

Prologue

On one of its sides Victorian history is the story of the English mind employing the energy imparted by Evangelical conviction to rid itself of the restraints which Evangelicalism had laid on the senses and the intellect; on amusement, enjoyment, art; on curiosity, on criticism, on science. (G. M. Young)

A study entitled 'Evangelicals and Culture' has to begin with reference to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. With its scathing denunciation of mid-nineteenth century nonconformity, Arnold's book did much to establish an image of evangelical philistinism which has persisted ever since. Dissent of his day, Arnold believed, encouraged 'a life of jealousy of the Establishment, disputes, tea-meetings, openings of chapels, sermons,' a life signally lacking in 'culture.'¹

Arnold defined culture as the pursuit of total – not merely religious – perfection, and claimed that it fostered an interest in 'the development of all sides of our humanity.' It was incompatible with 'the over-development of any one power,' such as the moral sense, 'at the expense of the rest.'² The truly cultured man, he argued, was aware of 'the variety and fullness of human existence,' familiar with 'the best that has been thought and said in the world,' able because of his breadth of vision to turn 'a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits.'³ The nonconformist environment seemed to Arnold peculiarly un conducive to the nurturing of culture thus defined. To be cultured a person had to be in contact with 'the main current of national life,' which found its natural home within the established church. Dissenters, who wilfully excluded themselves from the national establishment, were in Arnold's view archetypally uncultured.

Arnold's description of dissent should not be dismissed as mere polemic unsupported by observation. As a school inspector he met numerous dissenters whose interests seemed to him more narrowly and exclusively religious than those of many Anglicans. While he may have been wrong to imply that their philistinism resulted from their churchmanship, his charge that nonconformists 'have developed one side of their humanity at the expense of all the others and have become incomplete and mutilated men in consequence' merits examination.⁴

So too does the possibility that Arnold's charge was too narrowly focused. Arnold concentrated his attack upon nonconformity because he believed that it epitomised the ills of his age, but other critics have similarly censured evangelical

¹ M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869, C.U.P. edn 1960), p. 58.

² Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 48.

³ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp. 6, 14.

⁴ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 11.

Anglicans for their limited outlook on life. Was Evangelicalism, as Arnold's theory might seem to imply, any less philistine than dissent?⁵

Arnold wrote his book in the second half of the nineteenth century but his essay prompts questions which can appropriately be applied to evangelicalism of an earlier era, traditionally subject to similar criticism. Were evangelicals as Arnold and other detractors have suggested interested only in religion? How far did they accept non-religious interests as character-forming and life-enhancing? Were they willing to develop other facets of their personalities than the purely spiritual? Did they, as Arnold assumed, disregard the cultural heritage of their society in favour of a narrow sectarianism? Were they prepared to bring critical acumen to bear upon their own 'stock notions and habits' or did they despise such intellectual activity?

These questions may give some indication of the scope of the word 'culture' in the title of this book. While not carrying the weight of meaning with which Arnold invested it, 'culture' is used here, in some respects as he used it, as an umbrella term. Its primary reference is to literary, aesthetic, and intellectual interests, but it also denotes an inquisitive and affirmative attitude to life as a whole.

When G. M. Young claimed that evangelicalism exercised a restraining influence upon 'the senses and the intellect; on amusement, enjoyment, art; on curiosity, on criticism, on science,' he was writing within a tradition which predated Arnold and which can be traced back to the early decades of the revival.⁶ One common charge was that evangelical faith was antagonistic to intellectual activity: 'Pure METHODISM' complained an anonymous writer in 1781, 'requires of its votaries to commit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit, with an utter contempt of reason and all human learning.'⁷ Another frequent allegation was that Methodists were killjoys, despising even the most reputable cultural pursuits. According to Sydney Smith, who wrote for the prestigious *Edinburgh Review*:

The Methodists hate pleasure and amusements; no theatre, no cards, no dancing, no punchinello, no dancing dogs, no blind fiddlers; all the amusements of the rich and the poor must disappear wherever these gloomy people get a footing. It is not the abuse of pleasure which they attack; but the interspersions of pleasure, however much it is guarded by good sense and moderation; it is not only wicked to hear the licentious plays of Congreve, but wicked to hear *Henry the Vth* or the *School for Scandal*.⁸

⁵ In accordance with the general convention 'evangelical' and 'evangelicalism' are used as generic terms while 'Evangelical' and 'Evangelicalism' refer to the Anglican branch of the movement.

⁶ G. M. Young, *Victorian England, Portrait of an Age* (1936, 1966 edn), p. 5.

⁷ Quoted A. M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked* (1960), p. 23.

⁸ *Edinburgh Review*, xi (1808), p. 357.

If many critics spoke primarily of Methodism, their reproof was by no means confined to the connexions established by John Wesley and the Countess of Huntingdon. The term ‘Methodist’ was often used generically to the intense annoyance of evangelical Anglicans who shunned what they regarded as Methodist excesses. But the same sort of criticism was levelled specifically at them. The *Edinburgh Review* maintained that the Evangelical system demanded the continual suppression of intellectual questions.⁹ Evangelical Anglicans were themselves very conscious of such censure: ‘Every man of the world,’ wrote Hannah More, leading Evangelical laywoman, ‘naturally arrogates to himself the superiority of understanding over every religious man.’¹⁰

Those who moved away from Evangelicalism frequently criticised the movement for disparaging learning and the arts. W. E. Gladstone, tracing the history of the Evangelical party, commented:

It must be remembered that the massive learning which never wholly deserted the Church, and the preponderating share of purely intellectual force were never theirs, and perhaps were not in all cases adequately viewed among them.¹¹

More forcefully, Mark Pattison, who had suffered a strictly evangelical upbringing, argued that evangelicalism ‘insisted on a “vital Christianity”, as against the Christianity of books. Its instinct was from the first against intelligence. No text found more favour with it than “Not many wise, not many learned”.’¹² In the next century, another son of evangelical parents, E. L. Woodward, claimed that evangelicals’ weakness ‘was on the intellectual side,’ while A. V. Dicey, a descendant of the evangelical Clapham sect, noted that ‘Evangelicals assuredly did not exaggerate the value of the aesthetic side of human nature, and the High Church movement, looked at from one side, was a revolt against that under-estimate of taste.’¹³

Even those who remained more consciously within the evangelical tradition accepted and perpetuated similar criticisms. Dicey’s uncle, James Stephen, praised much that he saw to be of worth in ‘The “Evangelical” Succession,’ but drew attention to its failure to produce scholars or authors of note. Indeed, he suggested that the Church of England had suffered during the Evangelical ascendancy from ‘intellectual barrenness’ for

⁹ *Edinburgh Review*, lii (1831), p. 449.

¹⁰ H. More, *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* (1798), *Works* (1834 edn), ii, p. 269.

¹¹ W. E. Gladstone, ‘The Evangelical Movement; its parentage, progress, and issue,’ *British Quarterly Review*, lxx (1879), p. 7.

¹² M. Pattison, ‘Learning in the Church of England’ (1863), *Essays* ed. Nettleship (1889), ii, p. 268.

¹³ E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815–1870* (1938, 2nd edn 1962), p. 504; A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England* (1905), p. 404.

her most popular teachers had not merely been satisfied to tread the narrow circle of the 'Evangelical' theology, but had exulted in that bondage as indicating their possession of a purer light than had visited the other ministers of the Gospel.¹⁴

The complaint that Stephen made of Anglican evangelicalism, R. W. Dale, leading Congregationalist, made of dissent. Evangelicalism had much to commend it, but it had destroyed the older puritan type of Independency, which was characterised by a 'keen interest in theology . . . a delight in books and in intellectual pursuits of the severer kind.' With the influx of revival converts into Independent congregations, 'the intellectual earnestness . . . disappeared.'¹⁵ Vision was limited for there was 'no eagerness to take possession of the realms of Art, Science, Literature, Politics, Commerce, Industry, in the name of their true Sovereign and Prince.' Moreover, although evangelical leaders were often 'men of learning, men of great intellectual vigour and keenness,' they lacked a disinterested love of truth: they cared for it not for its own sake but merely as an instrument in conversion.¹⁶

Dale's view was implicitly accepted by literary critic Donald Davie, whose 1976 Clark lectures made an important contribution to the study of evangelicalism and culture. On the one hand, Professor Davie was concerned to reinstate eighteenth-century dissent, and even Methodism as propagated by the Wesley brothers, as the locales of an important and neglected form of genuine literary culture: he called for further studies which would analyse the hymns of Watts and Wesley not as an isolated corpus of material but as part of the literature of their day.¹⁷ On the other hand, he accepted with little question the strictures levelled against nineteenth-century dissent by men such as Arnold, of whose arrogance he was however properly critical: dissent, he argued, sadly became 'as philistine as the Church had always said it was.' That evangelicalism in its Anglican form was similarly tarnished was, he believed, fully established: 'of the philistinism of the Evangelicals there can be no doubt.'¹⁸

Many historians concurred in such labelling of evangelicalism. According to Geoffrey Faber, evangelicals were 'the stupid party.' J. H. Plumb maintained that 'there was an anti-intellectual philistine quality' about Methodism 'which attracted the dispossessed but was dangerous for society.' E. P. Thompson recognised that Methodism taught people to read but argued that it was 'a religion hostile to intellectual inquiry and artistic values, which sadly abused their intellectual trust.'¹⁹ Even W. E. H. Lecky, whose judicious and perceptive treatment of evangelicalism

¹⁴ J. Stephen, *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography* (1849), ii, pp. 169–72.

¹⁵ R. W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (1907), pp. 590–91.

¹⁶ R. W. Dale, *The Old Evangelicalism and the New* (1889), pp. 19–20.

¹⁷ D. Davie, *A Gathered Church, the literature of the English dissenting interest, 1700–1930* (1978), lectures ii and iii.

¹⁸ Davie, *A Gathered Church*, pp. 56–58, 77–82.

¹⁹ G. Faber, *Oxford Apostles* (1933, 2nd edn 1936), p. 74; J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (1950), p. 95; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963, Penguin edn 1970), p. 44.

continued to hold its own against many later works, concluded that intellectual incapacity was one of the greatest weaknesses of the movement.²⁰

Given such concordance of opinion, the traditional depiction of evangelicalism as anti-intellectual, ascetic, and philistine might appear too well established for effective challenge. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that it may be open to question. J. A. Froude, who disliked evangelicalism, came unexpectedly to respect an Evangelical family with whom he stayed in the summer of 1842:

There was a quiet good sense, an intellectual breadth of feeling in this household, which to me, who had been bred up to despise Evangelicals as unreal and affected, was a startling surprise. I had looked down on Dissenters especially, as being vulgar among their other enormities; here were persons whose creed differed very little from that of the Calvinistic Methodists, yet they were easy, natural, and dignified.²¹

The idea that evangelicals suffered an unduly bad press from those ‘bred up to despise them’ was echoed by later writers. Valentine Cunningham showed how nonconformity, *Everywhere Spoken Against*, was sometimes grossly misrepresented by people who relied on the testimony of Victorian novelists. Some historians argued that evangelicals were no more antagonistic towards cultural and intellectual interests than other religious groups, and cited individual instances of evangelical culture which challenged the traditional picture.²² Amy Cruse described the Anglican evangelical leaders as scholars and cultured men, a depiction accepted by A. O. J. Cockshut who suggested that Clapham parents encouraged ‘an active love of the best literary culture.’²³ Similarly, Owen Chadwick pointed out that, notwithstanding austerities in other spheres, the children of evangelical pastors ‘were given the run of good libraries’ and ‘were encouraged to varied interests of natural history or music or good literature.’ While not rejecting the time-honoured charge of evangelical intellectual naivety, Professor Chadwick implied that it needed qualification, as did Charles Smyth who wrote

Where the Evangelical party was weak, by comparison for example with the Tractarians, was on the intellectual side. This is the more surprising, because it always contained a number of individuals of outstanding intellectual ability among the clergy and even among the laity. The simplicity and sincerity of the Evangelical piety captivated many extremely able men in every walk of life. It has also to be said, I think, that the quality of such scholarship as the Evangelical party did in fact produce has

²⁰ W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1878–90, 1913 edn), iii, pp. 150–52.

²¹ J. A. Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1894 edn), iv, p. 295. Froude, an essayist and historian, was the brother of the early Tractarian, Hurrell Froude.

²² For comparison with others see for example L. E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals, a religious and social study* (1953), p. 434; G. Best, ‘Evangelicalism and the Victorians’ in A. Symondson (ed.), *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (1970), p. 50.

²³ A. Cruse, *The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1930), p. 71; A. O. J. Cockshut, *Truth to Life: the art of biography in the nineteenth century* (1974), p. 73.

been habitually under-estimated, whether because it is out of date or simply because it is forgotten.²⁴

Implicit in such statements is the challenge to test general allegations against the hard evidence of particular and neglected sources. Evangelicalism has suffered from the failure of historians to give due attention to its special literature which, as Lecky and more recently Donald Davie have pointed out, 'has scarcely obtained an adequate recognition in literary history.'²⁵ It has suffered too from a shortage of individualised and localised studies which increasingly reveal the fallacy of treating the movement as a homogeneous entity. Biographies and group histories clearly prove that not all evangelicals and not all evangelical groups can be tarnished with the same anti-intellectualist, philistine brush. Relying on local source materials for his book, *So Down to Prayers: studies in English nonconformity 1780–1920* (1977), Clyde Binfield points to the existence of a cultured nonconformity all too frequently ignored by earlier writers. Work such as his exposes the need for a detailed examination of the validity of the traditional thesis.

At least two distinct approaches can be identified in the plethora of studies of nineteenth-century evangelicalism produced in the quarter-century preceding the original publication of this book. A number of historians, following G. M. Young, were concerned to examine the contribution of the movement to the emergence of an identifiably Victorian frame of mind. In *The Call to Seriousness: the evangelical impact on the Victorians* (1976) Ian Bradley argued that evangelical principles were peculiarly suited to the exigencies of an increasingly complex industrial society, within which they were therefore widely accepted.²⁶ Similarly, Kathleen Heasman stressed the extensiveness of evangelical influence, suggesting that this operated to the benefit of society in philanthropic activity.²⁷ Ford K. Brown agreed that evangelicalism was pervasive, but he condemned it as pernicious, attributing to evangelicals the responsibility for all those nineteenth-century developments which he regarded as most deplorable.²⁸ Notwithstanding their differing assessments of the value of evangelicalism, these historians shared a common aim, to analyse the influence of the supposed *Fathers of the Victorians* upon their descendants.

Other historians adopted a very different approach. Rather than viewing evangelicalism as a cause of social change, they studied it as the product of a

²⁴ O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, i (1966), pp. 444, 450–51; C. Smyth, 'The Evangelical Discipline' in H. Grisewood (ed.), *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians* (1949, 1966 edn), p. 102.

²⁵ Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, iii, p. 120. See also p. 4 above.

²⁶ Bradley, *Call to Seriousness*, p. 33.

²⁷ K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action, an appraisal of their social work in the Victorian era* (1962).

²⁸ F. K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (1961).

particular environment. Bradley, Heasman, and Brown had assumed an initial distinction between evangelicalism and the rest of society, which was ultimately to be changed for good or ill into the evangelical image. The contrasting school of thought stressed the similarities between early evangelicals and their contemporaries. Whereas evangelicalism was once regarded as a reaction against eighteenth-century life and thought, its congruity with the society which gave it birth was increasingly acknowledged. One of the first published works to adopt this perspective was W. R. Ward's *Religion and Society in England 1790–1850* (1972), which examined the way in which the churches were affected by new social pressures characteristic of society as a whole. For an earlier period, essayists stressed the continuity between Methodism and a traditional folk-culture, under attack from the new mobility of labour and the enclosure movement. Arnold Rattenbury implicitly challenged the view that evangelicalism was hostile to traditional pleasures which, he suggested, found new expression within it.²⁹ Whereas he concentrated on Methodism, rooting this form of evangelicalism within the folk-practice of the age, Haddon Willmer was concerned primarily, although not exclusively, with Evangelicalism. The thesis of his essay 'Evangelicalism 1785–1835,' which was awarded the University of Cambridge Hulsean prize in 1962, was that evangelical theology was not, as was often assumed, simply a reaction against the age of reason but on the contrary manifested many of its traits.

This study builds upon the work and follows the approach of such historians. If, as they suggested, evangelicalism was a recognisable product of the eighteenth century, reflecting the values and traumas of society as a whole, then it seems probable that its adherents shared the cultural and intellectual attitudes of their contemporaries to a far greater extent than Arnold and many other writers were prepared to admit. The chapters that follow attempt to discover how far evangelicals were influenced by and participated in the thought and taste of their age.

The age in question is the forty years between the death of Wesley and the death of Wilberforce. Evangelicalism has suffered from the tendency of adherents and denigrators alike to treat the movement as an unchanging entity, assuming that the attitudes of any one generation are typical of all time. In contrast, Michael Hennell has suggested that the period 1770–1870 saw 'an increasing strictness and rigidity with regard to "the world,"' as practices permitted by earlier evangelicals were condemned by their successors.³⁰ Sympathetic and unsympathetic historians alike

²⁹ A. Rattenbury, 'Methodism, Commonsense and Coincidences of 1751' in E. and S. Yeo (eds.), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict* (1981); cf. J. Rule, 'Methodism and Recreational Conflict in West Cornwall' in R. D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (1982).

³⁰ M. M. Hennell, 'Evangelicalism and Worldliness 1770–1870' in G. Cuming and D. Baker (eds.), *Popular Belief and Practice, Studies in Church History*, viii (1972), p. 229.

accept that the pre-Victorian generation was less philistine than that which followed. The latter, Ford K. Brown wrote, ‘had lost to a distressing extent . . . the taste, culture and intellectual interest that had marked many of the dominant Evangelicals of Wilberforce’s generation’ among whom ‘there was always a less bigoted Puritanism than developed at the end of the reform period and was a notable mark of the Bleak Age.’³¹ His admission provides both the incentive to and the justification for a study of evangelicals and culture between 1790 and 1833.

What was meant by the designation ‘evangelical’ in this period? Historians concerned to examine the contribution of evangelicals to society have sometimes used the term very loosely, thereby exaggerating evangelical influence. Ford K. Brown has been criticised for describing as ‘peculiarly Evangelical sentiments and beliefs which were certainly not peculiar to Evangelicals,’ and for enlisting within an evangelical party all who supported the organisations which the movement spawned.³² While it is probably true that most evangelicals were involved in such societies, this involvement by itself cannot be used as a test of evangelical commitment: in the absence of comparable bodies evangelical foundations gained – and indeed solicited – the support of many who did not profess evangelical belief but who could find no other context for their religious activity.

The beliefs which distinguished evangelicals from others are not, however, easily defined. As Haddon Willmer has shown, the doctrines propounded by evangelicals in the late eighteenth century conformed far more closely to those of other churchmen than has always been admitted.³³ Later identification of evangelicals by reference to a conservative approach to Scripture and the proclamation of some form of substitutionary atonement is of little use when applied to an age in which neither characteristic was peculiar to evangelicals. In many respects evangelicals’ claim to be simple ‘Bible Christians’ was more a war-cry than a means of distinguishing them from their contemporaries, many of whom also identified revelation with the record, believed that the Bible was self-authenticating and the Genesis story historical and factual. The influential theologian, William Paley, stressed the sacrificial character of Christ’s death and in a sermon on ‘The efficacy of the death of Christ’ quoted numerous biblical texts supportive of this view.³⁴

Nevertheless, some doctrinal differentiation between evangelicals and their contemporaries can be attempted, for they gave far more weight to original sin and the need for redemption than did Paley and other non-evangelical Christians. Evangelicalism centred upon soteriology and its soteriology centred upon the cross.

³¹ Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*, pp, 6, 404.

³² D. Newsome, ‘Fathers and Sons,’ *Historical Journal*, vi (1963), p. 298.

³³ H. Willmer, ‘Evangelicalism 1785–1835,’ Hulsean Prize essay, University of Cambridge, 1962

³⁴ *The Works of William Paley D.D.* (1838, new edn 1842), pp. 772–74.

In 1811 Charles Simeon, the most influential of all Evangelical clergymen, entitled a university address ‘Christ crucified, or evangelical religion described.’ He maintained that the description ‘evangelical’ could only properly be applied to those who, like St. Paul, ‘determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.’³⁵

Simeon would not have denied that others preached about the atonement, but he was critical of the nature and emphasis of their preaching. Arguing against salvation by works, Paley pointed out that even the best of men were painfully aware of the selfishness of their motives and the poverty of their service: ‘all men stand in need of a redeemer,’ and the scriptural teaching that God had met this need was ‘much more satisfactory’ than uncertain reliance upon human merit.³⁶ With all this evangelicals could agree, but their belief was expressed in much starker terms. They maintained that human beings were positively bad, estranged from God, and under his condemnation. Not only were Christians freed from the guilt of their sin by the death of Christ and admitted to heaven. They were also brought into a restored relationship with God that profoundly affected their immediate lifestyle. Paley was concerned that people should live moral and godly lives, but he did not on the whole relate this demand to his belief about the death of Christ. That, for him, was primarily a means of facilitating human beings’ entrance to heaven. By contrast, the cross was for evangelicals the lynchpin of their faith, affecting not only their future but their present state, constraining them to that obedience which they believed would lead to increasing holiness. In Paley’s eyes, redemption was a transaction within the godhead, efficacious whether or not people know of it. For evangelicals, it was a potentially present experience demanding personal response.

It followed that evangelicals were characterised by a belief in conversion – from estrangement into relationship. But conversion was not necessarily instantaneous. Their biographies reveal that many Anglican evangelicals and members of the older dissenting denominations never claimed the sudden experience of religious certainty, which was so lauded within early Methodism. On the contrary, they agonised over months and years, wondering if they were truly Christian, and eventually attained peace of mind in the gradual awareness that they were manifesting those fruits of the Spirit, which they regarded as the only proof of true conversion.³⁷ Their doctrine was again articulated by Simeon who explicitly repudiated the allegations

³⁵ A. Pollard (ed.), *Let Wisdom Judge, university addresses and sermon outlines by Charles Simeon* (1959), p. 110.

³⁶ Paley, *Works*, pp. 775–77.

³⁷ See for example the biographies of such notable Evangelicals as Hannah More, William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay, and among dissenters, I. Taylor (ed.), *The Family Pen, Memorials . . . of the Taylor Family* (1867); E. R. Conder, *Josiah Conder, a memoir* (1857). Josiah Conder was editor of the dissenting *Eclectic Review* which maintained ‘we would not attempt to fix the date of any man’s conversion,’ ii series xviii (1822), p. 489. A similar stance was maintained in the more enthusiastic *Evangelical Magazine*, ii series vi (1828), p. 477, where it was stressed against Calvinist assertion that no-one could be sure that he

that we require a *sudden* impulse of the Holy Spirit . . . to convert the soul to God; and that we require this change to be so sensibly and perceptibly wrought that the subject of it shall be able to specify the day and hour when it took place . . . It may be so gradual that the growth of it, like the seed in the parable, shall at no time be particularly visible, either to the observation of others, or to the person's own mind.³⁸

Nevertheless, Simeon insisted that conversion, whether a recognisable or imperceptible experience, instantaneous or gradual, was an essential part of spiritual progress. Here he differed from Paley, who maintained that while some people, including some churchgoers, needed to be converted, conversion was not necessary for all.³⁹

The disagreement over the universal need for conversion found its focus within Anglican circles in a protracted debate on baptismal regeneration which spanned much of the second decade of the nineteenth century. In an attempt to refute high-church affirmations, some Evangelicals lapsed into negative and minimalising language.⁴⁰ Others, however, stressed the value of baptism. They agreed that it could sometimes bring about spiritual rebirth, and challenged high-churchmen only in so far as they implied that this automatically took place. The sacraments, one writer concluded, should be highly esteemed but 'popish error' should be avoided.⁴¹ This aptly sums up evangelical views on Holy Communion. Both Evangelical and dissenting writings reveal a concern for proper preparation prior to receiving the sacrament and an awesome appreciation of its value and significance. On the other hand, just as the atonement was not central to Paley's teaching, so sacramental practice was not central to that of evangelicals: there are comparatively few references to the Lord's Supper in the first edition of Simeon's multi-volume set of sermon outlines, *Horae Homileticae*, and no sermon is included on the most detailed New Testament exposition of the sacrament, 1 Corinthians 11.⁴² Evangelicals admitted that in practice the Lord's Supper was a peculiarly effective means of grace, but they had no doubt that it was only one of a number of means that the Spirit of God might use.⁴³

It was this emphasis upon the activity of the Spirit that most obviously differentiated evangelicals' beliefs from those of their fellows. The revival itself was

possessed an 'interest in Christ' until his faith had been tested by its fruits. This belief led to a widespread suspicion of deathbed conversions which, while sometimes genuine, could not be so proved, e.g. *EM*, i series xix (1811), p. 167; ii series ii (1824), p. 438.

³⁸ Pollard (ed.), *Let Wisdom Judge*, 'On the New Birth,' p. 51.

³⁹ Paley, *Works*, 'On the doctrine of conversion,' pp. 737–42.

⁴⁰ See for example the discussions in the Evangelical periodical the *Christian Observer*, xv (1816), pp. 172, 228ff.; xvi (1817), p. 309.

⁴¹ *CO* xiv (1815), p. 286. Cf. xi (1812), p. 370.

⁴² An omission belatedly rectified by three sermons in the 1832–33 edn.

⁴³ See for example *CO* xii (1813), p. 518 where a reviewer criticised a high-churchman for attributing 'exclusively to the Lord's Supper' 'that . . . which though eminently due to it, is still shared in common by every other act of worship.'

seen as a work of God's Spirit. Evangelical Anglicans of Wilberforce's generation may have been increasingly respectful of the ordinances and order of the established church, but they refused to place limits on what the Holy Spirit could do, and they readily conceded that God used other instruments, alongside the discipline and sacraments of the Church of England, to convert and nurture people in the faith. Even in the frenzied years following the French Revolution, when Evangelicals became highly solicitous of church order, they still co-operated with only slight qualm with dissenters in establishing interdenominational societies which they believed to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

Their contemporaries certainly regarded a marked interest in the activity of the Holy Spirit as a distinguishing feature of early evangelicalism. The term 'fundamentalist,' characterising evangelicals by their approach to Scripture, dates only from the 1920s. Older synonyms, such as 'enthusiastic,' define by reference to the Spirit rather than the Word.⁴⁴ Indeed evangelicals' approach to the Bible itself can best be differentiated from that of others by reference to their belief in the Spirit. In no doubt that the Holy Spirit guided the sincere reader of the Old and New Testaments, they shared the early nonconformist belief that 'the Lord hath yet more truth and light to break forth from his Word.' William Carey, the first Baptist missionary, was galvanised by the challenge 'Go ye into all the world,' neglected by previous generations. Similarly, John Wesley came to believe that the Word was challenging the existing formularies and practices of the Church, through which orthodox Anglicans assumed it was properly expressed. Scripture was for Carey and Wesley, as for the latter, 'the truth once and for all delivered to the saints' but it was dynamic as well as authoritative.

Their firm conviction in the work of the Spirit gave rise to both the worst and the best in evangelicalism. On the one hand, believing in the personalised guidance of the Holy Spirit, evangelicals tended to assume that the Spirit had directed them into all truth, and that others must deliberately be setting themselves up against God. The title of Wilberforce's famous book, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797), is indicative both of evangelical exclusiveness and of the lack of tact which was sadly characteristic of much evangelical apologetic. On the other hand, evangelicals' belief in the Spirit carried with it a concern for spirituality which could result in a way of life admired even by those who despised their doctrine. 'If the test was personal holiness,' J. A. Froude wrote of the family who so impressed him in 1842, 'I for my own part had never yet fallen in with any human beings in whose actions and conversation the Spirit of Christ was more visibly present.'⁴⁵ Well might Hannah More speak of 'those writers,

⁴⁴ The word 'enthusiast' derives from the Greek and in its original meaning referred to someone possessed or inspired by God.

⁴⁵ Froude, *Short Studies*, iv, pp. 296–97.

whom it is the fashion to call evangelical; but which you and I had rather distinguish by the name of spiritual.’⁴⁶

While her statement reinforces a definition of evangelicalism which lays stress upon an interest in the work of the Holy Spirit, it introduces further complications. Hannah More was writing to Alexander Knox, a man who, with his friend Bishop Jebb of Limerick, has been described as a forerunner of the Oxford Movement. Not only did Knox and Jebb hold decidedly Catholic views on church and sacraments; they were also highly critical both of individual evangelicals and of evangelical dogmatic theology.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, like a number of other high-churchmen, they maintained intimate friendships with evangelicals. The effective founder of the Clapham community, Henry Thornton, appointed the conservative high-churchman Robert Inglis as guardian of his children and, prior to the premature death of John Bowdler, had hoped that this son of a high-church family might worthily carry on the Clapham tradition.⁴⁸ Just because evangelicals laid such emphasis upon spirituality they were likely to establish close relations with others who shared this preoccupation: ‘Though doubtless, in certain points, I entertain a view different from them,’ wrote Knox, ‘I say now, what I should desire to say on my deathbed, *sit mea anima cum istis*.’⁴⁹

The close association between these recognised high-churchmen and the Clapham sect provides a timely warning to any historian who attempts to define evangelicalism too rigidly. If the imprecise use of terminology misrepresents, so too does the over-precise use of that same language. The history of opinion does not permit hard and fast definitions. The preceding description of characteristic evangelical belief must serve as a guide rather than a plumb line, for some who do not altogether conform to the general pattern were clearly included by association within the evangelical fold.

On the other hand, it can readily be admitted that some were more centrally within that fold than others. In an analysis of evangelical attitudes it seems appropriate to restrict discussion to those who saw themselves, and have been seen over a considerable period of time, as being unquestionably within the evangelical tradition. In the discussion that follows it is assumed on doctrinal grounds that at this time all dissenters, save Quakers and Unitarians, were evangelical, and periodicals representing mainstream dissent constitute a major primary source. Evangelical Quakers, most notably J. J. Gurney, can easily be identified, for unlike other Friends they were active in evangelical organisations such as the Bible Society. The Anglicans are the most difficult to distinguish. In practice the title ‘Evangelical’ will be used primarily of those who were accorded obituaries in the recognised

⁴⁶ W. Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More* (2nd edn 1834), iii, p. 238.

⁴⁷ Y. Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival, studies in the Oxford Movement* (1925) ch. iv; *CO* xxxiv (1834), pp 691ff.

⁴⁸ S. Meacham, *Henry Thornton of Clapham* (1964), pp 57–58, 183.

⁴⁹ Brilioth, *Anglican Revival*, pp. 39–40: ‘May my spirit be with theirs.’

Evangelical periodicals and who have featured in the old hagiographical histories which evangelical writers have from time to time produced for the edification of the faithful. Uncritical though these sometimes are, they provide an unparalleled guide to those whom through the ages it has been ‘the fashion to call evangelical.’

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