

THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



WHAT'S IN A NAME? ISSUES IN EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

THE LEVER

lever (lee-ver) n. 1. a bar or other device pivoted on a fixed point (the fulcrum) in order to lift something or force something open. 2. a flat projecting handle used in the same way to operate or control machinery etc. – v. to use a lever, to lift or move by this. leverage. n. the action or power of a lever. (Oxford Paperback Dictionary)

The Lever aims to open up healthy and respectful reflection in our denomination on the Bible's role in our identity and decision making. We want us all to be moved by the fulcrum of the Biblical Gospel – the unmoving centre of the Apostolic witness to Jesus – and to revolve around that centre, and derive our power from that centre. The journal aims to be a biblical, loving, robust lever for such aims.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to The Lever, the new newsletter of Baptist Evangelicals Today. Let us first remind you of BET. BET is a network of evangelical Baptist pastors who are keen to promote evangelical belief and ministry among Australian Baptists. We believe that as Australian Baptists we are privileged to have a strong evangelical heritage but we should never take this heritage for granted. Each generation needs to both promote and defend the truth of the gospel and BET aims to do both of these things by acting as a catalyst among Baptists for evangelical thought and discussion on a variety of issues. We hope, through a variety of ways, to promote a dialogue between Baptists that is true to the Scriptures and therefore also to the evangelical faith.

Let us also say a few things about this new newsletter. First, we hope it will be published twice a year, in Autumn and Spring. We hope this regularity will make it a more constant source of constructive comment, rather than just an exercise in troubleshooting. We also hope to have much more Australian content than in the past. This issue looks at what being evangelical actually is, or should be, and we hope the articles are helpful in answering the question.

There are many things we can be doing to promote gospel directed ministry and the Bible as our primary basis of fellowship as Baptists. Our hope is that BET will be just one of those ways in which we, as Baptists, will continue to maintain our evangelical heritage.

Tony Prestoe, Philip Calman, Matthew Arkapaw



WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL? ... AN EXPERIMENT IN DEFINITION

Recently, a friend of mine met the Catholic archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Pell, and came away surprised and delighted by the things he said. “I couldn’t believe how evangelical he was,” my friend told me.

The Federal treasurer, Peter Costello, went to Hillsong conference last year, and the general consensus among the secular media was that he went there because Hillsong is the place to go if you want to win “the evangelical vote”.

These days, it seems, everyone’s an evangelical. Whilst words like ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘liberal’ are finger-pointing words, the sort of words that we use to talk about other people, ‘evangelical’ is a word that has a certain cachet to it – it’s a warm, positive word that we want to be associated with, and so an ever-increasing number of Christians seem keen to claim the label.

This phenomenon is not an entirely new one. More than a century ago, the American Universalist, John Wesley Hanson, made his pitch for the evangelical high ground:

The Greek euaggelion, good news, is the root and parent of this word. An evangelical Christian, therefore, is one who proclaims an evangel, glad tidings; and the more cheerful and joy-inspiring the form of faith, the better it is entitled to be called evangelical. A greater misnomer can scarcely be imagined than to style a system of religion that is full of gloom and horror evangelical. Only good tidings can be entitled to this description; and Universalists not only consider themselves strictly evangelical, but the most evangelical of Christians.¹

The problem, of course, is that the further we stretch the definition of the word to include

more and more diversity within its ambit, the less the word ends up meaning. If you pour enough water into the cordial, it can fill as many cups as you like, but eventually you reach a point where it no longer tastes like cordial at all.

At this point, most of us resort to redefining ourselves as hyphenated evangelicals of one sort or another: conservative evangelicals, liberal-evangelicals, pentecostal-evangelicals... the adjectives we add to the word quietly bearing witness to the fact that the word itself no longer says enough. Thus, a recently-published book of essays edited by Iain Taylor, *Not Evangelical Enough: the gospel at the centre*, surveys and celebrates the diversity of the evangelical landscape and concludes that these days “none of us is simply an Evangelical without further qualification.”²

What conclusion should we draw? Is there any point in trying to define the word at all? Should we simply concede that the word means very little on its own, or should we stiffen up its definition with doctrinal tests inherited from some authoritative evangelical institution? Can you be an evangelical Catholic? An evangelical pentecostal? An evangelical liberal? Does that whole exercise of defining a word like ‘evangelical’ just fan the flames of party spirit and factionalism?

It is appealing to conclude that the whole ‘what is an evangelical?’ question is an exercise in futile introspection and walk away from it as a waste of time. Surely there are other priorities more important than sitting around endlessly defining who belongs to the club and who doesn’t! And if the criteria used in defining the word are nothing more than sociological (the lowest common denominator shared by the denominations, colleges and mission

societies that call themselves evangelical) or historical (the same question asked about the denominations, colleges and mission societies of two hundred years ago) then perhaps it is an exercise best left to academics with spare time on their hands.

But if the approach we take is not merely sociological or historical but theological, and if we take seriously the ‘evangel’ at the heart of evangelicalism, then defining evangelicalism changes from being an exercise in collective navel-gazing to being an exercise in gospel clarity.

So here’s the experiment: what if we scrapped the sociological descriptions and the historical surveys, and even the doctrinal statements inherited from our evangelical tradition, and simply defined ourselves by the gospel? What if we went with Paul the apostle’s claim that the things ‘of first importance’ are indeed the things of the gospel? How much light could be shed on the question of what genuine evangelicalism ought to look like simply by being as clear as we can about the content of the genuine apostolic gospel? What if the gospel was what defined both our centre and our boundaries?

Here are four theses, just for starters:

1. The apostolic gospel is a cross-centred gospel, so genuine evangelicalism is cross-centred Christianity.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth about the things that he received and passed on as of first importance, and the first thing he writes is ‘that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures’ (v.3). In 2 Corinthians he attacks the religion of the super-apostles with its gospel of success, charisma and spiritual

power, and denounces it as a religion that is based on ‘another Jesus... a different Spirit... a different gospel.’

Likewise in our day, any genuine ‘evangelicalism’ that takes the cross-centred gospel of the apostles seriously needs to consistently place the cross front and centre as the sole basis of our acceptance with God, and needs to consistently teach and model a pattern of discipleship that is about taking up the cross daily and following Jesus in joyful, sacrificial service. As Luther wrote five hundred years ago: *crux probat omnia* – the cross is the test of all things.

If that is the case, then (as one of many issues that it illuminates) it sheds a clear light on our interactions with contemporary pentecostalism. Can you be evangelical and speak in tongues? By all means! Can you be evangelical and preach a gospel that turns the cross of Jesus into a footnote, or into a convenient device for achieving worldly comfort and success for us? Surely not.

It also poses a sharp, searching challenge to the sort of comfortable, cheap, easy-beliefism that characterises most of our non-pentecostal evangelical churches. If we are genuine in calling ourselves people of the cross, then perhaps we need to focus somewhat more of our energy on working out what it will mean to take up the cross in our own lives.

2. The apostolic gospel is a gospel that proclaims the Lordship of the risen Jesus, so genuine evangelicalism is a resurrection-based Christianity that gladly submits to the authority of the Lord Jesus and waits expectantly for his return

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 15:4, “that he was buried, that he was raised on the

third day according to the Scriptures, (5) and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve...” In that chapter, Paul is emphatic about the fact that the resurrection of Jesus was an historical, bodily resurrection, and that if it was not then “our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

But there is more at stake in the resurrection than affirmation of the historicity of the event. The point of the resurrection, according to the apostles, is that it points us forward to a sure and certain future, when Jesus will return to judge and to save, and designates Jesus in the present as the Lord of all.

That means that in our day, genuine resurrection-based evangelicalism will never be content with merely building a better world or a bigger church in the present, but will continually direct people’s vision forward to the new heavens and the new earth, and will continually warn of the dreadful realities of hell and judgement. Christianity that has become comfortable in the world is not evangelical Christianity.

It also means that genuine evangelicalism will be the kind of Christianity that sits willingly under the authority of Jesus, and therefore (by his command) under the authority of the Old Testament scriptures and the writings of his apostles. Our commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is not merely because it is one of the inherited orthodoxies of evangelicalism, one of the ‘club rules’ of our doctrinal basis, but because we have submitted our lives to the Jesus who taught that ‘the Scripture cannot be broken’.

3. The apostolic gospel is a gospel of grace, so genuine evangelicalism is a grace-centred Christianity that preaches and believes

in a gospel that offers salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul asserts in the strongest possible terms that a gospel that is not a gospel of grace is no gospel at all: ‘I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all.’ (Galatians 1:6-7)

If that is the case, then in our day genuine evangelicalism will be marked by its grace-centredness and will stand out sharply from all kinds of ritualistic and moralistic works-religion.

Inevitably, then, until the catechisms and dogmas of the Roman Catholic church undergo radical reformation, evangelicalism in our day will surely need to remain vigorously and unashamedly protestant.

But protesting against the theology of merit and good works in the Catholic church is surely not enough – if we are going to be any different, then we ourselves will need to be continually reformed and restored back to the purity of the gospel of grace in what we preach and live by.

4. The apostolic gospel is a gospel that calls for repentance, so genuine evangelicalism is a repentance-oriented Christianity that seeks the salvation of the lost, and calls on all people to respond to the gospel with a radical change of heart and life.

When Jesus sent out the disciples on mission in Mark 6. Mark’s one-line summary of their message was ‘that people should repent’. Whilst there was obviously a context and a background and a basis for that call to repentance (not

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only in the words and actions of the disciples, but also in the preceding ministry of the law and prophets) it is nevertheless a striking indication of the centrality of repentance in the apostles' gospel preaching to Israel. And when the gospel went out to the nations after the resurrection, Jesus' summary of that message was that it was a message of 'repentance and forgiveness of sins... in [Jesus'] name' (Lk 24:47).

The gospel is not the kind of good news that leaves us in our sins, forgiven but unchanged. It does not extend the forgiveness of God and leave it to us to figure out for ourselves that we ought to respond in some sort of repentance. The gospel includes within itself the call to repentance (and the promise of the Holy Spirit to enable and empower the change of life which that involves - Gal 3:8, 14).

If we are genuinely evangelical, then we will be eager to be involved in Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost, remembering

that he came 'not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' We will remember that the thing that unites us is not merely a creed or a code or a law or a philosophy but a gospel – a message that exists to be proclaimed. An evangelical heart is an evangelistic heart, and if we have orthodox doctrine but no missionary zeal, we can scarcely claim to be evangelicals! True evangelical commitment should continually drive us out of the safety of the ghetto and into the world of the lost.

And in our own lives, if we are gospel people, then the repentance and faith which that gospel calls for ought to determine the shape of our lives; if we are evangelical people, then we ought to be repentant people, people for whom repentance has become a way of life, and whose lives display the fruit of that repentance in a thousand changes of thinking, feeling and action.

What is an evangelical? Let's start at least by reminding ourselves of what the gospel

is, and when we've got that clear, I suspect we'll be a long way toward the answer!

David Starling

1. John Wesley Hanson, *A Pocket Cyclopaedia: Brief Explanations of Religious Terms* (1892), cited at www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/terms.html
2. Iain Taylor (ed.), *Not Evangelical Enough: the gospel at the centre*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2003, p.19.



BAPTISTS AND EVANGELICALISM

Stuart Piggin in his observation of Baptists remarks: 'Baptists have not all been evangelicals always. Australian Baptists have not all been evangelical always.'¹ The observation is correct. There have been times in the past when Baptist evangelicalism has been tarnished and indeed lost. Baptists belong to the Protestant stream of Christianity and have been marked by liberty of conscience and independence. This has led them to express themselves with greater freedom and, at times - intentional imprecision, than other evangelical groupings. Whatever the theological vicissitudes of the Baptist experience in Australia, they have mainly asserted themselves as evangelicals most of the time. What is the relationship of Baptists to the larger movement of evangelicalism and how has that evangelicalism influenced Australian Baptists?

EVANGELICALS AND BAPTISTS

Much work has been done on the subject of evangelicals and evangelicalism by David W. Bebbington. Bebbington is a Baptist and has advanced a four part definition of evangelicalism.² This definition may be applied to Australian Baptists and provide a useful approach and understanding of Baptists and their relationship to the larger evangelical movement. The four part criteria are – Biblicism, conversionism, activism and crucicentrism. These criteria are of assistance in studying Baptists and evangelicals throughout the course of their history and varying cultural contexts.

Evangelicalism is to be seen essentially as a movement, an association of those who share common attitudes. Australian Baptists are members of the association. Evangelicals

originated in the revivals of the eighteenth century under Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards. Baptists were not the offspring of the evangelical movement but predated it. They formed part of that Puritanism out of which evangelicalism evolved. Baptists are an evangelical archetype but a parental archetype. From its inception evangelicalism has been international in its scope. Primarily in terms of Europe, Britain and America. Australian Baptists have been impacted by these international influences both in the past and the present.

Baptists have consisted of about 1% of the Australian population. Throughout their history Australian Baptists have found themselves as a religious minority in a large land with a small population. Baptists offered many options, probably too many – closed membership and closed communion – the Hypercalvinists; open membership and open communion – the progressively Arminian Bathurst Street; closed membership and open communion. These colonial Baptists did not always get along with each other but, they always proclaimed themselves as evangelicals within Australian society. The exception to this was the Strict and Particular Baptists, who in practice were not evangelicals.

Baptists wholeheartedly adhered, often in confessional form, to what is called the gospel or evangel. This was understood in terms of the total depravity of human nature; atonement by the divine Christ; justification by faith only in Christ; regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit; and the divine inspiration and final authority of the Scriptures. Baptists also affirmed the behavioural paradigm which arose from

these convictions: repentance; turning to God; assurance of salvation; holiness and purposefulness of life. David Bebbington maintains the four necessary qualifications of evangelicalism: Biblicism; conversionism; activism (missions and evangelism); and crucicentrism. Broadly speaking, Baptists have been arguably stronger on these essentials than most other denominations. A powerful thesis could be argued that Baptists have been and can be the 'quintessential evangelicals'.³

Australian Baptists and their relationship to evangelical faith will be assessed under the four headings of Biblicism, conversionism, activism, and crucicentrism

BIBLICIST

Baptists have shared with other evangelicals the conviction of the supremacy of the Scriptures. Principal Morling stated at a conference on 'Baptists and the Bible' in 1940:

Russian Communism which is defiantly atheistic, and German Nazism which is blatantly materialistic, may seek to suppress Biblical Baptist fellowships but persecution has ever brought a blessing, not a curse to the church. Baptists are emphatically loyalists in respect to the Bible, believing and declaring it to be God's authentic word to man.⁴

In historical terms Baptists are the heirs of the Protestant Reformation. Not only did Protestantism spring from reformation but also revival. That revival gave men and women a Bible that they could read for themselves. Morling was a contemporary of Samuel Angus, the controversial Sydney theological liberal.⁵ In the context of the Angus conflict Morling affirmed that the college's position was of 'sound evangelical teaching opposed to modern theological conceptions'.⁶

The Rev. C.J. Tinsley of Stanmore Baptist elevated the college because it, 'had one of the strongest evangelical platforms of any college of the world, being based wholly and solely upon the Word of God'.⁷

Morling was not an apologist in a technical sense but the most important contribution he made to the defence of the Bible was to impart his devotion for it to his students. Morling may be credited for inspiring Bible preaching ministers to go into pastoral and evangelistic work. Basil Brown a student of Morling and a future lecturer at Whitley College, Victoria observed that Morling,

Exemplified that the Word of God was true and the only preaching that was significant was the exposition of the Word of God and the only way to expound was to get to the heart of it. The emphasis of the ministries of his students is expounding the Word of God – getting to the heart of the passage....⁸

Due to the fact that Baptists have been staunch Biblicists they have valued the preaching of the Word of God and have produced some of the greatest preachers of all time such as C.H. Spurgeon. Evangelicalism has had a considerable influence on the Australian Baptist attitude to the Word of God and the accompanying commitment to its proclamation, producing some exemplary Australian Baptist preachers: C.J. Tinsley, W. Cleugh Black, George Morling and John Ridley.

CONVERSIONIST

Evangelicalism has consistently emphasised the importance of converted individuals rather than the covenantal community. It is possible that this has dovetailed effectively into the democratic spirit of Australia. Baptists, as a generalisation, have been consistent with

this conversionist spirit and have passionately sought to win converts. Australian Baptists were dedicated apostles 'of the necessity of conversion'.⁹

Anglican Archbishop Mowll held Morling in high esteem and invited him to join a hand-picked group of evangelicals to be involved in the evangelistic enterprise. It was this group which was responsible for bringing Billy Graham to Australia in 1959. Whatever future disagreements would arise between Calvinists and Arminian Finneyism, the 1959 Crusade drew the almost unanimous Australian Baptist support for the American Baptist. Stuart Piggin notes: 'The Baptists are perhaps the most conversionist of the Protestant churches.'¹⁰

ACTIVIST

By activist is meant the evangelistic aggression of evangelicals manifesting itself in missionary enterprise and evangelism. Unlike Catholicism, where mission is understood in terms of an extension of the incarnation, Baptists have always perceived mission as an extension of Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Australian Baptists have engendered bush missionaries and household churches.¹¹ Baptists have been heavily involved in overseas missions, both denominationally and interdenominationally.

Unquestionably, Baptists were aggressive in their evangelistic energies.¹² Strongly evangelistic preacher C.J. Tinsley mentored other evangelists such as John Ridley and Wilfred Jarvis. Tinsley used to proclaim 'preach or perish; evangelize or fossilize'.

CRUCICENTRIC

Cross-centredness has always been integral to the faith of evangelicals as a perusal of the

sermons of the Reformers and Whitefield, Wesley and Edwards will reveal. Morling's *The Quest for Serenity* demonstrates his conviction that to be filled with the Spirit was to be drawn to Jesus Christ.¹³ It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into a proper understanding of the reality of Christ's salvation by his death on the cross.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Former principal of the Queensland Baptist College, Dr. Edward Gibson once stated that the Scriptures are at the heart of modern American evangelicalism and that the Gospel is at the core of European evangelicalism.¹⁵ Whatever the precision of this observation evangelical Baptists could do much worse than to ensure that both Scripture and the Gospel are integral to their identity.

Historically, the Australian brand of Baptist evangelicalism in some quarters has veered more towards a warm-hearted piety than a doctrinally defined version. But in the main the Australian Baptist stance has been to espouse the major tenants of the evangelical movement.

It has been stated that the cost of democracy is eternal vigilance. There needs to be an ecclesiastical equivalent of this for the Baptists. The cost of being an evangelical Baptist is eternal vigilance. Complacency has no place. History has shown that Baptists have not always been evangelical in their convictions and practices. One need only to think of the English General Baptist drift into Unitarianism with its accompanying denial of the divinity of Christ; the English Particular Baptist absorption of some of the Hypercalvinist spirit with its stultifying impact on the preaching of the Gospel;¹⁶ the Downgrade Controversy which involved C.H. Spurgeon in conflict

with theological forces which were a threat to Baptist evangelicalism.¹⁷

Baptists must consider whether other denominations may be more faithful adherents to some evangelical Baptist distinctives than they are. For some there are concerns that Baptists are being influenced more by larger evangelical denominations and secular models of management than their biblical - historical distinctives. Other factors may be contributing to the fogging of the evangelical heritage of the Baptist identity: the growth of pragmatism as a denominational strategy; and a general doctrinal apathy that has led to theological indifference. Not long after the formation of the New South Wales Baptist Association in 1868, the Rev. James Greenwood, delivered his Chairman's address in Sydney, setting forth the basis of the Baptist Association. His vision for Australian Baptists has largely been ignored or forgotten but undeservedly so.

The basis of our Union is comprehensive enough to include many of those divergences which were once the landmarks of separation between our churches and the barriers to communion: that the disciples of John Calvin and the disciples of James Arminius can meet on common ground, equally welcome where their lives prove that they are disciples of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Within Greenwood's words is to be found the robust seal of approval for a Reformed evangelicalism being part of the theological foundation of the Baptist Union of New South Wales. There is the ongoing need to reiterate traditional themes in contemporary ways, Baptists would do well to check up on the main ideas that formed the foundational theology of such outstanding Baptist evangelicals of the past as Andrew Fuller, John Bunyan,

Roger Williams, Adoniram Judson and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. For nearly four hundred years in Europe and over 170 years in Australia God has blessed and used the people called the Baptists. Their impact for evangelicalism in Australia has been way out of proportion to the modesty of their numbers. Baptists need to press on with a love and commitment to their evangelical past. It is a knowledge of their evangelical past that enables them to understand the present and with their knowledge of the present to move into the future as evangelicals.

Rev. Dr. Michael Chavura, M.A., B.Th., Ph.D.

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3. Piggin, 'The Role of Baptists', p.8.
4. E.R. Rogers, 'Our Beloved Principal: The Rev. G.H. Morling, O.B.E., M.A.', manuscript, p.141.
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12. See M. Petras, *Extension or Extinction: Baptist Growth in New South Wales*, Baptist Historical Society of New South Wales, Eastwood, 1983, Ch. 4.
13. Rogers, 'Our Beloved Principal'.
14. Rogers, 'Our Beloved Principal', pp.105-108, p.177.
15. Edward Gibson interviewed 30 July 1987, Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity archives.
16. For the impact of Hypercalvinism upon Australian Baptists see, Chavura, 'A History of Calvinism'.
17. For an account of the reaction of Baptists in Australia to the Downgrade Controversy, see Michael Chavura, 'Calvinism and the Spurgeonic Tradition Among The Baptists of New South Wales - The Downgrade Controversy', pp.111 - 130, *Re-Visioning Australian Colonial Christianity: New Essays in the Australian Christian Experience 1788-1900*, Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, Sydney, 1994.
18. New South Wales Baptist Association Minute Book 1867-1878, p.v. cited in M. Chavura, 'A History of Calvinism'.



BOOK REVIEW: EVANGELICALISM DIVIDED

GAINS AT HIGH PRICE

How are we going as evangelicals? Is the evangelical movement stronger today than it was 50 years ago? Many things would suggest that over the last 50 years the evangelical cause has grown. More people are calling themselves evangelicals and there has been a great increase in both evangelical literature and scholarship. Yet in spite of these obvious gains, Iain H. Murray paints a more sombre picture of evangelicalism in his book "Evangelicalism Divided". Murray argues that while there have been many "gains" these have often come at the expense of evangelical truth and unity. In this review of Murray's book I will attempt to summarize his argument and conclude with a few comments about the book's value.

THE SEEDS OF CONFUSION

What I found most surprising about the book were the men that Murray held principally responsible for sowing seeds of confusion among evangelicals. Murray maintains that Billy Graham, John Stott and J. I. Packer have unintentionally sown seeds that have led today to a crisis of identity among evangelicals.

Murray argues that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was the catalyst for change on both sides of the Atlantic. Murray argues that following the success of Graham's crusades in the United Kingdom in 1954 Billy Graham embraced a more comprehensive approach to evangelism. This new approach scattered seeds of confusion among evangelicals.

Murray explains that in order to have a greater influence in the mainline denominations Graham changed his approach. He adopted an approach where he was willing to work

with all who were willing to work with him. Graham did not believe that he was compromising his own evangelical position by adopting such an approach. Murray however believes the unintended outcome was that he did. Graham had to be willing to work with, and stand alongside, people who were clearly non-evangelical and liberal. Graham also would need to send "converts back to their local churches, no matter how liberal those churches might be."

A NEW SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

A new spirit of cooperation emerged among evangelicals as a result. Older evangelicalism had always sought to minimise cooperation with clergy and denominational leaders who denied the truth. Yet with the apparent success of the 1954 Graham Crusades in England, Evangelical Anglicans also began to adopt a new spirit of cooperation and inclusiveness. Just before the Evangelical Anglican Conference at Keel in 1967 John Stott publicly disowned the isolationism of older evangelicalism. Murray argues that the conference, under Stott's leadership, went on to confirm and adopt the ground rule for all ecumenical dialogue, namely, that "so long as anyone confessed Jesus Christ as 'God and Saviour' there must be an acceptance of their Christian standing." This was a massive turn around for evangelicals. Murray argues that at this point evangelicals in Britain really crossed the ecumenical watershed.

THE ROAD DIVIDES

There was one senior evangelical voice in Britain that raised the danger of engaging in this sort of comprehensiveness. Martin Lloyd Jones was the congregational minister of Westminster Chapel in the centre of

London. Murray says that Lloyd Jones "saw that for evangelicals to gain ecumenical and denominational acceptance they would have to pay a price which would imperil the very legitimacy of their distinctive beliefs. If evangelical belief is, in essence, gospel belief, how can Christian fellowship exist independently of any common commitment to such belief? ... How can evangelicalism be said to represent biblical essentials if one regards as Christians and works alongside those who actually deny these essentials? The effect of such broad co-operation, he argued, would be bound to promote the doctrinal indifferentism characteristic of the ecumenical movement."

Murray explains that for Lloyd Jones, Christian unity was the fellowship of the gospel. We share this fellowship with all Christians who share the same saving faith. Jones believed that it was faith in the gospel which brought the unity of the Spirit. Where the gospel ceases to be believed unity ceases to exist. There was "no real unity without Biblical and evangelical belief." For people like Lloyd Jones evangelical unity was to always take priority over ecumenical or denominational unity.

In October 1966 Lloyd Jones and John Stott openly disagreed about the nature of Christian unity at the National Assembly of Evangelicals in London. This disagreement came to mark the division in the road for British evangelicals. It was not a disagreement over fundamental beliefs but over the implications of this new policy of comprehensiveness and where it would ultimately lead evangelicals. Stott saw it as a great opportunity to win back the denominations for Christ. Under his leadership the evangelical Anglicans adopted

it at the Keel conference, six months later. Lloyd Jones saw it as a great mistake that would ultimately erode evangelical belief and identity.

COMPROMISE CAME WITH COOPERATION

Murray argues that history has largely vindicated the stance that Lloyd Jones took. In his book, Murray traces the effect that the new evangelical approach has had within Evangelicalism. Although it is clear that evangelicals in the UK intended to “cooperate without compromise”, Murray says it proved to be an illusion.

For evangelicals to be accepted within the denominations, Murray argues that they had to adopt the ecumenical ground rule that states that all who claim the name of Christ are to be treated as Christians regardless of whether or not they held to the Pauline gospel. Evangelicals came to accord the promoters of unbelief “the same right to the name of Christian as anyone else.” Eventually Anglican evangelicals even agreed to a broad and inclusive view of a Christian. A person’s baptism became the reason why a person was to be regarded as a Christian and Christian unity “was no longer to be defined by evangelical belief”. Murray argues that the net result of this was that confusion was created about the fundamental question that evangelicalism seeks to answer: “What really is a Christian?”

Murray argues that the result was that it “proved impossible to both co-operate in the ecumenical ethos and to hold together a strong evangelical centre.” Having ceased to emphasize biblical teaching that was fundamental to the evangelical position, the

need to be distinctively evangelical receded into the background. The new “openness” could not long co-exist with an insistence on evangelical distinctives. So evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic lost its strong centre.”

A PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION

I found Murray’s book extremely helpful. He offers a very plausible explanation as to how a very broad understanding of evangelicalism has found such acceptance among many today. Murray’s argument is clear and the evidence he cites seems to back up his argument. Lloyd Jones does seem to have been justified in his warning to the Evangelical Alliance in 1966. Doctrinal indifference has become the norm in many places and a commitment to ecumenical unity has taken the place of evangelical unity for many. Today the term “evangelical” seems to be stretched to mean whatever anyone, claiming to be an evangelical, wants it to mean.

Many have criticised the book arguing that Murray has only been concerned to defend Lloyd Jones and vindicate him. In my opinion the book is far more than this. In the book Murray paints a sympathetic picture of those who he believes were largely responsible for planting the seeds of confusion. He does not doubt their good intentions. He also argues that the new evangelicalism was right to reject unbiblical strictness of ‘fundamentalism’ – which too often saw people as Christians only when they were of the same persuasion”. Murray also agrees that a desire for greater unity among Christians is desirable and commendable. Murray however argues that many mistakes are often made when people reacting against one error go to the opposite extreme.

The truth of the old saying, says Murray, has been illustrated over the last 50 years, ‘Many an error is taken up by going too far from other men’s faults.’ “If a narrow sectarianism is contrary to Scripture, no less so is the inclusivism which would embrace all who adopt the Christian name. If belligerence is wrong, so is a false charity” In the matter of unity, Murray says that what evangelicals are to always remember is that the greatest cause of division is unbelief over fundamental truth. The answer to division is not to embrace everyone as Christians regardless of what they believe, but to put first gospel teaching and living.

I found Murray’s book a good and interesting read. The argument in the end is simple and can be summed up much more briefly than the 318 pages that are required in the book. The length of the book, however, is due to the fact he is not just presenting an argument he is also justifying what he is saying and has to quote a good deal of his source material. Having grown up admiring Billy Graham and having greatly benefited from the writings of Stott and Packer the source material was necessary for me to be convinced that Murray wasn’t just being overly critical of these great men of God.

The book for me was helpful for it not only gave me a plausible explanation of how we came to be where we are today as evangelicals, it also offered many valuable insights for us today. Having read the book I am more aware that the issues facing evangelicals today are still the same as they always have been.

Philip Calman.



BOOK REVIEW: GOING THE DISTANCE, HOW TO STAY FIT FOR A LIFETIME OF MINISTRY

The author of this book is alarmed at the rate of pastoral burnout and its effects on individuals and churches. In response, the book sets out to explain why 'self-care' is important to ensuring unnecessary burnout does not occur, and so subsequently to help more pastors stay in the job for longer. He hopes to justify the wisdom of self-care, and give lots of practical advice on how to ensure self-care occurs. The book is fairly convincing and helpful on both counts.

The seventeen chapters range from ones on practical issues to do with burnout, stress and depression, to ones on the pastor's family relationships and friendships, to others directed toward specific groups such as local church members and denominational leaders (aiming to help them help their pastors).

Stylistically the book is a little cumbersome and tiring; there are many lengthy quotations and the prose rarely sparkles. However, it is written on the whole in a straightforward and non-technical manner.

I found the most impacting chapters to be the ones on anger, advice to local leaders on how to help the pastor, and on justification by faith. I felt the latter chapter provided the theological bedrock that the author was obviously working with as the controlling assumption of the book, and thought for that reason that it may have been more helpfully placed at the beginning. Still, it is an excellent chapter that challenges the superman workaholism endemic in the pastorate with a responsible application of the great doctrine. It may also have helped to have reflection on what ministry, and faithful pastoring, actually are. Perhaps a detailed look at 1 Corinthians 3, long before page 240, would have helped.

This thought did occur to me: would the apostle Paul attribute the longevity of his ministry to a regimented program of 'self-care'? Is self-care noticeably absent from the Pastorals or is it a silence that arose because the self-care of pastors just did not happen to be a presenting issue for the NT writers

“A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men.”

at the time? What would Paul make of pages on how to work a diary and the nuances of manageable tasks and goal setting?

Pushing such naughty thoughts aside I discovered a book full of many of the wise comments that can only come from the

extensive insider experience that bishop Brain obviously has.

There are earthy admissions about the competition that exists between churches in the same locality (pg75). There are prescient warnings on how subtly a ministry can give one an inflated view of one's own importance (pg103). There are many great quotes, such as this clanger from Bonhoeffer: "A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men." Ouch!

If you are looking for an Australian book with lots of practical advice on how to ensure you don't burnout in paid ministry, this one will do the trick nicely.

Matthew Arkapaw

Going the Distance: How to Stay fit for a Lifetime of Ministry

Author: Peter Brain.

Publisher: Matthias Media.



Don't forget to check out our new website

www.bet.org.au

It's bare bones at the moment but will soon be fully functional with lots of helpful resources, articles, links and discussions.

We'd wager you'll like it!

THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



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