Victorian Evangelical Theology

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1. Introduction

Surprisingly little is known still about Victorian Anglican evangelicalism, with only the outlines of its history having been uncovered. For long there was no adequate general history, but now we have books by Bebbington and Hylson Smith.[1] Bebbington in particular is radically revisionist, strong on the intellectual temper of various periods, and he suggests that evangelicals reflected the times in which they lived as much as they moulded them. Perhaps his only weakness is that he neglects the way evangelicals of all periods protested against the times in which they lived.

The outlines of the history of Anglican evangelicalism from 1850–1900 are as follows. Evangelicals grew in numbers, to about one third of the clergy by 1880. They were poorly led however, by the bishops appointed by Palmerston, who proved lightweight and ineffective. Parochial clergy showed great diligence and effectiveness. But by the end of the century there was a perceptible feeling that the High and Broad parties were more in tune with the temper of the times. Disunity among liberals and conservatives led to formalized division among evangelicals in 1904.

We Anglican evangelicals have seized on the lives of the great heroes, Shaftesbury, Ryle, and Handley Moule but passed by any attempt to analyse and appreciate our full Victorian inheritance. We have remembered a few famous figures, but the temper of the age has not influenced us as the sixteenth or the eighteenth centuries have. In the cases of the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival we have recognized that there is a body of thought and spirituality which has permanent value for the church of all ages, but we have failed to do so with the Victorian evangelicals. We have recognized the value of the parochial labours of men such as Canon Christopher of St. Aldate's, Oxford, but not the full scale of Victorian Evangelicals' intellectual contribution.

And yet in the Victorian Church of England there was a body of thinkers, operating in a world recognizably modern compared with that of Cranmer or Wesley, dealing with many of the issues with which we still wrestle—evolution and biology, liturgy and ritualism, the after-life and the existence of hell. We have many new twentieth-century insights into these matters; we shall have time to produce many more if we do not reinvent the wheel and rework the same seams so exhaustively mined and for the most part successfully worked.

I believe that if we look at the contributions to theology by the Anglican

evangelical divines of the nineteenth century we shall find much to admire, and much of permanent value. Most of their theology was written in response to what Shaftesbury described as 'the juggernaut of the two Rs—rationalism and ritualism'.[2] We shall consider first the evangelical reaction to the rationalist controversies and then the positive evangelical theological contribution in biblical criticism and philosophy. Following that we shall deal with the evangelical reaction to the ritualist controversies, then evangelical liturgiology. Finally we shall look to the lessons and legacy of Victorian evangelical theology.

2. The Rationalist Controversies

The rationalist controversies lasted from the late 1850s to the turn of the century. There was a great flood-tide of publication in the years from 1859–62 which challenged Christian orthodoxy, Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, *Essays and Reviews*, and Colenso's commentary on the Pentateuch.

2.1 Essays and Reviews

Essays and Reviews[3] was a publication by liberal scholars, including Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and Frederick Temple, later archbishop of Canterbury. It argued that science could not be reconciled with Gen. 1–3, that miracles cannot prove the truth of Christianity, that there is a progressive revelation in the Bible, with the Old Testament less inspired than the New, and in the famous phrase of Jowett's, that the Bible should be interpreted like any other book. There was an immediate outcry against the book of essays from bishops, orthodox High Churchmen, Tractarians, and evangelicals. The outcry was like that against later radical essays such as *Lux Mundi*, *Essays Catholic and Critical* and *Soundings*. A case in law was opened and two of the authors, Wilson and Williams, were found guilty of denying the inspiration of scripture and eternal punishment and they were deprived of their benefices for a year.

What was the evangelical scholars' reaction to this book? Evangelicals dubbed the authors the 'Septem contra Christum', like the Seven against Thebes in Aeschylus' play of that name and roundly opposed them. These liberal thinkers were a new phenomenon, not old-fashioned rationalist scoffers, like the eighteenth-century deists, Toland and others. They deployed nineteenth-century ideas of historical relativism. In response the evangelicals relied upon the old theology of evidences of Paley and the philosophy of Locke and the common sense philosophers which they, in common with their American counterparts at Princeton, used.

The main burden of evangelical theological opposition to the essayists fell to Edward Garbett, Alexander McCaul, nominated as the first bishop of Jerusalem, Robert Payne Smith, the greatest Syriac scholar of the nineteenth century, whose Lexicon is still in standard use, and C.A. Heurtley, a

moderate evangelical who was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford. McCaul countered some of the essayists' attacks on the Genesis account of creation by arguing that the six days of creation were indefinite in length.[4] Interestingly, although the evangelicals held a high view of the inspiration of Scripture, they were not all agreed on whether inspiration was verbal or merely plenary. They were however agreed in rejecting the progressive theories of revelation of Temple. Although they paid due attention to the human element in scripture and rejected mechanical theories of inspiration, believing that 'men moved by the holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Pet. 1:21) they rejected Jowett's plea to treat scripture as a merely human production. The issue of inspiration lay at the heart of the *Essays and Reviews* controversy.

2.2 Colenso

The next controversy involved Colenso, the bishop of Natal. He was a pioneering colonial bishop in Natal, South Africa, where he viewed, with more approval than most Englishmen, Zulu polygamy. He utilized and popularized German scholarship in attempting a critique of the Pentateuch, which he made in a blunt manner.[5] Colenso found the large numbers ascribed to the Israelites in the book of Numbers absurd, and attempted to show that such numbers could not subsist in the desert. Colenso was a mathematician who wrote arithmetic textbooks used by Queen Victoria's children. Shaftesbury in criticizing him observed wittily that Colenso could never forgive Moses for having written the book of Numbers.

Colenso was in fact an easier opponent for the evangelicals than the essayists. His methods for disputing the verbal veracity of scripture were similar to those of the eighteenth century Deists, that is, narrow logic applied without regard to the broader picture. Again, as with the essayists, evangelicals attacked Colenso's theology of inspiration. Colenso ascribed infallibility not to scripture but to God and in this we catch a foreshadow of modern liberalism. *The Record*, that noisy organ of strong evangelicalism, accused him of error and of following Coleridge here. Evangelicals made a valid criticism of Colenso in asking whether God's infallibility could be of any use to humans, if it were not used in the production of an infallible book? How can God's infallibility even be known, for sure, without some infallible communication of it?

The main evangelical critic of Colenso was Joseph McCaul, son of Alexander. He attacked Colenso, not on the broad front of inspiration theory, but on the narrow front of textual and detailed criticism.[6] He was able to show that many of Colenso's assumptions about the numbers in the desert depended on corrupt readings of doubtful translations. For example, Colenso had declared that Lev. 4:11–12 where priests were to carry personally all the offal from the sacrifices outside the camp, was impossible because of the large number of sacrifices and the distance of transportation. McCaul responded by questioning the bishop's translation of *wehotsi*

as 'he shall carry forth' (personally and manually). It rather meant 'he shall cause to go forth.'—a more literal meaning of the theme of the verb. This could signify that a conveyance was employed or that others helped. By such respected and detailed scholarship McCaul placed all conservative Old Testament scholars, and not just evangelicals, in his debt in rebutting Colenso.

Evangelical criticism of Colenso was effective. As a footnote, later on when Colenso was deposed from his see by his High Church metropolitan Robert Grey of Cape Town, evangelicals rallied to his defence, because they disliked Grey and mistrusted his wish to see the Church of the Province of South Africa independent of the Church of England.

2.3 Darwinism

The third and last major rationalist controversy in these years 1859–62 concerned Darwinism. Evangelicals had found previous evolutionary theories, usually Lamarckian (teaching that developments in a parent were handed on directly in their offspring), easy to dismiss. But Darwin[7] and Wallace had produced a new mechanism of natural selection to account for evolution. For many evangelicals Gen. 1 seemed to rule this gradual process out. Chalmers and Buckland had argued for six literal days and for a gap in the narrative of Gen. 1:2 in which geological formation had taken place and extinct and primitive animals and plants found in fossils had subsisted.

However this theory of the 1830s, along with Cuvier's idea of multiple floods was increasingly untenable due to new geology as well as biology. Although the majority of evangelicals tenaciously held to the old 'gap' theory of the literal six days, a minority led by the Scottish theologian and geologist Hugh Miller argued for 'day-periods' of indefinite length. This more liberal possible rapprochement became increasingly popular with evangelicals as the century progressed. By the end of the century, Macnamara, a leading evangelical, proposed evolution as a 'law of nature'.

Evangelicals were, if opposed to Darwin, less blinkeredly so than other conservatives. Not for them the excesses of High Churchman Samuel Wilberforce whose ridicule of T.H. Huxley rebounded on his head in the famous British Association debate. Evangelicals were often more open to science, and better acquainted with it, than Tractarians. Shaftesbury pronounced science as an important enquiry for the Christian. There need be no conflict for the Christian between it and the Bible. For evangelicals biblical criticism and questions of biblical inspiration were the crucial issues on which the conservative lines must hold, not science. This contrasts with the 'evangelicals *versus* science' mythology of history to which we have grown accustomed. This erroneous view is applicable to America in the 1920s, not to England in the 1860s.

3. Biblical and Philosophical Theology

There were many positive works of theology in these fields of biblical criticism and evolutionary philosophy and biology produced by evangelicals.

3.1 Biblical Theology—Girdlestone and Moule, far-seeing commentators

The major evangelical Anglican biblical scholars were Handley Moule, first principle of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and Robert Girdlestone, principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. Both their institutions were founded in the late 1870s to train clergy and to help them resist rationalism and ritualism. Moule wrote major biblical commentaries which are still serviceable today, as well as making contributions to dogmatics and reformation studies. A maverick liberal evangelical scholar, J.J. Lias, also wrote commentaries. He argued that Wellhausen, the radical German biblical scholar, was needed to redress the lack of emphasis on the human element in scripture. He held that scripture contains, but is not itself, the revelation of God's will.

Moule argued for a symbolic meaning in parts of scripture, especially in Gen. 3. Like Edward Litton, whose *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*[9] was republished recently, he moved away from the theories of verbal inspiration current among earlier evangelical scholars of the 1860s and 1870s like T.R. Birks, towards theories of plenary inspiration in Litton's case and even progressive revelation in Moule's instance, though without the admission of error in the earlier period of the writing of scripture. Thus there was a liberalization at work, which was the harbinger, in the increasingly extreme views of Lias, of the split between conservative and liberal evangelicals in 1904.

Girdlestone was remarkably far-seeing in his theories. He argues against the German source critics not merely on the usual evangelical doctrinal and inspiration grounds, but saying.

> They write as if they expect everything to be brought up to the critical style of the present century, regardless alike of the age of the books, of the genius of the people, and of the spiritual interest of the writers.[10]

This was criticism of the source critics which all bible scholars would acknowledge today, namely that they turned biblical characters and writers into nineteenth century figures, and sometimes Moses seemed like a nineteenth century Victorian professor.

Secondly, Girdlestone always wished the passage to speak for itself, not to be placed in the straitjacket of subservience to this or that theory. He wrote,

> Critics are sometimes liable to forget or neglect the first principles of their art, viz., that we should give due respect to what an author says of himself, and to what his earliest followers say of him, and to what his object is, and to the spirit with which he carries it out.[11]

Here is an anticipation of the 1980s' discovery of structuralist criticism.

3.2 Philosophy theology—T.R. Birks opposes Spencer

Turning to evolution, the leading evangelical here was Thomas Rawson Birks. He was a theologian and controversialist, educated at Trinity College Cambridge, where he was Second Wrangler. While curate to Edward Bickersteth, the evangelical leader, he married his daughter and became vicar of Kelshall, Hertfordshire. In 1866 he was appointed to Simeon's pulpit, Holy Trinity, Cambridge. In 1872 he was elected to succeed the broad churchman F.D. Maurice as professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge. Choosing him was controversial. Some of his earlier papers on utilitarianism had been received with little enthusiasm, and he was at the opposite theological extreme from the liberal Maurice. But his thought matured, and he is today regarded as Britain's leading anti-Darwinian.

His main contribution lay, however, in the philosophical realm, in responding not just to Darwin, but to the proponent of social Darwinism and inflated Darwinist philosophy, Herbert Spencer. Birks's demolition of Spencer was thorough and effective. He pointed out the numerous contradictions in his theories, arguing against the views that matter is indestructible, motion continuous and force persistent.[12] He attacked theories that knowledge is relative, and that there is no real perception of objects but a persistence of consciousness. Birks's thought was based on Lockean natural realism, rejecting idealist philosophy, opposed to the unknowability of God and grounded on Newtonian science. Faced with the philosophical choice between Birks and his evolutionary philosopher opponents, many moderns would take Birks's side in the main in rejecting the relativity of knowledge. Although Birks's rejection of Darwinism may not appeal to all today, his philosophical arguments against naturalism are powerful.

4. The Ritual Controversies

We turn to the other facet of the juggernaut, ritualism. First is the response of evangelical theology to the ritual controversies. The response at a practical level has been often considered, especially in relation to the litigation. But what about the theological reply?

4.1 Baptism—the aftermath of the Gorham judgment

Evangelicals in the 1850s were cock-a-hoop because of the Gorham judgment which ruled that the belief that regeneration did not invariably accompany baptism was not inconsistent with the formularies of the Church of England. This victory, however, concealed some real divisions

within the evangelical party. One liberal, Henry Melvill was in favour of baptismal regeneration while evangelicals were divided over whether to regard certain phrases in the prayer book service, such as 'This child is regenerate,' as referring to a lower admission to the Christian community, or to a merely hypothetical higher spiritual rebirth. Some held both views, and in the theological arena, evangelicals seemed concerned not to pursue their legal victory to its theological conclusion, and to allow that the Church of England's formularies granted some latitude.[13]

4.2 Confession—a scandal to the Protestant public

Confession was introduced into Tractarian churches from about 1845 onwards. In the eighteen-sixties a major contention arose over its validity. Faced with the seeming recommendation of a similar practice in the Prayer Book's Order for the Visitation of the Sick, evangelicals responded by distinguishing between private confession and auricular confession, the former being admissible and the latter not. The latter, unlike the first was sacramental, exhaustive, juridical and absolving. Evangelicals had plenty of other objections to the confessional such as that the priest intervened between husband and wife, that it attracted dissolute women, and also that it was a treatment of the symptoms rather than the causes of sin. But a major theological objection was that the absolution in confession was unconditional by implication, whereas the absolutions in the Prayer Book, whether declaratory 'He pardoneth'; optative, 'Almighty God have mercy upon you'; or indicative, 'I absolve thee' were all conditional upon faith in the recipient. Warnings against secret confession from the 1552 prayer book were cited.

At the end of the century there was a series of round-table conferences on issues dividing the church, and one took place between December, 1901 and January 1902. Evangelicals attending included the liberal evangelical Hay Aitken, Canon of Norwich, and Henry Wace, the heavy weight conservative.[14] Evangelicals maintain there that forgiveness was not tied to an appointed means such as confession, that an absolute declaration of absolution should not be made where there was inadequate assurance that sins were absolved, and that there was a distinction between a declaration of freedom from church censure and absolution of sins. There was however some convergence in the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic positions, with more ground given on the side of the latter than the former.

Confession was really only a theological side-show in the ritualist controversies, however much the Protestant public's hackles were raised by it. The main theological bones of contention were the real presence at Communion and eucharistic sacrifice.

4.3 Real presence and eucharistic sacrifice—two heterodox doctrines

The doctrine of the real presence had not been held by very early Tractarians, but it had become the centrepiece in their edifice of sacramen-

talism. It had an equivalent position in the Lord's supper to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in Baptism. That is to say, it was the principle by which Anglo-Catholics argued that grace was conveyed mechanically to all who partook of the sacrament. Evangelicals objected not merely to the adoration of the elements but to the conveying of mechanical grace to all partaking of communion, including the unworthy.

There was a successful evangelical assault on Archdeacon Denison for holding such a doctrine, in 1856. Denison shared the usual Tractarian dislike for the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation, preferring to describe the presence of Jesus in the bread and the wine in spiritual terms. An evangelical reviewer pointed out the inconsistency of a spiritual presence which could none the less be carnally pressed by the teeth of an unbeliever. The leading evangelical theologian of the early nineteenth century had been William Goode, author of *The Rule of Faith* and doughty opponent of baptismal regeneration in the Gorham controversy. He was invoked in this controversy, with Anglican eighteenth and seventeenth century divines, which he cited, quoted against the real presence—Wake, Warburton, and Taylor in particular.[15]

There was an attempt by the Anglo-Catholic Bennett to argue for the real presence in his book *A Plea for Toleration in the Church of England.* Evangelicals prosecuted him for heresy; this prosecution failed because he did not write of a 'corporal' presence, such as is condemned in the black rubric in the prayer book. Pusey was the next to argue for the real presence in his sermon 'On the Presence of Christ' and in his *Eirenikon.* Evangelicals in reply argued from Jn. 6:63 'the flesh profiteth nothing', that a corporal presence could not convey grace to the soul. Zwingli was the source of this defence.

Evangelicals liked to quote as an authority Daniel Waterland, the eighteenth century eucharistic theologian.[16] Though not an Evangelical or even a low churchman he outlined a receptionist theology of communion acceptable to evangelicals. John Harrison among others utilized him, and it was Harrison who recognized that the key shibboleth was whether the unworthy did or did not receive the Body and Blood of Christ. If yes, then some doctrine of the real presence was taught. If no, then no doctrine was taught at variance with Article XXIX and the reformers.

How stood matters at the end of the century: There was a round table conference similar to that on Confession.[17] Evangelicals on the conference argued for a spiritual presence at Communion, but one neither subjective, rather objective by faith, nor in or under the elements.

Moule sat on the conference and he seems to have held not a receptionist but a Ratramnian theology of the presence, similar to that of Cranmer himself. That is, he envisaged a parallel though separate physical and spiritual feeding. There was considerable divergence recorded in belief between evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics, led by Gore.

There had clearly been some development and alteration in evangelical eucharistic teaching as it had been moulded in response to ritualism. Evangelicals could now write of a consequential participation in the glorified body, and a spiritual adoration of Jesus in, though not locally in, the sacrament. Zwinglianism had never been accepted by the majority of evangelicals. Now, although rejecting consubstantiation, some could embrace Ratramnianism.

What about eucharistic sacrifice? The issue surfaced in 1861 when, it was reported, several bishops wanted to interpret the rubric on placing bread and wine to mean oblation. Even this slight suggestion of oblation was unacceptable to many evangelicals. The only biblical use of oblation, they argue, was in the sense of offering and presenting ourselves and our possessions to the Lord in response to Christ, not in Christ.

The title 'altar' for the holy table, nowhere found in the Prayer Book, was adopted by Tractarians. Some evangelicals saw little to quarrel with in the bare name itself, but others objected to it. Other divisions grew in the evangelical ranks as the years went on. One extreme liberal evangelical, Sadler, even argued that Christ offered his death continually in heaven,[18] but most other evangelicals strongly disagreed.

At the Fulham round table conference, Christ's sacrifice was admitted by one evangelical to be 'offered to view'.[19] This was unacceptable to another evangelical on the conference, who amended this to 'submitted to view'. There was some variety of opinion among evangelicals on this issue, with a spectrum of positions from near-Zwinglianism to Ratramnianism on the real presence and the more radical interpreted Waterland's theology to allow for a passive offering to view of Jesus' sacrifice in the Communion.

4.4 Ritualism—catholic ceremonial practice

What about the evangelical reaction to other ritualist teachings? It should not be forgotten that although almost all were against everything ritualistic, some evangelicals were prepared to tolerate a mild degree of elaboration in robes, with Moule creating controversy by wearing a surplice for the first time in the pulpit of Holy Trinity, Cambridge in 1887, and Ryle similarly creating controversy by doing the same thing in a remote Lakeland parish, though word of the deed spread. Some evangelical bishops in the 1850s, notably Ryder of Lichfield and Coventry pioneered purple cassocks. One evangelical pronounced in 1857 'Neither can we see that Protestantism will suffer the smallest injury from a rose-coloured Communion coverlet, or an ornamented credence table.'[20]

But in the main evangelicals were rightly suspicious of ritualist developments. When the Camden society wished to restore the Round Church in Cambridge by replacing the wooden Holy Table with a stone altar, evangelical refusal alerted the church to the distinction between an aesthetic love of the Gothic and Roman theology.

In the late eighteen-sixties there was much controversy concerning vestments. The Ornaments Rubric, which seemed to sanction their use, inserted in the 1559 prayer book, called for ornaments as in the second year of Edward VI's reign, that is, chasubles for communion. However this was, Evangelicals maintained, superseded by the Advertisements of Archbishop Parker, issued in 1566 prescribing surplice only for communion and copes in cathedrals. Evangelicals advanced theological arguments in favour of reformed robes, drawing attention to the sacrificial and mediaeval overtones of the chasuble. For a time evangelicals were legally successful on this point also, though nothing could change the growing number of Anglo-Catholic parishes prepared to defy the law.

Another issue was eastward position at the holy table for communion. Benjamin Harrison, the evangelical theologian, attacked supposed seventeenth century precedents for this practice well and quoted the Reformer bishop Jewel in denying patristic precedent also.[21]

Evangelicals became unpopular among some with their backing for the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 which led to the imprisonment of several ritualist priests, and for their prosecution of the bishop of Lincoln, Edward King in 1888–92. However recent scholarship suggests that prosecutions were still common after the King case; and that the King case did not discredit the policy. Evangelicals were in fact divided over the wisdom of prosecuting bishop King, with Gedge against prosecution and Henry Miller, secretary of the Church Association, in favour of it, battling it out in the pages of *Churchman*.[22] The Privy Council judgment pronounced that candles and the eastward position were legal, reversing the Purchas judgment. Mixed water and wine in the chalice and the sign of the cross were pronounced illegal.

In 1904, the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline allowed more latitude in ritual, but its regulations were much tighter in theory than many bishops administered in practice, and Anglo-Catholic priests and churches went their own way anyhow.

5. Liturgical Theology

Turning from the controversies to the positive theology, evangelicals were fortunate in possessing in this field their strongest theologian, a man of great and outstanding ability, the liturgiologist Nathaniel Dimock.

5.1 Nathanial Dimock—a learned liturgiologist

Dimock graduated with an M.A. at St. John's College, Oxford in 1847 and then held livings in Kent from 1848–87. Although possessing no senior appointments within the church, his was an influential voice and he served on many important committees, including the above mentioned Fulham Round Table conferences on the real presence and ritual. His writings were largely but not exclusively on liturgical matters; he wrote for example on the Atonement.

Dimock's scholarship was recognized by men who did not share his theological views. Bishop Dowden of Edinburgh, the Anglo-Catholic liturgical scholar hailed his achievements. Moule acknowledged his books as ones 'which Goode would have hailed and studied',[23] Goode being the great evangelical scholar and opponent of Tractarianism mentioned above.

Dimock's views were backed up by a very good knowledge of the fathers and an excellent acquaintanceship with the Anglican divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His learning in this field was exhaustive and encyclopaedic. Time and again he would prove that even Laudian divines of the seventeenth century were opposed to principles set forth by Tractarians. Although his work is not as well known as it might be today, he was quoted in a General Synod debate on the issue of the Ministerial Priesthood a few years ago. On this issue Dimock admitted that there was a *sacerdotium* or priestly activity in the church, but located it solely in the finished work of Christ, contrary to the suggestion made by Anglo-Catholics in that debate.[24]

Dimock combined learning concerning the past authorities with a creative and acute theological intelligence. He had drunk deeply of the well of Cranmer's thought. He carried Cranmer's attack on the real Objective presence into new territory. By claiming that Christ's body is on the holy table as well as in heaven Catholics confound the two natures of Christ. He is present everywhere spiritually, not corporally. Dimock claimed that not only this Apollinarian confusion but a breach in the hypostatic union are implied by this erroneous doctrine.[25] Dimock pointed out that it denies the permanent consequences of the incarnation by denying the permanent union of Christ's natural body with his spirit, as well as, what Cranmer argued, the corporal departure of Christ's body to heaven.

Dimock also exposed the chameleon-like nature of the eucharistic sacrifice as taught by Catholics. Was it a bloody or an unbloody sacrifice? If the latter, as the Roman Catholic Bellarmine alleged, what of the scripture that there is no sacrifice without shedding of blood? Was there real destruction in the sacrifice? Or was it merely a sacrifice of bread? At the Last Supper Christ did not destroy his own body, so there is no sacrifice there.

These arguments show what a master of eucharistic theology Dimock was. His learning was greatly respected and other churchmen could have no doubt that evangelicals had a strong intellectual case for their eucharistic theology on which their opposition to ritualism was based.

6. Lessons and Legacy

This concludes our investigation into the evangelical theologians, their responses to ritualism and rationalism and their own positive theology. What are their lessons and legacy for us? By lessons I mean warning lessons, and by legacy I mean a positive testament which they have bequeathed to us.

6.1 Warning lessons—decline caused by falling away from Protestantism and conservatism

It is always much more hazardous to try to learn from history than to analyse it. But does this new analysis provide us with any fresh understanding of the reasons why the evangelical movement in the Church of England went into decline at the end of the nineteenth century? And what lessons can we learn from this for our own times?

A lesson to learn from these evangelicals is that parochial success may not be enough on its own to capture the national church. The evangelical clergy who laboured in large numbers in their parishes so successfully would have seen many of them decline into liberalism and catholicism in the early years of this century. Another lesson is that intellectual success and scholarship may not be enough to capture a national church. Perhaps this article has gone some way to showing that late nineteenth century evangelical Anglicanism was more intellectually distinguished than has been admitted. Yet that alone did not save it from decline.

So what did account for the decline of the evangelicals? It was not, I think as popular mythology claims, that they failed to meet the challenge of Darwinism. I have shown the considerable flexibility of Miller, and then latterly Moule, on this point, while social Darwinist philosophy was dealt a fatal blow by Birks. Nor was it because they were obscurantist about the Bible. Through their high theology of inspiration, not conceding primitivism in the Old Testament or error in any part, they could provide an effective response to scepticism and in such as Moule and Girdlestone, far-seeing commentators.

Nor was the reason because they were unthinkingly litigious and narrow-minded over ritualism. There were considerable reservations within evangelical ranks concerning an overuse of litigation in the later period, and the theological objections of Dimock in particular were meticulously thought out and acted as a strong and effective supplement to the forensic process.

There seems to have been decline largely because there was a strong movement of liberalism and catholicism which weakened them externally and because some of them were infected by a spirit of liberalism and catholicism and fell away from the Bible and from historic Church of England orthodoxy. The spirit of the age was one in which colour, mystery, romanticism, and free inquiry flourished. In this decadent atmosphere the evangelicals' biblicism and bare commemorationalism failed to appeal. The conservative evangelical theologians fought a spirited rearguard action, but the increasingly strong heterodoxy of the turn of the century bore them down. The theologians spoke, but the parishes refused to listen.

6.2 The legacy of classic evangelical theory—its late flowering in the Victorian era

Lastly, what about the legacy of the nineteenth century evangelicals? It is

a legacy of the summation, the culmination of what Jim Packer calls 'three centuries of reformed Augustinianism, massively expounded by major minds'.[26] These evangelicals, as we have seen, saw themselves as heirs of the divines and thinkers of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In philosophy they were the heirs of Locke; in eucharistic theology, of Waterland and of Cranmer; and concerning the theology of orders; of other Reformation divines.

This sense of the continuity of tradition was attenuated by the hiatus in the evangelical Anglican party caused by the post-Victorian collapse. The beginning of a fight-back was marked by the formation of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society in 1922. There was some continuity between this new conservative evangelical movement and Victorian theology, in the persons of such as Henry Wace, Dean of King's College London and Canterbury, and sometime Editor of *The Churchman*. But essentially everything had to be started again, and in the process that thread of tradition was broken: even memory of the tradition was lost. Why do we now not venerate Dimock as Pusey is venerated by Anglo-Catholics? This is surely the answer.

A process of rewriting and mythologizing of history also began, with the triumph of rationalism and ritualism being seen as inevitable by liberal and catholic historians, and nineteenth century evangelicals stigmatized as failed, intellectually inadequate, and narrow-minded legalists—as prejudiced fundamentalists at worst, and as out-of-date Victorians at best.

Some evangelicals today have succumbed to the trap of going back to the Bible direct and forgetting about church history, but we need intellectual tools and forms of systematizing dogma. So long as their opinions are not inconsistent with scripture on any point, our Church of England divines are the bank from which our dogmatic currency should continue to be drawn.

There are also other extreme relativists, even in the evangelical camp, who see our modern situation as culturally so distinct from everything before it that we have nothing relevant to learn from the last century. This is a view arrogant and incoherent, for by this theory what is the view that everything is culturally distinct but a culturally determined view? So by this argument the view that we can learn from the past can also be true.

So many of our problems are the same, give or take a few developments, as those which confronted the Victorians. Darwinism, biblical criticism and ritualism are still major concerns for contemporary evangelicals. In many respects the climate in which these concerns were voiced was similar in Victorian times to what it is today, and dissimilar from the early years of this century. In the early 1900s evangelicals were a small minority, a church within a church, an *ecclesiola*. Now as in Victorian times, the party is large and these matters are debated openly with other parties in the church.

Yet there does not exist today the same commitment to truth and genuine, if robust, give-and-take in debate. Victorian theological debate could be fierce, but it was always open and sincere. Gulled by an illusory pluralism, we have lost a taste for actually thrashing out, with courtesy and openness, the great issues of, for example, the real presence and the inspiration of scripture with other parties within the church. Instead we expect evangelicals to agree with us, and are content with agreeing on secondary matters only with other churchmen. This, I submit, is an abdication of responsibility for the truth of the gospel.

We have a great, if largely unknown, legacy of Victorian evangelical divinity. We should study it to our spiritual profit. We shall be a sound party and a strong force for the gospel of Jesus Christ in our Church of England, if allied with our pastoral and parochial devotion to duty and effectiveness, and our spiritual love and commitment to the Lord Jesus, we also are people under godly, reformed theological tradition as well as under the Bible. We shall be in a healthy state if we respect the classic tradition of evangelical theology. These evangelical thinkers, conscious of being heirs to the greatest theological riches of reformed divinity, knew from the lives of ordinary people around them that the gospel of Moody and Spurgeon was bringing men and women into the kingdom of God. They sought with their intellects to defend the truth of that gospel against the broad church and anglo-catholic movements which, they were sure, diverted and drew people away from the timeless truths of the Message of Redeeming Grace. One evangelical wrote: 'Mr. Dimock's books are among the greatest treasures a clergyman can possess.' May we share this attitude of respect and gratitude to God for the work of these Victorian evangelical theologians.

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NOTES

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