
BOOK REVIEWS

What Evangelicals Believe

*Edited by Andrew Anderson
Fellowship of Independent Evangelical
Churches, 1992.
55pp, £1.99*

This booklet is a helpful commentary and exposition of 'What we Believe', the new doctrinal statement of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. It is good to see Christians endeavouring to state the Bible's teaching in language which is clear, readable and accessible to contemporary Christians. Doctrinal statements are often neglected and this example, with the book based on it, will serve to strengthen the convictions of the present generation of Christians.

I will first make some comments on the doctrinal statement. 'What We Believe' has 9 sections: God, the Bible, the human race, the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the church, baptism and the Lord's supper, the future. It strikes the distinctive notes of the Reformation, *sola fide*, *sola scriptura* and *soli deo gloria*. It makes broad statements in areas where Christians differ, eg the Holy Spirit, baptism and the second coming. It addresses contemporary issues. The statement on verbal inerrancy reads, 'Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the word of God' (Section 2: the Bible). On evangelical unity it reads, 'The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel' (Section 7: the Church). The eternal pun-

ishment of the ungodly is affirmed, 'The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment..' (Section 9: the Future). Baptismal regeneration, transubstantiation and the repeated sacrifice of Christ are specifically rejected (Section 8: Baptism and the Lord's Supper). There are a number of positive emphases which are helpful. The God-given dignity of human beings is affirmed, 'All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their great purpose is to obey, worship and love God' (Section 3: the Human Race). Total depravity is expressed in unambiguous terms, 'As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life...' (Section 3: the Human Race). This and the previous quotation illustrate the use of 'men and women' rather than simply 'men'. The universal offer of the gospel is specifically stated, 'Salvation...is offered to all in the gospel' (Section 5: Salvation).

The book itself has been written by members of the Theological Committee of FIEC. They have a threefold purpose; a key to open up the Christian faith, a useful summary of what evangelical Christians believe, a stimulus to going further and seeking to know more. There are 9 brief chapters, each based on one section of the doctrinal statement and each chapter concludes with 5 study questions. Whilst the needs of the FIEC churches have been particularly in mind in this publication it is hoped that it will be of use to evangelicals more widely. The book will be of benefit for personal use, Bible study and housegroups. It would be a good book to give to anyone interested in knowing

more about the Christian faith, or to someone influenced by false teaching.

Each chapter is well-written and provides a useful phrase-by-phrase exposition of 'What We Believe'. Many scripture references are included, but the study questions expect Christians to be ready to do some work for themselves. The questions are both theological and practical. Two questions from the chapter on Baptism and the Lord's Supper illustrate this; What do you understand by the phrase 'union with Christ'? How should we use a time of quiet during a communion service?

Issues where there is disagreement between Christians are handled sensitively. The comment on the gifts of the Spirit is, 'All the Spirit's gifts are given for the common good of God's people. He baptises us into Christ's body, the Church (1 Cor 12:13), so that in mutual dependence on one another we each play our part as we share our various gifts and graces (Rom 12:3-8).' Whilst recognising different baptismal practices it is clearly stated that 'every Christian should be baptised.' A warning is also given that, 'We should not allow ourselves to become intolerant of those who hold different views from ours about the order of events surrounding Christ's coming (often referred to as millennial views), or about the details of judgement and heaven.'

I would have liked to see a statement about the Lord's *pre-existence* being included, especially in the light of contemporary confusion and the denials of the cults. The doctrinal statement begins with a clear statement of his full deity and humanity, 'The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man', and then goes on to deal with the incarnation. The relevant chapter makes his deity very clear, but lacks a clear explanation about his eternal deity and then his taking human nature at

the incarnation. Those who already understand these things will not be misled, but others would have been helped by further explanation.

In dealing with the transmission of the biblical text I feel it would have been better to avoid the use of the phrase 'small errors have crept in' (p 13), since the doctrinal statement affirms 'the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine.' To help readers with less acute minds a reference in the explanation to 'mistakes' rather than 'errors' might have been better.

Biblical truth is helpfully applied to contemporary issues. In the chapter 'About the Human Race' application is made to the issues of racism, sexism, discrimination, exploitation, and evolutionary teaching. The chapter 'About the Future' specifically refutes conditional immortality and annihilationism.

It is regrettable that the economics of book publishing mean that this most welcome publication has appeared on poor quality paper in a format unworthy of its contents. It really falls between two stools, being too large for a saddle-stitched booklet like FOUNDATIONS and yet not large enough for a substantial paperback. Nevertheless, in an age when Christians have little doctrinal understanding, and when confusion abounds, it will help all true evangelicals to grasp and communicate the unchangeable truths of historic, biblical Christianity.

Peter Milsom, Deeside EC, Clwyd

Evangelical Spirituality

From the Wesleys to John Stott

James M Gordon

340 pp, £12.99, SPCK

For those who enjoy a combination of biography, theology and Christian experi-

ence this is a good read. As the title indicates, the book takes a careful look at evangelical spirituality over a period of three hundred and fifty years, through the lives of twenty-two leading figures grouped in pairs, eg John and Charles Wesley; Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield; John Newton and William Cowper, and so on. The author, who is a Baptist minister from Aberdeen, has put a great deal of work into the book. The result is a highly readable, thorough, fascinating and spiritually helpful book.

Spirituality is not easy to define. It has to do with the relationship between belief and practice. Spirituality is not simply the inward spiritual life of the Christian, but that life as it manifests itself in attitude, word and practice. It is the product of faith and conviction, the *outworking* of a person's understanding of what the Bible teaches about the Christian life.

Even amongst evangelicals there are variations in spirituality, and the author brings this out very well by comparing and contrasting pairs of contemporary men or women. Several factors contribute to these variations: differences of theological emphasis, spiritual experience, temperament, and prevailing moral and spiritual conditions in society. All of these shape our lives in some measure, often unconsciously. The study of how this has worked out historically is fascinating and, more importantly, has much to say to us by way of warning and correction. The book is fairly self-contained and can be read profitably even where the reader's historical knowledge of the period is sparse. James Gordon acknowledges his indebtedness to Dr David Bebbington, whose book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain - a History from the 1730's to the 1980's* covers the same period, and is worth reading (though the reviewer confesses to some irritation at Dr Bebbing-

ton's failure to distinguish between Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism, and his tendency to give the impression that pleading with sinners to come to Christ and freely offering Christ to them is somehow inconsistent with the tenets of Calvinism).

So the lives of these great saints of God are set before us. The author lets down his bucket into some very rich wells. These lives are described with sympathy and honesty, and are allowed to speak for themselves. The chapter on John Newton and William Cowper, for example, is excellent, as is that on Horatius Bonar and Robert Murray McCheyne.

The inclusion of men like R W Dale and P T Forsyth is less satisfying. Both of these men were influenced by the rising tide of liberalism. Gordon recognises this particularly in Dale. "By contrast (with Spurgeon) Dale's Evangelical orthodoxy became more and more suspect as he modified, redefined and finally rejected his Calvinistic heritage. His first expository series of sermons on Romans created uproar. The doctrine of original sin and universal guilt by the imputation of Adam's sin upon the whole race, he declared 'unintelligible'." Again, "He rejected the traditional interpretation of original sin and predestination because to him their moral implications were intolerable and their intellectual credibility no longer tenable. The challenge posed by biblical criticism, scientific advance and social changes forced a man of Dale's intellectual bent to attempt a defensive restatement of evangelical doctrine." With all this Spurgeon had no sympathy whatever. Gordon speaks of him as "uncompromisingly hostile to the 'spirit of the age', suspicious of the intellectual and social changes which were becoming more and more unsympathetic to the old theology. Spurgeon's was a spirituality of

conservation, of reverence for the past and of protest against the eroding forces of the present; Dale's was a spirituality of reconstruction, equally concerned to preserve, but prepared to use modern materials if they proved more durable." But it must be said that Spurgeon's resistance to change arose from his understanding as to where those changes would lead and from his unshakeable commitment to Biblical truth. In fact Dale's defections from the truth were by no means slight. He rejected the eternal punishment of sinners, preferring the theory of annihilation. In his view of the Atonement he leans towards the Governmental Theory advocated by Grotius, the 17th century Dutch theologian (see *The Atonement* by R W Dale, and especially the chapter on the Relationship of Christ to the Law). Dale was also a vigorous opponent of Calvinism and said of it (in the Daily Telegraph, Christmas Day 1873) "that Calvinism would be almost obsolete among Baptists were it not still maintained by the powerful influence of Mr. Spurgeon." For these reasons we do not think Dale and Spurgeon go well together.

The chapter on Handley Moule and J C Ryle is most stimulating and useful. Gordon shows their contrasting responses to the *Higher Life* movement and its particular form of perfectionism. At a time when he felt deeply the shortcomings of his own life, Moule heard Evan Hopkins preach at a holiness convention and found in that sermon "the answer to his own deficiency". From then he became an ardent and eloquent supporter of the Keswick Movement. This change is clearly reflected in Moule's two commentaries on *Romans*, the first in 1879 and the second in 1894, and especially in his treatment of *Romans 7*. Here we see the believer struggling vainly with sin in a life largely without the Spirit's power; whereas in

chapter 8 the believer is living the life of victory through the rest of faith. Ryle was wholly out of sympathy with this view, and in his book *Holiness*, "a weighty defence of the Calvinistic spiritual tradition", he presented his answer to the new holiness movement. Gordon gives us a fine comparison of these two men.

In the final chapter the book enters our own times with D M Lloyd-Jones and John Stott. Such close encounters are not easy to handle, but on the whole Gordon has treated them with sensitivity and honesty. There are occasional lapses such as the comment that Dr Lloyd-Jones "remained cautious in his attitude to Keswick holiness teaching ..." - an extraordinary understatement! Dr Lloyd-Jones had no more sympathy for the old Keswick teaching than Ryle, and was as outspoken on many occasions. Those who are familiar with Iain Murray's fine two-volume biography of Dr Lloyd-Jones will appreciate the richness of that biography coming through. The comparison between Lloyd-Jones and Stott is slightly reminiscent of that between Spurgeon and Dale. Stott's openness to modern influences has, to the present reviewer's mind, weakened him especially in his attitude towards ecumenical issues and liberalism. Gordon says of him, "Since 'Lausanne '74' Stott's major works have shown clear signs of a mind which, in growing more catholic in sympathy, has struggled to hold together integrity of personal conviction with sensitivity where disagreement is inevitable." However there is an undeniable bond between Lloyd-Jones and Stott in their commitment to Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and to the preaching of that Word.

The Conclusion of the book is somewhat disappointing in places. Some less helpful elements in present-day evangelical thinking show themselves. There is a re-

luctance to engage in precise theological definition. Gordon says, "The death of Christ is perhaps best presented as a mystery which defies theological control". We accept that there are mysteries here that none can plumb, yet some elements are plainly taught in Scripture: penal substitution; satisfaction of the righteous demands of divine law; propitiation and consequent reconciliation and peace with God; these we must insist upon. We need however, not only sound doctrine, but also love and humility and holy joy. "Joy, fear of the Lord, gratitude and many other notes are sounded in the song of the redeemed." writes Gordon, "but adding depth to the whole experience is the sense of indebtedness to the crucified Lord. Joy is the joy of being loved; the heartfelt sense of obligation, which is the legacy of forgiveness, is understood as the debt of love; the fear of the Lord is the carefulness of the Christian not to offend against the holy love of God; ... " With all this we wholly concur. Gordon draws attention to Romans chapter 7 as a key text in many of the discussions on holiness. In fact, Dr Lloyd-Jones recognised this and expounded the chapter with great care and thoroughness, disagreeing with the older Reformed commentaries as well as with Handley Moule. The issue is a very relevant one for us all - are the anguish of chapter 7 and the victory of chapter 8 incompatible? What is the pattern of true spirituality?

James Gordon has packed into this book a great deal that is rich and excellent from our evangelical heritage. We are in his debt. Bearing in mind the reservations expressed in the review, the reader will find much here to inform his mind, warm his heart and challenge his conscience. What kind of spirituality are we producing? How Biblical is it? Are we convinced that genuine spirituality is the

product of the truth in its fulness being brought to bear on our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit? Above all are we working out its practical implications?

Unity in Truth

*Addresses given by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones for the British Evangelical Council.
Edited by Hywel Jones
204pp £6.95, Evangelical Press.*

These addresses, though concentrating on controversial church issues, still bear those distinguishing features that characterised the preaching of Dr Lloyd-Jones - a deep sense of the greatness of God and a jealous love for the gospel of Jesus Christ - and which endeared him to the Lord's people. Some of the addresses would, in the hands of other men, have been lectures, but with the Doctor even historical addresses became sermons. All of them, are polemical to some degree and will arouse different responses in readers - indeed, I suspect that some will wish they had never been given at all. As some felt about Spurgeon a century ago, there are those who would prefer the Doctor to have fulfilled the role of *the grand old man of evangelicalism* and not spoiled that image by controversy. But those who think like that have never understood the man who throughout his ministry sought to face up to the issues of the day. In that sense these addresses, though at times sharply polemical, are entirely in character.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the Doctor enjoyed controversy. He enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate, as those who attended the Westminster Fellowship know, but disagreeing with his evangelical brethren whom he loved was not pleasant to him. He was a man of much warmth and friendliness, who revelled in the great

truths of the gospel and counted all who stood with him in those truths as brethren beloved. For this reason it needs to be appreciated that these addresses were costly. They cost him friends and a good deal of sharp criticism, and all this he felt deeply.

During this period of his ministry he suffered a great deal of misrepresentation and misunderstanding, much of which has lingered over the years. The publication of this book will, I believe, do much to clarify the nature of the Doctor's vision for evangelical unity, and explode the myths. Four features stand out in these addresses and are central to the Dr Lloyd-Jones' whole approach to the *unity of the church*:

1 An insistence that we have a Biblical doctrine of the church, and that we should face up to its practical implications. To Dr Lloyd-Jones the defence of the gospel could not be separated from the reformation of the church. The church must become what she is, the pillar and ground of the truth.

2 Unity in the gospel involves separation from those who deny the gospel. It was at this point that he took issue with the *Keswick* brand of unity, and with the Evangelical Alliance and its stance of neutrality over the Ecumenical Movement. Dr Lloyd-Jones insisted that in order to express a positive unity between evangelical churches there must be a separation from those who declare a false gospel. This insistence involved painful withdrawal from many evangelical Anglicans who, at least from Keele onwards, were moving in a very different

direction. 3 The evangelical basis of the Doctor's appeal for unity. Although he was a thorough Calvinist in his theology he was not seeking a unity based on the distinctive tenets of Calvinism. His concern was with essential evangelicalism.

4 Dr Lloyd-Jones was a man of vision with his feet firmly on the ground. He was always able to see through the details to the big issues. He had a high view of the church and what she was called to be. Those who heard him deliver these addresses can never forget that element of the *prophetic* that roused the soul and kindled longings for better things. Yet for all that, we were never allowed to forget the darker realities of the situation; he offered no easy solutions, and never pretended the way forward would be anything but stony and difficult. He had great sympathy with men who, while seeing the need to separate from those who preach a false gospel, felt the deepest obligations of love and pastoral care for their churches.

Hywel Jones' invaluable introduction outlines the Doctor's relationship to the BEC, and sketches in the background from which these addresses arise. The fact that they were delivered well over ten years ago in no way reduces their relevance; indeed, because the church situation has worsened, it could be argued that they are more relevant than ever. Altogether, the book provides a powerful apologetic for the BEC and is truly a word for our times.

Neil C Richards, Wheelock Heath BC