australia* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 217. There is no comprehensive history of the church in Australia available. Each denomination has its own series of histories for each state or regional area. *The Australian Encyclopaedia* entries for each denomination provide a concise summary of their development. K. S. Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1970), vol 3, ch. XIII, and vol 5, ch. VI, provides one of the few surveys available.

⁶ A. de Q. Robin, *op. cit.* M. L. Loane, *Hewn from the Rock* (Sydney, AIO, 1976). regards the bishopric of W. G. Broughton with his Tractarian sympathies as an atypical interlude in the evangelical heritage of Sydney diocese (54–65, 141).

⁷ C. P. Skinner, *The Australian Evangelical*, vol 3 no 4, Jan 1976, 22. R. S. C. Dingle, *Annals of Achievement* (Brisbane, Q.B.D., 1947), 81, 251.

⁸ *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (A.D.B.) vol 6, 'Strong, Charles'.

⁹ W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, Independent Press, 1954), 286.

¹⁰ J. D. Douglas, (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (N.I.D.C.C.) (Exeter, Paternoster, 1978 2nd ed.), 469.

¹¹ S. L. Greenslade (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge, University Press, 1963), 294–338. R. J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972).

In the U.S.A. in particular, there was considerable resistance to higher criticism. The implications for doctrine were more apparent in U.S.A., so that there was also resistance to doctrinal liberalism or 'modernism'. Taking their name from a series of booklets called 'The Fundamentals' which defended the basis of traditional Protestant teaching, conservatives in U.S.A. came to be known as 'fundamentalists'. The term 'conservative evangelical' was also sometimes used in the United Kingdom.¹²

It was during the 1920s that the fundamentalist-modernist controversies rocked the American churches, resulting in divisions in denominations, and the emergence of a new conservative movement, complete with churches, training schools, and missionary agencies.

By mid-century, the extreme or militant wing of this movement had, in its zeal in contending for the faith, gained for itself an image of belligerency, obscurantism and separatism. This produced a reaction from moderates who wished to retain the conservative theology, but at the same time to be 'intellectually respectable, socially concerned and co-operative in spirit'.¹³ This renewal movement, known at first as 'Neo-evangelicalism' and then later as 'evangelicalism' which shares many of the same characteristics as its British counterpart, conservative p. 137 evangelicalism, has developed strongly in the three decades since, and sees itself as heir to the heritage of the original 'fundamentalists' and the nineteenth century evangelicals.¹⁴ Today it is a major force on the American religious scene.

The separatist fundamentalist group has also continued to flourish, so that as E. Jorstad¹⁵ puts it, there are 'two on the right', both of which have made a mark on U.S. religion, politics and social life, as the events surrounding the election of Presidents Carter and Reagan illustrate.

In Australia, the conservative reaction to higher criticism and modernism was not so spectacular, with only a few cases of overt controversy on record. The case involving the distinguished scholar, Dr. Samuel Angus of St. Andrew's (Presbyterian) Theological Hall, Sydney was undoubtedly the most notable.¹⁶ Australian religion, in general, has been

¹² Readily available references to the emergence of 'Fundamentalism' include: J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London, IVF, 1958), ch2; and especially *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th Ed.) 'Fundamentalist and Evangelical Churches', See also the bibliography supplied with the Enc. Brit. article by a leading authority on the subject. It should be noted that the terms 'fundamentalism' and 'evangelicalism' may be used in both a broad inclusive manner, in which case they are nearly synonymous but too vague to be helpful, and in a restricted specific manner, in which case they refer to two distinct sections of contemporary conservative Protestantism unless reference is being made to the period of the 1920s when the term 'fundamentalist' was first used. The term 'evangelistic' refers to the activity of evangelism.

¹³ NIDCC, 396.

¹⁴ For a contemporary analysis, see D. F. Wells and J. D. Woodbridge, *The Evangelicals* (2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1977). The present author's unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Queensland, 1978) *Revelation and Scripture in Neoevangelical Theology*; analyses this movement's claim to an identity separate from that of fundamentalism.

¹⁵ E. Jorstad, 'Two on the Right: a comparative look at Fundamentalism and New Evangelicalism', *The Lutheran Quarterly*, May 23, 19 107-117, and E. Jotstad, *The Politics of Doomsday; Fundamentalists of the Far Right* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1970). For an insider's view see G. W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, Bob Jones University Press, 1973).

¹⁶ ADB vol 7, 'Angus, Samuel (1881-1943)'. A. Dougan, *A Backward Glance at the Angus Affair* (Sydney, Wentworth Books, 1971). Mr. Parer, *Australia's Last Heresy Hunt: Samuel Angus* (Sydney, Wentworth Books, 1971).

largely conservative so that there were few examples of a strong and widely influential modernist school against which 'fundamentalists' could react.

However, significant sections of Australian Protestantism have retained a conservative theology, and there exist in all the main Protestant denominations considerable numbers of evangelicals, many of whom have formed organizations such as the Westminster Fellowship within the Presbyterian church and the trans-denominational Evangelical Alliance.¹⁷

The most obvious example of a sizeable and influential conservative evangelical group within these denominations is the evangelical wing of the Church of England. Its main concentration is in Sydney but it is strongly represented elsewhere as well. It is in this group that the p. 138 concept of the evangelical heritage of Australian Christianity is preserved most conspicuously. Archbishop Marcus Loane's 1976 Moorhouse Lectures (published as *Hewn from the Rock*: AIO, 1976) trace the development from the first chaplain to 1958 from this perspective.

Denominational evangelicals have mostly operated in a rather low key manner, but the creation of the Uniting Church in Australia (officially formed June 22, 1977) was one case where more concerted and spirited action took place. In the process of re-organization that occurred at this time, continuing Congregational and Presbyterian churches emerged which are more consistently evangelical than were their predecessors.

Besides these evangelicals within the main Protestant denominations, there are also, of course, smaller denominations which are more or less solidly evangelical in theology, having been relatively unaffected by liberalising trends. These include the Baptist Churches, Churches of Christ, Reformed Church of Australia, Lutheran Church of Australia and the Christian (Open Plymouth) Brethren.

There are also counterparts in Australia to American fundamentalists. The most prominent examples are the independent Baptist churches which have been formed since the mid-1960s by missionaries coming from fundamentalist Baptist churches in U.S.A.¹⁸ There are also some other small American churches of Methodist and Presbyterian polity of comparatively recent origin, as well as independent churches and denominations of indigenous origin scattered throughout the country. Some of these are members of small associations such as the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches of Australia (FECA) and the Australasian Alliance of Bible Believing Christian Churches (AABBCC) which also come into the fundamentalist category, although few apart from the independent Baptists welcome the use of the term.¹⁹ p. 139

Para-church Evangelicalism

¹⁷ The Evangelical Alliance (NIDCC, 359) dates from 1846. It had wide influence in U.S.A and Europe during the 19th century and so existed in Australia at this time. (Robin, *op. cit.*, 139). Its present operations in all states of Australia and as a national body dates from the mid-1960s.

¹⁸ *New Life*, June 25, 1964. The independency of these churches makes it difficult to trace as a movement, but the paper, *Biblical Fundamentalist*, published in Brisbane which circulates widely throughout Australia reflects their position.

¹⁹ A good example of this reticence can be seen in Marcus Loane's remarks in commendation of the Billy Graham crusade in Nichols and Olson, *op. cit.*, 140f: "The word 'fundamentalism' has been transferred from America to Great Britain and a deliberate attempt has been made to use this word in order to smear conservative evangelicals. They have been called Fundamentalists in order to imply that they represent something effervescent, obscurantist, anti-intellectual, and hostile to true learning. But this kind of misrepresentation in the long run will recoil on those who refuse to treat the views of conservative evangelicals with the calm and balanced consideration which should be the hallmark of the enlightened and progressive mind."

As well as these denominations and churches, evangelicalism and fundamentalism are expressed in a large number of inter-denominational para-church agencies. Some of these existed prior to the twentieth century, but many are more recent in their origin. The movement as a whole has taken on greater ideological cohesiveness and distinctiveness since ca. 1920 in the context of evangelical-liberal theological differences.²⁰

There are a large number of these agencies in Australia, particularly in view of the relatively small place organized religion has had within the community during this period. The Evangelical Alliance *Directory of Missions* (3rd edition, 1978) alone lists some 91 organizations and a further 25 Bible and theological colleges, of which at least 80% could be regarded as evangelical. These agencies embrace virtually all of the fields of their overseas counterparts, including missions, evangelism, clergy training, Bible teaching, professional interest groups, learned disciplines, media, welfare and political lobbying.

Some of these agencies are grouped into voluntary association for the development of common interests, but they have no legislative power over members all of which have arisen spontaneously and operate independently of each other, yet with a high degree of unity of purpose and spirit.

Most of these agencies are functional groups, having as their objective evangelism, welfare work, the promotion of the deeper spiritual life or such like. They seek personnel and support from all of the Protestant denominations. There is therefore relatively little emphasis placed upon controversial doctrinal matters, with the result that a high degree of co-operation is possible on the basis of similar conservative evangelical doctrinal statements which they adopt.

II. BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

This common doctrinal basis sums up the essential points of the theology of the Protestant Reformation as it was re-emphasized in the subsequent movements such as English Puritanism, Continental P. 140 Pietism and the Evangelical Revival. A typical exposition²¹ of the main distinguishing features of evangelicalism may be found in an article in the widely circulating evangelical newspaper, *New Life* (Sept. 12, 1968). The author has set out these features in five points.

Leading the list is the view of Scripture which sees it as the inspired Word of God through which God's will is made known. It also sees it as the supreme and sufficient authority and source of Christian doctrine and guide for Christian practice.

Then follow the doctrines concerning Jesus Christ—his deity, sinlessness, saving death, resurrection, ascension and his expected glorious return to the earth. The third characteristic belief is the salvation of the individual believer through the 'new birth' or spiritual renewal by the work of the Holy Spirit and the incorporation thereby of such believers into the one invisible true church.

The final two distinguishing features mentioned relate to the believer's evangelistic concern for other people that they might also share the new birth and the fact that his life should be godly, humble and faithful.

Such an understanding of evangelicalism would find wide acceptance from a cross-section of Australian evangelicals. But these principles represent the distinctives held in

²⁰ E.g., Evangelical Missionary Alliance; South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges.

²¹ Other readily available examples are, Packer, *op. cit.*, J. R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London, IVF, 1958) and, *Christ the Controversialist* (London, IVF, 1970); Billy Graham, *How to be Born Again* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977). For the historical background, see K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York, Harper and Row, 1953), 813f, 894–7, 1022f.

common by all. Beyond this there are several doctrinal options, not all of them mutually exclusive.

Represented in Australia are the historic doctrinal systems embraced by the major streams of Protestantism, viz., Calvinist or Reformed, Anglican, Arminian/Holiness, Lutheran and Baptist.

Also strongly represented are the emphasis upon the deeper spiritual life as taught at the 'Keswick' conventions held annually in many parts of the country, millenarianism, and the charismatic movement/ pentecostalism.

Fundamentalist tendencies in these doctrinal options may be distinguished by their stress on such themes as the inerrancy and literal interpretation of Scripture, the extremely high priority placed on 'soul-winning' evangelism, dispensationalism,²² and the need for Bible-believing Christians and churches to separate from and militantly denounce unorthodox, non-biblical beliefs. p. 141

III. FACTORS AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT OF EVANGELICALISM IN AUSTRALIA

During the nineteenth century, Australian Protestantism was able to build upon its evangelical birthright by drawing upon the traditions of British Protestantism which at that time was enjoying a period of remarkable vitality.

These British influences were supplemented by American influences, especially over the last century, and increasingly so in recent decades. Even before U.S.A. emerged onto the world political scene, it was making an impact upon evangelicalism world-wide, and by mid-century had taken the lead from Britain as the epi-centre of the movement.

These influences were mediated through the circulation of literature, the visits of Australians abroad for travel, conference and study, and especially in the visits of British and American preachers and leaders to this country. The media, especially T.V., has been increasingly influential in disseminating information in more recent times. However, it should not be overlooked that at the end of the nineteenth century there was enough informed interest in Australia concerning D. L. Moody's evangelistic work in U.S.A. and U.K. to produce an invitation for him to visit Australia.²³ He was unable to come, but his assistant, R. A. Torrey, a noted contender for the evangelical faith, and his song-leader, Charles Alexander, conducted a highly successful tour instead, and thus set the pattern for regular visits by overseas evangelists which has continued to the present.

Similarly the Bible training institutes set up under the inspiration of Moody at Chicago²⁴ and Glasgow were well enough known at this time to attract a significant number of Australian students. More than one similar agency in Australia was modelled on these institutions, which has in turn led to a virile Bible college movement with an aggregate alumni in excess of eight thousand persons.²⁵

²² Dispensationalism (NIDCC, 303) of which J. N. Darby (1800–1882), an early Plymouth Brethren teacher, was the main originator, is a variety of premillennialism which teaches that history is divided into several eras or dispensations in which God's mode of dealing with man differs. The system was popularised by the *Scofield Reference Bible* (OUP).

²³ C. R. Skinner, 'Giants in the Land', *The Australian Evangelical* vol 2 no 4, Jan 1975, 9.

²⁴ S. A. Witmer, *The Bible College Story: Education with Dimension* (Wheaton, Accrediting Assoc. of Bible Colleges, 1970), 35–7.

²⁵ *On Being*, Nov 1980, 27–42. D. Parker, 'The Bible College Movement in Australia', paper read at 9th Conference of the South Pacific Assoc. of Bible Colleges, August, 1980.

In the later period, revivals of interest that occurred overseas in Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism and Calvinism were effectively transmitted to Australia by medium of these channels of influence and have become important elements in the Australian evangelical spectrum. p. 142

A further factor in favour of the development of evangelicalism in Australia is the practical and Biblical nature of its beliefs and practices, which suit the needs and abilities of untrained lay-people. The literal method of Biblical interpretation requires little scholarship, and, in good popular Protestant style, places a premium on the divinely-given right and ability of believers to read and understand Scriptures for themselves. The type of worship used which places emphasis upon preaching and simple gospel songs is easily appreciated, while the doctrinal and ethical tenets of the faith are readily applied to the individual's daily life without the need for a sophisticated knowledge of the intricacies of sociology, politics and the like.

There are a number of factors, however, which have limited the impact of evangelicalism as a recognizable movement in Australian public life. It will be recognized that some of them also relate to other forms of Christianity, but notice will be taken of their implications for evangelicalism in particular.

It has often been remarked that the role of the church in the days of the penal colony of New South Wales as part of the Establishment has had a marked influence upon its later image and its reception by the community. The fact that the early chaplains were evangelicals, and one in particular, Reverend Samuel Marsden, was notorious for his work as a magistrate, did not help to create a good impression for evangelical Protestantism. Reverend John Dunmore Lang's stormy career in public life also did little to help the cause. Whatever may have been the virtues of its earliest clergy and membership, Australia's original evangelical heritage did not succeed in producing anything like a powerful religious movement.

One of the legacies of these pioneering days is the 'moral policeman' image of the church and Protestantism in particular.²⁶ It has emerged at various times since, especially at the end of the nineteenth century in the period of 'wowserism' and again a century later in the Festival of Light.²⁷ While not appreciated by sections of the Australian community, this insistence upon a correlation between beliefs and behaviour and the need for public morality is a characteristic trait of evangelicalism. It was also apparent in Britain in the hey-day of evangelicalism in the form of the Non Conformist Conscience' and was an understandable response of the puritan p. 143 element in evangelicalism to what it saw as a serious departure of the nation's ethical standards from the divinely-given order.²⁸

A further factor that worked against the influence of evangelicalism was the secularism and pluralism of the Australian religious settlement, worked out in the period from Governor Bourke's Church Act (1836) through to the establishment of free and secular education in the 1870s. It was essentially a pragmatic decision, based on the peculiar conditions of the colonies where, as Bourke perceived, the mixture of religious beliefs in the colony meant there could be no possibility of favouring one denomination

²⁶ e.g., J. Stebbins, *Australian Christianity* (Canberra, The Gospel in Australia File, Reading Guide No 3, Zadok Centre, 1980), 2.

²⁷ F. Crowley (ed) *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne, Wm. Heinemann, 1974.), 211f. *Current Affairs Bulletin*, Feb 1974, vol 50 no. 9, 13-19.

²⁸ E. A. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), 112-6.

over another as had been the case in England and Scotland.²⁹ In the absence of denominational co-operation, the only practical alternative was to remove formal institutional religious matters from public life and relegate them to the domestic concerns of the churches themselves. This procedure was also, of course, in line with the wishes of the advocates of 'moral enlightenment', the 'chief secular creed of the play (which) tended to be egalitarian, and hostile to privilege and pretension, especially of the clergy'.³⁰

This secularizing process had profound effects for religious developments in Australia. The policy of secular education effectively removed serious consideration of religious questions from the curricula of every level of schooling, except the private religious school sector.³¹ Thus, generations of government school and university students were brought up to assume that religious questions were to be segregated from ordinary affairs.

This ran counter to the evangelical's Bible-centred approach to life, making him justifiably suspicious of the values inculcated by the educational system. It helped to create the separatist or ghettomentalities whereby it was assumed that it was necessary to separate oneself from the secular world in order to find opportunity to develop one's faith and practice and to do so in a proper biblical manner. p. 144

During recent decades it has been possible to relax the secularist nature of education because of the increased spirit of co-operation on the part of the churches, and because of the development of the non-dogmatic 'studies in religion' approach to religious education. However, neither of these factors is welcomed by fundamentalists since they perceive them to involve serious threats to the purity of their doctrine and practice. They have responded by beginning to develop their own educational system in which an attempt is made to relate the curricula to biblical teaching and perspectives as explicitly as possible. One of the disciplines affected most conspicuously in this regard is science, in which creationism is taught as a valid interpretation of the origins of the world and man.³²

The extension of education in recent decades has meant that evangelicals, in common with other groups, have increasingly been in a position to avail themselves of higher education and so to broaden their horizons. One result of this development is that the traditional isolation of evangelicalism from the wider affairs of culture has begun to break down. However, this poses the evangelical with a new and complex range of questions as he seeks to discern his attitude towards issues which previously were of no great concern to him. The 'Zadok Centre', a national research and resource centre established at Canberra in 1977 by the Scripture Union and Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (A.F.E.S., formerly I.V.F.), and the independent periodical, *On Being*, are examples of positive response to this new situation.³³

²⁹ J. S. Gregory, *Church and State* (Melbourne, Cassell, 1973), 14ff. G. L. Buxton, in Crowley, *op. cit.*, 209f.

³⁰ M. Roe, in Crowley, *op. cit.*, 112. See also 162.

³¹ The theological training of candidates for the ministry was particularly affected by the exclusion of divinity studies from the universities. An attempt to reverse this situation as late as 1910 at Melbourne University was unsuccessful and resulted instead in the establishment of a separate body, The Melbourne College of Divinity, whose governing body is made up of representatives of the churches. See A. de Q. Robin, 'Theology and Theological Training in Australia: an Outline Historical Survey' (*Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol 54 Pt 4, Dec 1968, 362ff).

³² The Creation Science Association of Australia with its headquarters in Brisbane is the leading exponent of this view in Australia. Its views are similar to those expressed in J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1961). C.S.A.'s first book, *Man: Ape or Image—the Christian's Dilemma*, by Prof. J. Rendle Short of the University of Queensland, was published in 1980.

³³ J. & M. Prince, *Tuned in to Change* (Sydney, Scripture Union, 1979), 234.

Another factor arising out of the nineteenth century religious settlement which had its effect upon evangelicals was the decision to restrict religious instruction in schools to general religious and moral teaching and the use of Bible lessons, rather than permitting the use of sectarian or denominational material (except for that extra-curricular period of instruction conducted by visiting clergy). As both the Anglican Bishop Broughton, and the Catholic Bishop Polding saw at the time, this would be detrimental to the efficient propagation of denominational tenets.³⁴ p. 145

Evangelicals were content with the move because the practice of using biblical material alone seemed to be in harmony with their view of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, an assessment which had its share of practical wisdom. However, the combined effect of the elementary, neutral nature of the Bible teaching, and the exclusion of religious topics from the educational process meant that the evangelical's need for in-depth doctrinal study of the Bible and its relation to fundamental values was as difficult to achieve under the system as was the propagation of Anglican or Catholic dogmatic theology.

It was not surprising then that evangelicals, instead of developing a strong doctrinal profile, developed their strength in other areas such as puritan morals (in which they could find support from a wider section of the community) and pietistic practice. The long term effect of this development was that when occasion presented itself, even evangelicals were ill-equipped to sustain an intellectually effective debate with the advocates of higher criticism and liberal theology. Instead, they rested their case largely on the merits of traditional Bible teaching, evangelism and the deeper spiritual life, and so failed to meet the challenge on its own grounds.³⁵

This tendency was a reflection of the influence of the British type of evangelicalism. W. B. Glover has pointed out that in the nineteenth century when higher criticism was first being debated, there was no strong school of conservative theology in Britain as there was in the Princeton Theological Seminary in U.S.A. Thus there was a marked absence of theological debate in Britain, although there was some resistance to higher criticism.

British evangelicalism was in fact characterized in large measure by a non-intellectual pietistic Christianity, epitomized in the 'Keswick' deeper life convention, which was influential in Australia at the early stage of the closing decades of the nineteenth century.³⁶

It is noteworthy that the controversial reactions against the few outstanding examples of liberalism in Australia tended to be linked p. 146 with either the American conservatives (such as the Calvinists from Princeton Theological Seminary, and later, its conservative rival, Westminster Theological Seminary, or the Fundamentalists) or the few British controversialists (such as C. H. Spurgeon and the I.V.F. movement). The normal British evangelicalism, which was also largely reproduced in Australia, while holding the same doctrinal views, was not given to controversy. While personality and circumstance

³⁴ Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia* (Sydney, Tudor, 1969), 99f, 106–108, 153–9.

³⁵ See, for example, the response to the Angus Case as represented by *Was Jesus God? and other addresses* (Sydney, Life and Service Campaigns, 1934), the printed record of sermons preached in Sydney and Melbourne by Dr. W. G. Scroggie whose visit was intended to help counteract Angus's influence. A similar response may be found in the words of leading contemporary Baptist, Dr. C. J. Tinsley, who said, 'We shall not reach the masses ... by modernizing the Gospel by emasculating its doctrinal content. I believe it is going to be done by re-affirming ... the truths that have created the Church ... One of the most vital things to be re-affirmed is evangelism.' (A tract entitled, 'The Case for Evangelism', 5, 6).

³⁶ For an analysis of the 'legacy of Pietism' see D. G. Bloesch. *The Evangelical Renaissance* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 101–157.

had their part to play in this, due recognition must also be given to the introspective spirit of pietism which focused evangelical attention upon spiritual well-being rather than upon doctrinal and ecclesiastical disputation.

Another factor arising from the nineteenth century religious settlement which had important implications for evangelicalism was the decision to adopt a policy of religious pluralism, rather than the establishment of one religious denomination. Coupled with such factors as the legend of Australian 'mateship' and the pragmatic priorities dictated by the needs of pioneering the church in the difficult circumstances of a new and growing country like Australia, the policy of pluralism meant that it was difficult for a distinctive party within the church to claim any dominance or superiority for itself.

During the nineteenth century, the sectarian battles were fought on matters of denominational theology, resulting in intense rivalry across and even within denominations. Such behaviour further discredited the church in the eyes of its liberal critics, and tended to increase its alienation from any meaningful engagement in public life. This was particularly important during the latter part of the century when the challenges coming from the development of science and from political movements abroad were at their critical stage.³⁷ It meant that the church, in a badly divided and intellectually impoverished state, was in a poor position to cope with a major ideological assault. Accordingly, public support for institutional religion has shown a steady proportionate decline in Australia since the turn of the century, although the churches are vigorous, and growing in absolute terms.³⁸

The claims of evangelicalism, with its characteristic appeal for a serious commitment to an increasingly unpopular doctrinal position, were difficult to sustain in these circumstances. By contrast, in U.S.A., the revivalist tradition, long a part of the national heritage, was [p. 147](#) beginning to create a situation where it was as natural to be 'born again' as it was to be a 'good mate' in Australia.³⁹

It was not therefore until after World War I that the evangelical-liberal tension emerged as a major trans-denominational issue. By this time, rationalist principles had begun to have some effect upon theology, thus bringing the challenge *within* the churches. Further, in Australia, the pioneering stages of the churches were over and the institutional structure of the denominations had taken shape. Since the spread of the churches across the country had required centralized assistance and regulation, a strong denominational bureaucracy was in the process of emerging, leaving virtually the entire Christian population in communion with a small number of denominational hierarchies.

This created a situation where there was little scope for ecclesiastical independency or the division of denominations. This was in strong contrast to U.S.A. where a strong independent church movement grew up, favouring those like the Fundamentalists, who dissented from denominational trends.⁴⁰

With the institutional form of Christianity in Australia established, the churches could begin to turn their attention to other matters. With the gradual worldwide emergence of ecumenism, there was a lessening of sectarian rivalry, although it was a long process

³⁷ Walter Phillips, 'The Defence of Christian Belief in Australia, 1875–1914: The Responses to Evolution and Higher Criticism', *Journal of Religious History*, vol 9 (1976–7), 402–423.

³⁸ J. Harrison, 'The Declining Influence of Religion in Australia', *The History Teacher*, Oct 1975, 14–27.

³⁹ W. G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, Ronald Press, 1959).

⁴⁰ H. Lindsell, in W. C. Harr, *Frontiers of the Christian World Mission since 1938* (New York, Harper Bros., 1962), 198–9.

before any inter-church union schemes came to fruition.⁴¹ This co-operative spirit was noticeable within the denominations also as mergers of Methodist and of Presbyterian bodies took place, and there developed a federal framework for each denomination across state boundaries.⁴²

The co-operative spirit was also evident in the para-church area, with the rapid development of the network of organizations mentioned earlier in this paper.

The growth of ecumenism in the churches meant that it was less appropriate for evangelicals to seek their own independent path. They p. 148 needed to find a way of retaining their own identity, and to do so without offending the spirit of good will that had arisen.

For fundamentalists who stood outside the churches, or who cared little for the approval of the churches, this was no problem. They simply proceeded to propagate their own views and to condemn those whom they considered had departed from biblical beliefs. However, for all their activity they registered no dramatic gains in overall numerical strength.

It was more difficult for those within the church to maintain the fine balance that was needed. Their moderate policy was not viewed with approval by those of more extreme views, who by this time were receiving the benefit of the influence of the revival of fundamentalism abroad.

Under this influence, Australian fundamentalism has made gradual gains, especially in the last decade. Its numerical and organizational strength is indicated by two events which took place in 1980. In May, one group sponsored the visit of the fiery American fundamentalist, Dr. Carl McIntire, for a conference and protests on the occasion of the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Congress in Melbourne.⁴³ In November, another group sponsored a National Congress of Fundamentalists in Sydney at which the chief speaker was the equally well known Northern Irishman, Rev. Ian Paisley.

Conservative evangelicals were misunderstood also by their more liberal fellow-churchmen who were anxious to move forward to take advantage of developments in recent biblical and theological scholarship.

The net result has been in recent years an increased polarization between evangelicals and fundamentalists in Australia. The situation is increasingly similar to that of U.S.A. where there is a clear line of demarcation between these groups, and less like that of U.K. where the differences are more muted.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE

⁴¹ Early moves for the union of Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches took place in the early 1920s, but were unsuccessful. G. Yule, 'Approaches to Church Union in Australia,' in D. M. Taylor (ed) *We Were Brought Together* (Sydney, A.C.C., 1960), 151-5.

⁴² The Methodist Church of Australasia composed of state conferences and the results of mergers of earlier Methodist bodies such as the Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians was established in 1902. Similarly, the Presbyterian Church of Australia was formed in 1901. The Baptist Union of Australia was formed in 1926 and Lutheran Union was finally achieved after lengthy negotiations in 1966.

⁴³ *New Life*, May 22, 1980. This type of polemic activity was typical of McIntire who formed the International Council of Christian Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 as a fundamentalist alternative to the World Council of Churches which was being formed there at the same time. L. Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement* (The Hague, Mouton, 1963), 44.

Absolute figures for the strength of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in Australia are not available, but the evidence supplied by an [P. 149](#) examination of the various institutions referred to in this paper suggests that the conservative wing of Protestantism constitutes a vigorous and significant element in Australia's religious life.

Mention can be made almost at random of other indicators. The Anglican evangelicals conducted a second National Evangelical Anglican Congress (N.E.A.C.) in Melbourne in May 1981 on a similar basis to a previous congress and a successful series in Britain.⁴⁴ An evangelistic and training enterprise for young people, Explo 80, held in Brisbane in May 1980, drew support from all major Protestant churches and attracted several thousand young people from all states of Australia. It will be repeated in other states in later years. Evangelical Bible and theological colleges report large enrolments, while the Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund (TEAR Fund) is enjoying rapidly increasing support

Australian religion is not noted for a strong and creative intellectual tradition. But in a survey of theology produced in Australia, Dr. J. Davis McCaughey noted that 'one exception which comes to mind is the strength of conservative evangelical scholarship'.⁴⁵

Along with other sections of the church, evangelicalism is now virtually self-sufficient in its leadership, but there is still need to draw upon overseas resources for post-graduate and other specialized training. The development of training facilities in Australia, such as the Pacific College of Graduate Studies, and the Bible colleges, will further the indigenization process. Appreciation of broader intellectual and cultural pursuits appears to have some potential with the establishment of agencies such as the Zadok Centre where there are some early signs of a creative application of conservative theology to Australian conditions. It remains to be seen, however, what will become of the distinctive evangelical principles in this quest, since they seem to have received only minimal attention to date.

Evangelicalism, however, is still influenced by its pietistic tradition which can inhibit rational reflection on intellectual issues and social concern adequate to meet the needs of complex modern society when its individualistic and spiritual distinctives are unduly emphasized.

However, developments in some key indicators, such as the [p. 150](#) Keswick and Bible college movements, suggest a decay of this influence is taking place.⁴⁶ It is not clear however if this is due to the creative development of a theology that is relevant to the late twentieth century, or simply to the exhaustion of traditional spirituality in an environment of secularism, hedonism and materialism.

Evangelicalism in common with other branches of the church has largely been a religion for the middle class, and has had little success in relating itself positively to such areas of concern as civil rights, industrial relations, urbanization and aboriginal affairs. Some sections, however, have had an appeal to those with higher education (the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, formerly I.V.F.), while many of the churches established for ethnic groups are decidedly conservative. In contrast, some agencies which have had success among counter-culture groups, such as the House of

⁴⁴ *New Life*, Oct 23, 1980. The report of the first conference held in May 1971 was edited by L. R. Shilton, *New Obedience* (Sydney ANZEA, 1971). British N.E.A.C. congress were held at Keele (1967) and Nottingham (1977). See J. Capon, *Evangelicals Tomorrow* (Glasgow, Collins, 1977).

⁴⁵ J. Davis, McCaughey, 'The State of Theology in Australia', *Crux*, Aug-Sept 1968, 14. He was referring particularly to Dr. L. L. Morris, at that time Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne.

⁴⁶ *The Australian Evangelical*, vol 1 no 5, [Mar 1974](#), 9. *Church Scene*, Nov 17, 1977, 17-21.

Freedom in Brisbane and the Truth and Liberation Concern, have had questions raised about some aspects of their evangelical orthodoxy.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

In an analysis of the reasons for the marked decline in the main-line churches in U.S.A. and the simultaneous sharp growth in conservative churches, Dean Kelley has pointed out that decline in social strength of churches is related to their effectiveness in meeting the unique religious needs of their members. He suggests that religion is a necessary aspect of human life because it provides ultimate meaning. He argues, therefore, that a religion will be strong if it makes life meaningful for its members by combining powerful concepts with high demands of commitment, discipline and missionary zeal.

Kelley also points out that this kind of strong religion is consequently strict, requiring total belief in the correctness of its tenets, conformity to its controls and fanaticism in propagating its beliefs.

In a secular age, the temptation a church faces is to make itself more relevant to the social and political needs of the community and to tone down its strictness. However, such leniency does not produce growth, but, by misunderstanding the function of religion, leads to social weakness and decline.⁴⁸

On the basis of this analysis, fundamentalist churches in Australia p. 151 can be expected to have potential for growth, because they, like their American counterparts, score high points in the way they meet the religious needs of their constituency by imposing high demands of loyalty, conformity and zeal upon them.

Because of their unwillingness to stand out sharply from aspects of the prevailing religious environment, evangelicals are not likely to score so well. This of course does not preclude success in their aim of the development of an alternative form of high commitment faith which is at the same time appropriate to the late twentieth century Australian religious context, but it will require the development of a greater degree of separate identity than presently exists.

In relation to this, the decline of institutional Christianity in Australia, as indicated by census and public opinion polls,⁴⁹ could well have a beneficial effect for evangelicalism, in that the trend to elimination of nominal religious adherence will favour the voluntary principle, and magnify the need for thoughtful personal commitment. Evangelicalism can meet this situation if it continues to mature through internal growth and if it continues to make the most of the influence of the increasingly stable and confident international evangelical movement.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *New Life*, June 5, 1980 and subsequent correspondence.

⁴⁸ D. M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (2nd ed.) (New York, Harper and Row, 1977) especially chs. 3-5, 8 and p.84.

⁴⁹ *The Bulletin*, April 29, 1980.

⁵⁰ Examples of this development are clearly seen in three international evangelical congresses held in Berlin (1966) Lausanne (1974) and Pattaya (Thailand) (1980) at which Australia was well represented. Bishop A. J. Dain of Sydney took a leading role in the second of these. A symposium on the Lausanne Covenant, *The New Face of Evangelicalism* (edited by C. R. Padilla, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) indicates the main directions of this development. For a description of Berlin and Lausanne, see John Pollock, *Billy Graham, Evangelist to the World* (Sydney, Harper and Row, 1979), chs. 15, 16 and A. Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, Tyndale 1978) chs. 5, 7, 8.

Blaikie's sociological study reveals a clear line of demarcation between evangelicals and secularists in Australia.⁵¹ If fundamentalist denominations are taken into account as well, the cleavage is even more pronounced. Should evangelicals succeed in developing a more coherent and conspicuous position, the fundamentalist reaction will sharpen and a third mediating element will come into prominence, representing a more realistic expression of Australia's undoubted but largely unexamined evangelical heritage.

David Parker is a lecturer in Theology and New Testament at the Bible College of Queensland, Toowong, Australia. p. 152

Recapturing the Initiative in Theology in Africa

Tite Tiénou

Printed with permission

(We are grateful to the Chairman of Africa Update: 1986 for sending the conference material to ERT for publication. The following article by Tite Tiénou is one of the two major papers presented. (See Theological News Vol. 19 No. 1 for details of the event). Concerned with African Evangelical Theology, Tite Tiénou reflects, with a mature and constructive critique, the state of initiative of African Evangelical Theology, its effects and remedies. The exhortation 'the church must become the centre of theological instruction and discussion' will find spontaneous echo in any third world situation.)

Ed.

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this paper is to help evangelicals understand the current status of theology in Africa and its implications to fulfilling the Great Commission, and to suggest correctives which are needed.

In the 1978 Byang Kato Memorial Lectures I delivered at Igbaja Theological Seminary in Nigeria, I raised a question which intrigued the committee. The context was one of attempting to map out an evangelical theological strategy in Africa. I asked then, how shall we, African evangelicals, recapture the initiative? As you can see, the title of the present essay suggests that the matter is not yet settled. Consequently, it shall be our purpose to answer the following three questions: How was the initiative lost? What have been the effects? and How can evangelicals recapture it?

HOW DID EVANGELICALS LOSE THE INITIATIVE?

⁵¹ N. W. H. Blaikie, *The Plight of the Australian Clergy* (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1979) Indicated by charts on 67 and by summary remarks on 158 *et al.*