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A Short History of Global Evangelicalism

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Being the fruit of 20 years of research on the part of its authors, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* reflects an awareness of the need to see the contemporary upsurge in evangelical religion both in a worldwide comparative perspective and in a long-term historical one. Thus by examining the worldwide phenomenon of evangelicalism from the 1730s to the present, Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe seek to provide the reader with an overarching framework in which specific manifestations of this religious movement can be accurately understood. In relation to this, one of the book?s major objectives is to correct reductionist ideological interpretations of evangelical history. A prime example of such, which the authors refer to, is the British Marxist historian E. P. Thompson?s assertion that Methodism acted as a form of ?physic exploitation? in which evangelicals were agents of the capitalist domination of the working classes (p. 281).(1) Instead, the authors hope that this book will help to create more sophisticated historical considerations of evangelicalism, in all its variegated forms, throughout the world.

In the modern age, when evangelicals are global pilgrims, a study such as this also helps us to stop thinking of evangelicalism merely in European and American terms or within narrow denominational frameworks. This is important because the authors remind us that evangelical Christianity is neither a particular ethnicity

nor ecclesiology, but is a historical convergence of convictions which serve to link personal and local experience with a global mission (p. 270). The reviewer would agree that evangelicalism is therefore best understood not as a theological position, but as a historical phenomenon. For this reason, historians should avoid the temptation to define evangelicalism in overtly theological terms because, in attempting to do so, there is a danger of trying to squeeze evangelicalism into a mould which is not historically accurate. It is therefore appropriate that the book begins with a chapter entitled, ?Understanding evangelicalism?, which seeks to provide an accurate definition of the term. The poverty of attempting to define evangelicalism doctrinally can be illustrated in a number of ways. First, the authors refer to the difficulty which the Evangelical Alliance experienced at its formation in 1846 when it sought to formulate a doctrinal test that was suitably inclusive but which excluded those who were either anti-evangelical (such as the Puseyites) or who were not yet considered to be suitably mainstream (such as those who denied eternal punishment).(2) The decision to make the perpetuity of the ministry and the sacraments terms of admittance to the Alliance was even condemned by some of its members at the time, who viewed it as being too inflexible on doctrinal matters at the expense of practical Christianity.(3) Even when attempts have been made by evangelical clergymen to outline essential evangelical beliefs, they have often had to concede that these views are not necessarily unique to evangelicals. In many cases, it would appear that evangelicals have tended to place more emphasis on certain doctrines than other groups, without these beliefs necessarily being evangelical exclusives (pp. 8, 11). On the other hand, the authors point out that those attempts by evangelical writers to produce definitions of evangelicalism have a tendency to reflect their own theological convictions as opposed to historical fact (pp. 13?14). This is why David Bebbington?s famous description of the ?quadilateral of priorities? common to evangelicalism (conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism) is so helpful. It effectively nullifies the need for debate about theological specifics and reflects lack of doctrinal precision within popular evangelicalism (pp. 16?17).(4) Dr Hutchinson and Professor Wolffe, however, suggest that Professor Bebbington could also have stressed the importance of revivalism to evangelicals. The reviewer is not persuaded by this, as it tends to overlook the reality that various self-confessed evangelicals either rejected revivalism or dissented from various aspects of revival excitement.(5) While not denying that Professor Bebbington?s definition could eventually be improved, the reviewer is of the opinion that it is the best working definition of evangelicalism currently available to historians. It is thus interesting that the authors recognise that ?even scholars apparently less than comfortable with Bebbington?s definition have nevertheless tended to defer to it? (p. 17).

Adopting David Bebbington?s definition of evangelicalism is also useful in relation to correcting the reactionary notion that evangelicalism does not exist. The authors? correctly recognise that ?[i]ntelligent analysis of evangelicalism needs to start from the recognition that it is a fluid and diverse phenomenon, with boundaries that cannot be rigidly defined? (p. 18). However, this does not justify Nathan Hatch?s supposition that ?there is no such thing as evangelicalism?.(6) Nor would it substantiate Darryl Hart?s argument, that ?[e]vangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist?.(7) Although we can understand why a confessional Presbyterian such as Dr Hart would want to encourage those who share his theological outlook to jettison their attachment to a movement as latitudinarian as evangelicalism, nevertheless, as an empirical and objective historian one cannot deny the reality of evangelicalism?s existence. The advantage of the present study is that it considers evangelicalism in worldwide terms rather than in relation to its manifestation in late 20th-century America, which renders it easier to understand why evangelicalism has a much broader significance and should be seen as a legitimate historical category. Conversely, it could be argued that the fact that evangelicalism has always had an ambivalent relationship to Calvinism and advocates unity in diversity, as opposed to doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesiological uniformity, certainly does appear to lend weight to Dr Hart?s view that ?being evangelical often includes a number of doctrines and practices to which Presbyterians and Reformed Christians might plausibly object?.(8) Another interesting aspect to the definition of evangelicalism in this book is that the authors? have chosen to include fundamentalists and Pentecostalists as representing varieties of evangelicalism as opposed to completely distinct categories. In response to George Marsden?s claim that ?[a] fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something? (9) the authors? suggest that a Pentecostal might be defined as ?an evangelical who is happy about something? (p. 22). Although amusing, these descriptions are useful ways of summarising the priorities and emphases of such groups.

The remaining chapters provide an overview of the movement at various stages of its history. Accordingly, chapter two considers the emergence of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world beginning with the revival at Northampton, Massachusetts (1734?5) up until the 1790s. While these occurrences were not unique to Northampton, it is argued that Jonathan Edwards (the town?s pastor) viewed this ?surprising work of God? as something new (p. 25). Indeed, it was described as ?a great and wonderful event, a strange revolution, an unexpected, surprising overturning of things, suddenly brought to pass; such as never has been seen in New-England, and scarce ever has been heard of in any land?.(10) Notwithstanding their recognition that evangelicalism began in the 1730s, the authors seek to chart a middle course between those who argue that it was a completely new movement and those who contend that it is merely part of a continuous Protestant tradition. Such approaches suffer from either being too schematic or else insufficiently aware of discontinuities. Evangelicalism was new up to a point, but it had its antecedents in English Puritanism, Scottish Presbyterianism, and even in High Church Anglicanism.(11) The chapter moves on to consider George Whitefield?s role in promoting revivalism on both sides of the Atlantic, with the authors viewing him as the personal link between the awakenings in Europe and America, rifts between Whitefield and John Wesley over Calvinism, the growth of evangelicalism within the Church of Scotland, the Old Side-New Side split over revivalism among the American Presbyterians, and the determination of evangelicals to cross class and racial boundaries. In terms of assessing the impact of the Great Awakening in America and the Evangelical Revival in Britain, the authors claim that the impact of such movements should not be overstated. Assertions that the revivals led to the moral transformation of English society or served as a source for American nationalism which culminated in the War of Independence are considered to be unhelpful exaggerations (p. 36).

Chapter three considers the growth of the movement from the watershed moment of William Wilberforce?s speech in the House of Commons demanding the abolition of the slave-trade to the 1840s. Wilberforce?s speech was emblematic of the evangelical desire, not only to save souls, but to transform society. Hence the chapter is entitled ?Volunteering for the kingdom?, which reflects the activism which grew out of the evangelical conversion experience. It examines the growth of Methodism (arguing that its growth was curtailed in places like Scotland where the Reformed Protestant faith was integrated with a regional identity), the emergence of premillennial eschatology and dispensational futurism (making the necessary

distinctions between various strands of premillennial thought), the triumph of evangelicalism within Ulster Presbyterianism, the rise of Charles G. Finney?s brand of revivalism, evangelical commitment to education, Bible distribution, moral reform, and global mission. Some particularly noteworthy points raised in this chapter include the assessment of evangelical concern for Sunday observance. Dr Hutchinson and Professor Wolffe note that campaigns to legally enforce the observance of the Christian Sabbath might appear oppressive to those who disagreed, but it must be kept in mind that such views reflected wider concerns for the humanisation of industrial society (p. 73). As Andrew Holmes has pointed out in relation to the context of industrial Ulster, ?[f]or many factory workers and other exploited groups, sabbatarianism offered a means by which they could guarantee a day?s rest?.(12) The authors also reject the view that evangelical missions were always pretexts for advancing European imperialism. They maintain that, in certain cases, missionaries did seek to advance the cause of empire, but in other situations they could be very critical of colonialism.(13)

Chapter four, ?The kingdom enlarged and contested: 1840s to 1870s?, examines the period in which evangelicalism achieved unprecedented cultural dominance in the English-speaking world. Attention is paid to key events such as the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, outbreaks of revival, the Irish Famine, the clash with Darwinism, and the American Civil War. It is helpfully pointed out that the evangelicals who opposed Darwin did so on the basis that his theories contradicted Baconian empiricism and Common Sense Realism.(14) This, however, did not mean that they were opposed to science *per se* (pp 106?7). The authors assessment of the Civil War in the United States properly recognises that abolition had been a minority report among the Northern clergy prior to the commencement of the conflict, and that it was not until the war began that the majority of evangelicals in the North began to support coercive abolition (p. 111). The authors? argue that the overall failure of evangelicalism in this era to lead to the incremental transformation of society led not only to a swing towards premillennialism among evangelicals, but also contributed to a search for non-Christian millennial visions such as those advocated by Marx and Engels (p. 113).

Chapters five and six (which cover the period between 1870 and 1945) consider how evangelicalism adapted in an age where nationalism became a quasi-religion. It was also an age in which the secular philosophies of figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud presented radical alternatives to traditional Christian beliefs. Important themes addressed include the Boer War, the First World War, the emergence of fundamentalism, the Great Depression and the Second World War. It is interesting that while the First World War can be seen as a disaster for evangelicalism, with many potential leaders and adherents dying in battle and others forsaking the churches in favour of secular socialism, the Second World War appears to have been accompanied by signs of religious revival in Britain with an increase in church-going and receptivity to Billy Graham?s preaching in the decade subsequent to the conflict (p. 175). One notable aspect of this period is the increased (though probably subconscious) emphasis on religion as a form of leisure. Evidence of this is seen the resemblances between C. H. Spurgeon?s Metropolitan Tabernacle in London and the theatre, D. L. Moody?s employment of the singer Ira Sankey in his evangelistic campaigns, the link between the Keswick conventions and bourgeois concerns about rest and health, and Thomas Cook?s contribution to organised tourism. Although it is also interesting to note that the authors? claim that sport and leisure became a vehicle for secularisation in the long run (p. 148).

Chapter seven (which covers the period from 1945 to the 1970s) devotes considerable attention to the ministry of Billy Graham, with analysis of his critique of communism as ?a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil? (p. 182), his political influence, calls for the abandonment of racial segregation in American society, and his links with youth culture. Other themes addressed in this chapter include the rise of the Christian schooling movement, the divergence between conservative evangelicalism (as represented by Inter-Varsity Fellowship) and fundamentalism, the resurgence of young-earth creationism, and the relationship between popular music and evangelicalism. The authors? draw attention to one of the ironies of the more recent history of evangelicalism is that while secularisation has increased in the West, the influence of evangelicalism on mainstream Western Christianity has also increased (p. 199). Secularisation may, therefore, ultimately transpire to have been good for the cause of evangelicalism as more formalistic variants of Christianity collapse. This appears to be true in the case of England, where in 2005 evangelicals

comprised 40 per cent of churchgoers as opposed to 30 per cent in 1989 (p. 213). Chapters eight and nine consider developments within evangelicalism at the end of the 20th century, noting the recent rapid advance of the movement in regions such as France, Latin America, Africa, and China. However, modern developments have not all been positive for evangelicals. For instance, the shallowness of much contemporary evangelical theology (if it exists at all) and approaches to the doctrine of the church has prompted some evangelicals to convert to Eastern Orthodoxy in a quest for a deeper theology and a greater sense of ecclesiological belonging. How evangelicalism will adapt to cope with the challenges it faces in a global context remains to be seen.

The reviewer found certain aspects of the analysis within the volume to be particularly strong. First, the distinction between evangelical voluntaryism and the Calvinist notion of a godly commonwealth is clearly a sound one. Whereas the Reformed tradition called for a state-funded church and government intervention in education and poor relief, evangelical voluntaryism rejected the notion of public assistance for the needy ?out of hand?. It believed that financial assistance for the destitute ?must never be the result of compulsory exactions?, as the poor were to be left to the tender-mercies of the better-off.(15) One of the strangest things is that Thomas Chalmers, the champion of the godly commonwealth and the establishment principle, advocated such an approach. This is especially peculiar, because Chalmers? position involves a fundamental redefinition of what the Reformed originally meant by the establishment principle.(16) Second, the authors are correct to draw attention to the reality that there is no single evangelical response to socio-political issues, but a range of responses (p. 114). For example, the existence of an evangelical left in the United States, centred on individuals such as Jim Wallis, serves to correct the crude suppositions of ?secularist ideologues? who have ?tended to portray evangelical politics as universally conservative? (p. 250). Third, they also correctly point out that not all variants of premillennialism automatically lead to quietism, as certain forms of historical premillennialism have sought to create end-times communities in order to present the church to Christ as a ?spotless bride? (p. 115). Fourth, the authors are more modest concerning the growth of Christianity in China than some. The claim that there are as many Christians in China as members of the Communist Party is rightly dismissed as an invidious comparison. As they point out, there are also more politically conservative evangelicals in the United States than members of the Democratic Party, yet that did not stop Barack Obama being elected as president (p. 227). Likewise, even if Chinese evangelicals do clearly overtake the Communist Party in terms of membership, they will still be a long way from being the dominant influence in the nation.

There are, nevertheless, a few places where the reviewer would dissent from the conclusions of the authors. First, the comment that evangelicalism in Ulster was ?initially limited to seceding groups? could be open to misunderstanding (pp. 41?2). It should be kept in mind that the Seceders, despite being unashamedly evangelistic, disciplined those who joined evangelical societies.(17) This, of course, raises the question of whether everyone who is evangelistic should be pigeon-holed as an evangelical. Second, the endeavours of the Free Church of Scotland in building over 700 new church buildings merely four years after the Disruption is described as ?a particularly striking manifestation of evangelical voluntaryism? (pp. 66?7).(18) In one sense this is correct, because the Disruption Worthies had relinquished the resources of the state church. On the other hand, the use of the word voluntaryism in this context could create confusion. The Free Church had not (in theory) abandoned the principal of religious establishments and endowments. As Thomas Chalmers put it, ?though we quit the Establishment, we go out on the Establishment principle ? we are the advocates for a national recognition and national support of religion ? and we are not Voluntaries?.(19) In fairness, however, the authors do suggest elsewhere that the term voluntaryism can be used to describe earnest activism and self-sacrificial giving (p. 56). Hence it is perhaps appropriate to employ this term to describe the activities of the Free Church in the wake of the Disruption. Third, the authors? claim that D. L. Moody?s campaign in England, Scotland and Ulster built upon the memory of the 1859 Revival (p. 123). In one sense this is correct, as revivalists thought that Moody was the instrument to usher in another year of grace. However, in Ulster at least, some of Moody?s supporters hailed his revivalism precisely because it was absent of the more spectacular outbursts of religious excitement that occurred in 1859.(20) Fourth, one would like to see more evidence to justify the claim that Tony Blair reinvented the British Labour Party in order to win over evangelicals (p. 249). Although it seems reasonable to suppose that evangelicals and

Christians in general would be attracted to centre-left socio-economic policies, as opposed to either Thatcherism or socialism, it would be interesting to find out if there is any hard evidence to justify such assumptions. Fifth, in discussing mega-churches, the authors? argue that many such churches hold views which put them beyond the pale of ?evangelical orthodoxy? (p. 265). Considering, however, that some professed evangelicals consider views as radical as open theism to be viable options (p. 266), it is doubtful if such a thing as evangelical orthodoxy presently exists. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* achieves its purpose in providing the reader with an overview of worldwide evangelicalism from its beginnings to the present. The book is very well written and interacts with the most recent scholarly literature relevant to the time-periods under consideration. Owing to the fact that it is both relatively brief a wide-ranging survey, not to mention the low price of the paperback edition, Dr Hutchinson and Professor Wolffe?s work would thus serve as a suitable text-book for those wishing to teach an undergraduate module on the history of evangelicalism. It is perhaps only to be regretted that the publisher did not include a full bibliography, though the suggested further reading is still useful. Those looking for a solid introduction to the history of evangelicalism, as well as others with more specialist interests in religious history, will find that *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* repays careful reading.

Notes

1. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 385?440. For a thorough analysis of such theories see David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 21?52; Daniel Ritchie, review of *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts*, (review no. 1342) < http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1342> [2] [accessed: 15 December, 2012].Back to (1)
2. John Wolffe, ?The evangelical alliance in the 1840s: an attempt to institutionalise Christian unity? in *Studies in Church History 23: Voluntary Religion*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford, 1986), pp. 333?47; idem, ?Unity in diversity? North Atlantic evangelical thought in the mid-nineteenth century? in *Studies in Church History 22: Unity and Diversity in the Church*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Oxford, 1996), pp. 363?75.Back to (2)
3. Isaac Nelson, *Slavery Supported by the American Churches, and Countenanced by recent Proceedings in the Free Church of Scotland. A Lecture Delivered at the request of the Free Church Anti-Slavery Society* (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 14.Back to (3)
4. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 2?17.Back to (4)
5. Daniel Ritchie, ?William McIlwaine and the 1859 Revival in Ulster: a study of Anglican and evangelical identities? in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (forthcoming); A. R. Holmes, ?The Ulster Revival of 1859: causes, controversies and consequences?, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63, 3 (July 2012), p. 505.Back to (5)
6. N. O. Hatch, ?Response to Carl F. H. Henry?, in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. K. S. Kantzer and C. F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), p. 97.Back to (6)
7. D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Paperback edn, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), p. 16.Back to (7)
8. Ibid., p. 10.Back to (8)
9. G. M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), p. 1. Back to (9)
10. Jonathan Edwards, ?A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of New-Hampshire, in New-England; in a Letter to the Rev. Dr Colman, of Boston?, in *The Works of President Edwards* (10 vols, New York, 1830), iv, pp. 120?1.Back to (10)
11. An interesting case has been made for strong continuities between the Dutch Further Reformation and 18th-century evangelicalism in J. R. Beeke, ?Evangelicalism and the Dutch Further Reformation?, in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. M. G. Haykin and K. J. Stewart (Nottingham, 2008), pp. 146?68.Back to (11)

12. A. R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770?1840* (Oxford, 2006), pp 75?6.Back to (12)
13. See S. J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom 1815?1914* (Harlow, 2008), pp. 195?206.Back to (13)
14. See A. R. Holmes, ?Presbyterians and science in the north of Ireland before 1874?, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 41, 4 (December 2008), 547?8.Back to (14)
15. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 121. For the historic Reformed view of the link between social welfare and the establishment principle, see Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi* (1550) in *The Library of Christian Classics: Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia, 1969); ?The first Helvetic confession (1536)?, trans. J. T. Dennison, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries in English Translation*, ed. J. T. Dennison (3 vols, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), i, p. 351.Back to (15)
16. For more on Chalmers? voluntarist approach to poor relief, see Peter Gray, ?Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty? in *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Frank Ferguson and James McConnel (Dublin, 2009), pp. 93?107. For an assessment of how Chalmers? views were complicated by the Irish Famine, see S. J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 367?9.Back to (16)
17. *Acts & Proceedings of the Associate Synod of Ireland (Antiburgher)*, 29 July 1800 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, D/3815/D/4).Back to (17)
18. For more on the Free Kirk?s achievements in this regard, see S. J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801?1846* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 358?60.Back to (18)
19. William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.* (4 vols, Edinburgh, 1852), iv, p. 348.Back to (19)
20. *The Witness*, 9 October 1874.Back to (20)

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