

Some Contemporary Evangelicals and Social Thinking

Derek J. Tidball

[p.60]

In her survey of nineteenth century social work Kathleen Heasman confidently asserts that 'The evangelicals are remembered for what they did rather than for their theology.'¹ The question that has often been posed in recent years is whether the historian, when he comes to write the history of twentieth century social thought and action, will remember the evangelical at all. If the future historian is silent on the role of the evangelical it may be either because his considered opinion judges them insignificant or because he is unaware of their attitudes and actions in the realm of the social.

A review and assessment of evangelical social thinking, therefore, is perhaps justifiable. But this essay does not claim to present a general assessment of evangelical social thought. Such a task is well outside its scope. Amongst those who would claim to be 'evangelicals' there would be found widespread differences of opinion about the limits and nature of social involvement. Some would believe that most forms of involvement with the world would be wrong. Others would place great emphasis on such involvement as an expression of the gospel they believe. A further difficulty with writing such a general assessment is that it is always a problem, if not an impossibility, to be sure what the 'thinking' of a group of people is on any issue. One may assume that what their representatives write or say is what the group thinks but this is not necessarily true. Many thoughts are often unexpressed. Further, evangelicals, as Heasman suggests, have a tradition of activism rather than academic speculation in regard to social questions. An examination of their past action shows that they have taken great care to avoid what Vidler, in another connection, called 'the questionable idea that the Church has done something about industry or politics when the clergy have said something'.² So the views that any evangelical publishes may be a very poor reflection of the real thinking of other evangelicals.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate one small aspect of the whole field of evangelical social thinking. It reviews some of the literature on the topic which has been published in the last decade in Great Britain by those who would wish to call themselves evangelicals. They are evangelicals in the sense of Heasman's loose definition of the term as 'those Protestants who believe that the essential part of the Gospel consists in salvation by faith through the atoning death of Christ'.³ They would also be evangelicals in the more precise sense given in a recent collection of essays by evangelical scholars who define evangelicalism as, 'reduced to bare propositions, it affirms first, that Scripture provides an authoritative and formal structure within which Christian theology must be conceived; second, that soteriology is central to the understanding of the Christian faith, and this soteriology teaches that God's justification of the

¹ Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action* (1962), 15.

² Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (1961), 100.

³ Heasman, *op. cit.*, 15.

sinner through the God-Man, Jesus Christ, is entirely unmerited and gratuitous, received under the conditions of repentance and faith'.⁴

The works under review have been treated selectively and have much to offer besides the views mentioned here. Therefore a general introduction to the

[p.61]

principal works cited will be valuable.⁵ Into *All The World* by J. N. D. Anderson aims to touch upon a number of issues to do with the needs and limits of Christian involvement. He says that he was inspired to write it after presenting a paper on the topic to the 1967 National Assembly of Evangelical Anglicans and his standing as a lawyer means that he has much to contribute. This book mentions work and leisure, culture, politics, social justice, morality and law, the social service and international relations. Sir Frederick Catherwood has contributed two works and in each his industrial experience is clearly evident. *The Christian in Industrial Society* is a very competent collection of essays which emerged from discussions which took place among a group of managers and financial experts. Though it is limited to dealing with questions that arise in the industrial sector of modern society it looks at those questions in depth and covers a wide range of relevant topics. *The Christian Citizen* is a personal collection of lectures by Catherwood which were delivered mainly to graduates in Canada. The issues discussed include the general Christian approach to society and the state and the need for personal involvement and action. Dr Carl F. H. Henry is an American scholar who has published some of his lectures on social topics in a book called *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*. The range of topics mentioned is somewhat limited and perhaps this contributes to the rather disappointing impact of the book. By contrast David Moberg is aiming to construct a Christian social philosophy in *Inasmuch*. Dr Moberg is a Professor of Sociology and writes with great feeling about the social needs and problems of others. Though broad in its scope his work is essentially a guide for churches who wish to assist in helping those who suffer from some of the great social evils of today. The final work, of those which will be chiefly cited, is A. N. Triton's *Whose World?* Triton has written for a student audience with the aim of helping Christian students to have a positive attitude to the world in which they live. It therefore covers a number of issues which do not concern this essay but it is well written and thought-provoking.

It should be noted that the subject of social concern has received considerably more attention in the contemporary writings of those who do not stand in the evangelical tradition. It is necessary to bear this in mind when considering the contribution of the writers just mentioned. In addition it is important to recognise the enthusiasm for social responsibility displayed by the evangelicals of the nineteenth century. Their contribution has been well documented, particularly in reference to the Clapham Sect and Slavery, Shaftesbury and the charitable work of the later part of the century. Not only are the events well known, but the significance of their contribution has been appreciated as a result of mature reflection, debate and criticism. The first part of the twentieth century, however, is notable for the relative silence and inactivity of evangelicals in the realm of social issues. The contributions of the writers under

⁴ Clark H. Pinnock and David F. Wells, *Toward a Theology for the Future* (1971), 8.

⁵ Among other works, John Oliver, *The Church and the Social Order* (1968), reviews the social thought of the Church of England between the two World Wars. Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (1956), examines the development of the W.C.C. until the Evanston Assembly (1954).

review are therefore a specific advance on this period when opinion was against rather than in support of social activity.

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY BACKGROUND

It is generally accepted that as the nineteenth century progressed the evangelicals, at least as a party within the Church of England, played an increasingly insignificant part in church affairs.⁶ With the rise of Biblical criticism, the apparent

[p.62]

assaults of science, and the decline of the coherently-formulated doctrines of Calvinism and the growth of liberal views by theologians and church leaders, the evangelical became a non-entity in the church, unheard and unsought. His response to the new movements was often unwelcoming. He is claimed to have entrenched himself in a narrowly individualistic doctrine of personal salvation and barricaded himself against all attack by his doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. The theologians who accepted the 'modern' ideas were not slow to publish their views and take the consequences as was shown by the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and *Lux Mundi* (1889). But no major attempt by the evangelicals to state their case and make their response took place until they published a series of twelve volumes on the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, as they viewed them, called *The Fundamentals*. These volumes were published with paper covers between 1909 and 1912 and included among the authors many competent evangelical scholars such as B. B. Warfield and James Orr. The series did not confine itself to the doctrine of Scripture nor did it present an interpretation of Christianity which was narrow, over-spiritualised and individualistic. Its final volume was in fact devoted completely to a discussion of 'The Church and Socialism'. In it the author, Charles R. Erdman, called for a 'new emphasis' on 'the social teachings of the Gospel' and stated that 'The New Testament no more clearly defines the relation of the believer to Christ than to the members of one's family, to his neighbours in society and to his fellow-citizens in the state'. He further pleads against the false view that 'one might be a social bandit and buccaneer and yet believe in the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ'.⁷

A casual glance at the next few decades would suggest that his pleas were almost entirely disregarded. Little seems to have been written or done to maintain the evangelical tradition of social involvement. This relative silence is, in part, explained by reaction to the exclusive preaching of a 'social gospel',⁸ which caused evangelicals to withdraw from pronouncing on social issues. Largely an American phenomenon the social gospel movement arose as a reaction to the economic and social conditions in the United States at the turn of the century and sought its theological foundation in Liberal Protestantism. With the decline of Liberal Protestantism the social gospel movement also declined, but not until it had undesirable effects on the evangelicals. These were driven back to preaching personal regeneration by faith in Christ and to an almost total neglect of the social implications of their faith. They were so

⁶ Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (1961); E. M. Howse, *Saints in Politics* (1952); M. Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (1958); G. F. A. Best, *Lord Shaftesbury* (1964); K. Heasman, *op. cit.*

⁷ Charles R. Erdman, 'The Church and Socialism' in *The Fundamentals*, Vol. 12 (1911), 118, 116.

⁸ For an examination of the Social Gospel Movement the reader is referred to C. H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915* (1940) and Paul Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel* (1956).

worried about being identified with those who preached salvation in social terms that they never mentioned the social implications of their own gospel. The evangelical response, as so often in church affairs, was an over-reaction.

Thorough research into the evangelical literature of the period would probably reveal that this view of the evangelicals' reaction is too simplistic an explanation. They maintained a social concern and were not afraid of expressing their views about social issues. One example of this, though admittedly a slightly later example, is T. C. Hammond's work on Christian Ethics published in the nineteen-thirties. This volume formed the sequel to his handbook on Christian Doctrine which had been widely accepted by the evangelical public.⁹ Over a third of his work on ethics is concerned with social ethics. He takes as his foundation the claim that 'the true self is the social self'.¹⁰ Consequently he argues that a Christian should be involved in politics and should choose it as a vocation by applying the

[p.63]

same principles that he would apply to any other vocation. Yet he is obviously a passionate supporter of the existing social order and takes his stand against revolution. To justify this he points out that the Bible is silent on the issue of slavery and therefore 'the social order must not be violently uprooted even in the interests of a higher principle'.¹¹ Among the basic principles which form the foundation for his views he holds the sacredness of human life; freedom; the right to hold property (which he qualifies by saying that it must be held for the service of the community); the right to enter into contracts and the right of every man to the fullest privileges of education that conditions permit.¹² His writing betrays a suspicion about the practicality of socialism as is indicated on a number of points. For example, when he discusses the question of work he states firmly that every man has an obligation to work but he is much more reserved on the duty and ability of the state to fulfil the right of every man to work. His ethical ancestry naturally lies in the 'Protestant Ethic' so, although he rules out excessive capitalism, he claims that unused property is unused opportunity and that is sin.¹³ In practice he rules out all excesses in social life and finally argues that his guiding principle is that 'Every man shall be given according to his capacity.'¹⁴ The issue of race relations is more important now than when Hammond was writing. But an elaboration of his views on this issue would have made for much greater clarity. The summary of his attitude towards those of other races is 'If the state can protect its national life against an aggressor, it is equally its duty to protect its national customs against the disintegrating influence of an inferior civilisation which might penetrate its ranks and then destroy its national ethics.'¹⁵ This statement seems to imply either that Hammond would argue for a very restricted immigration policy or that immigrants should not be properly 'integrated' into their new country lest they contaminate it. Racial superiority is unfortunately evident.

⁹ T. C. Hammond, *In Understanding be Men* (1936).

¹⁰ T. C. Hammond, *Perfect Freedom* (1938), 293.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹² *Ibid.*, ch. 22, 'The Christian and Moral Institutions'.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 339.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 386.

Hammond's views on social ethics are clearly forged on the anvil of the British environment of his own days; he displays something of the British arrogance of the time. Undoubtedly a general verdict on his work would be that he does no more than cautiously support the status quo. Yet at the same time it may be claimed for him that he has in embryonic form both the approach and many of the themes which contemporary evangelicals have developed and suited to their times. The way in which he seeks support for his views in the Bible and his championing of the cause and dignity of the individual are examples of this. It remains to be seen if they escape the somewhat 'establishment' image that he presents.

The plea for evangelicals to re-examine their social attitudes and involvement appears to have become a frequent occurrence.¹⁶ But one plea which other evangelicals often quote as a milestone and which seems to be viewed with more significance than most was made in 1947. It was perhaps the competence of its author and of its scope that attracted attention to Dr Carl F. H. Henry's essay entitled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. The essay was a call to the evangelical to make clear the implications of the gospel for both individual and social problems. Henry noted that the gospel was once a world-changing message but now had become a world-resisting message because it had divorced individual salvation from community responsibility. Since Henry wrote the pleas for evangelical involvement have increased but, more significantly, so has the thinking about evangelical social involvement.

[p.64]

THESE CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL WRITINGS —THEIR NATURE AND CONTEXT

Contemporary Evangelical social thinking is no doubt partly the fruit of the work of men like Carl Henry. But the fruit has taken some years to develop and the tree has demanded careful attention in the intervening years. The first signs of the fruit began to appear in the early 1960's and it is not exaggerating to say that the tree has been fairly laden with fruit since. But what of its quality? The immediately striking characteristic of the literature referred to above is that it is largely of a popular kind. Some other writing to be mentioned later is directed to particular social issues such as race or revolution but these works attempt a broad sweep of social problems and philosophy. But whether it is broad or narrow in its subject-matter virtually all the works to be cited have been produced for the average church member rather than the theologian. No one can seriously imagine that it can make any significant contribution to any debate at a scholarly level. One or two works may possibly approach that level of discussion but at least one work, which is not discussed in detail, is patently journalistic.¹⁷ This is not to deny that much serious thought and wide reading about social issues has not formed the background to these writings. It often has. Nor is it to deny its importance. In one sense this is the great strength of the evangelical tradition for, as Vidler recognised in the quotation above, whatever the theologians may say, it is more important ultimately to motivate people to act. Social issues always demand action at two levels. They demand action at the level of scholarship and legislation, but they also demand action at the level of the human and personal. Heasman noted this personal element as one of the great strengths of the social work

¹⁶ Such pleas are regular in *Christianity Today*. See *inter alia* George Marsden in Vol. XVI, No. 16, and Edwin M. Yamauchi in Vol. XVII, No. 4.

¹⁷ Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (1968).

done by the evangelicals in the last century.¹⁸ It seems that the evangelical is maintaining his high standard in this regard.

Yet at the same time writing at this level is also one of the greatest weaknesses of the evangelicals. Any social action that is to be permanently better for mankind must be approached at both levels not simply on the level of the personal. Thus the relative absence of an overall social philosophy at a serious theological level is a grave deficiency.¹⁹ Professor G. W. H. Lampe has recently pointed out in a more general context that if the evangelicals, as a party within the Church of England, wish to make any long-lasting contribution to the church they must make sure that they lay decent theological foundations.²⁰ The absence of these will mean that their buildings soon crumble.

Before any more detailed examination of their writings is undertaken it may be worthwhile to ask why there has been such an apparent upsurge of interest in these issues within the last decade. Careful historical research needs to be undertaken before useful and accurate conclusions can be reached but a number of factors may tentatively be suggested as relevant speculation at this point. Professor David Moberg has outlined some of the factors which made for evangelical withdrawal earlier this century.²¹ It is interesting to note that these evangelicals at least have had a significant change of heart over some of them. Reaction to the 'social gospel' movement has already been mentioned. With its decline the evangelicals may have felt able to emerge from their shells. But Moberg also accuses them of confusing social and spiritual dimensions; of an either/or mentality towards the personal and the social; of seeing politics as a dirty game; of having false views

[p.65]

about the doctrine of 'Separation'; of preaching a gospel of individual piety; of having churches that only looked in one direction—inward; and of being a prisoner in the 'suburban captivity of the churches'.

But what has led to this change of heart among some evangelicals? One factor, according to Moberg, is the decline that has taken place in the teaching of Dispensationalism. Dispensational views suggest that the world will inevitably get worse before the return of Jesus Christ.²² If that is so it is understandable if someone following this teaching feels apathetic to curing the ills of this world. His lethargy may also be increased if he feels the return of Christ to be imminent. Moberg believes a decline in such teaching enables a Christian to have a more positive attitude towards the world. But his belief that dispensational teaching is on the decline can be no more than a personal impression. It would be difficult for him to produce evidence of it at this stage. Further there is no necessary connection between dispensationalism and a negative world view even if it is possible to see how a dispensationalist could arrive logically at a negative world view.

¹⁸ Heasman, *op. cit.*, 287.

¹⁹ One work, D. O. Moberg, *Inasmuch* (1965), attempts to provide such a general social philosophy. Others which cover numerous social issues and general principles do not claim to give a coherent and integrated philosophy.

²⁰ Professor G. W. H. Lampe reviewing *Evangelicals Today* (ed. by John King, 1973) in *The Christian Record*, June 8th, 1973.

²¹ Moberg, *op. cit.*, 18-22.

²² 2 Tim. 3 is used as particular justification for this view.

On a number of points mentioned by Moberg it is possible that some evangelicals have changed their views as they have obtained greater confidence in their general position. For many years they were considered, as a party in the church, as the poor relation of other groups within the church. But increasingly since the war they have taken steps to overcome their theological inferiority and their growing self-confidence is reflected in their growing participation in ecclesiastical and theological affairs. This has perhaps enabled the evangelical party as a whole to look more critically and less defensively at certain of its beliefs. Further some evangelicals have had the courage to say when they have been wrong in the past and to revise their views for the present. Moreover the evangelical party cannot be considered in an environmental vacuum. The necessity to grapple with post-war economic and social problems is as pressing an issue for this party within the church as for any other party. A further environmental factor may have been the rise of the social sciences in University faculties during the early sixties. With the growing number of teachers in the field and the endless number of students, it was impossible for evangelicals to remain completely isolated from the increasing developments in this field.

Traditional interpretation of evangelical social thinking has often sought for explanations in terms of a reaction to what was being expressed in another branch of the Christian church. And much contemporary writing, at least in the United States, has been a response to the growing social and political involvement of the World Council of Churches. Particularly since the Assembly of the W.C.C. which met at Uppsala in 1965 evangelicals have been concerned to propound their own approach both to mission and social issues. The World Council has defined mission in terms of political and racial freedom rather than in terms of spiritual and individual freedom. Several evangelical scholars have vigorously resisted this definition of mission. But the dispute is not a simple repetition of previous disputes. This controversy is built on the arguments of past generations. At the risk of gross over-simplification and caricature the position of the W.C.C. was epitomised in some words of Robert McAfee Brown when he said, 'Politics is the vehicle through which the will of God is done today.'²³ But the this-worldly emphasis of the ecumenical movement is the logical synthesis of a number of

[p.66]

theological schools of thought. One of its sources is the incarnational theology of F. D. Maurice and the Christian Socialists. Another source is the existentialism of Bultmann. A third support comes from Harvey Cox and the secularist theologians. The emphasis of Jurgen Moltmann's eschatological approach in the theology of hope, for example, lends yet further weight.

Wirt colourfully summarised the response of evangelicals to previous controversies of similar nature as follows: 'He (i.e. an evangelical) was too often blinded by all the smoke from the theological brush fires and was unable to see what was happening to his world. The social conscience of the evangelical went into a rigor mortis.'²⁴ But in this controversy some evangelicals are making obvious efforts to escape the 'rigor mortis'. Beyerhaus and many others remain deeply critical of the general approach to mission proposed by the World

²³ Quoted in Harold O. J. Brown, *The Protest of a Troubled Protestant* (1969), 58.

²⁴ Wirt, *op. cit.*, 46.

Council and remain passionately convinced of an evangelical definition of salvation. Simultaneously, however, some evangelicals are attempting to put forward something of their own convictions about social issues. Their reaction on this occasion shows a desire to be positive. An examination of their views will demonstrate that their criticism of the W.C.C. is not just a criticism of general conclusions but a criticism of the particular strands which have been mentioned. But they are not content merely to criticise the views of others; they want to contribute from their own perspective to the discussion of the Christian's responsibility to the world in which they live. Our conclusion then would be that this dispute is not an exact parallel to earlier disputes, but neither is the response of these evangelicals a parallel to the attitude of their forefathers. More could be said of this debate and the respective attitudes to social concern and mission in the W.C.C. and amongst evangelicals but the debate has already been well documented.²⁵ What, then, do these evangelicals say about their social responsibility?

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF THEIR THINKING

An evangelical, at least by definition, is always anxious to discover the foundation for his views in the Bible. Many of the writers under review, therefore, spend much energy in justifying their belief that the Christian has a definite role to play within society by reference to the Christian Scriptures. This fact suggests that they may still be slightly apologetic about 'involvement with the world' and still attempting to convince others that such teaching does not contravene the doctrine of 'separation from the world'.

The most common solution to the question of why a Christian has a social responsibility is given in terms of the doctrine of creation. The varying writers emphasise different aspects and implications of the doctrine, but it is this facet of God's relationship with the world which is fundamental to them all. They argue that God made the world and that he continues to care for it and exercise his sovereignty in it. Therefore his children, that is those adopted into his family by grace, have a responsibility to be concerned for it. Professor J. N. D. Anderson sees the creation as relevant essentially because God has created man in his own image. He points out that this means that man has a worth and a value. This worth means that it is incumbent upon the Christian to work for the good of his fellow men.²⁶ Sir Frederick Catherwood also finds justification for Christian

[p.67]

involvement in the world in the first chapter of Genesis. But for him the important lesson is that God made the world which he still continues to uphold and in which he has put man as a steward. Being made in the image of God, for him, basically means that man shares the creative ability of God. God has not forsaken the world and therefore the Christian has no right to withdraw from it either. In fact it is through three particular institutions—the church, the family and government—that God keeps the world from destruction.²⁷ A. N. Triton also commences his discussion by asking if the material world matters. He warns against the

²⁵ For an evangelical perspective and documentation of this debate, see Peter Bayerhaus, *Mission: Which Way?* (1972). The debate is also the subject of D. O. Mobery, *The Great Reversal—Evangelism versus Social Concern* (1972).

²⁶ J. N. D. Anderson, *Into the World* (1968), 14.

²⁷ Sir Frederick Catherwood, *The Christian Citizen* (1969), 20-7.

danger of having an exclusive affection for the world but argues that everything that God has made is good and therefore the Christian should enjoy it. He also argues that if the world belongs to God it also belongs to us (seq. Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 3:21-23) but we have the responsibility to use it 'as He wants and as He tells us is right and best'.²⁸

Immediately therefore we have a divergence from other Christian social philosophy. The majority would see the necessity of involvement as issuing either from the doctrine of salvation or the doctrine of the church. Triton explicitly rejects the incarnational approach of F. D. Maurice's successors,²⁹ because he claims they confuse revelation with salvation. There would be agreement in the view that the incarnation of Christ was a special revelation of God but disagreement on its relevance for us. Triton believes it is an essential part of God's method of salvation whereby we may come to know Him. But he accuses others of viewing it merely as a fact by which we can come to know about God and this devalues the incarnation until its relevance is merely that we must follow the example of Christ.³⁰ He further rejects the view that the Christian is seeking to redeem the social order for he says, 'If we try to stretch the concept of "redemption" so that we can apply it to non-personal structures in this age, we dilute its meaning to a mere more-or-less influence for good.'³¹ Anderson admits that the incarnation and redemption do play a part, but it is in providing the motivating power for the Christian to become involved in society rather than the *raison d'être* for social involvement. There would seem to be general agreement with him among the other authors when he argues '...that the Bible approaches the question of social responsibility primarily in terms of the doctrine of creation and of God's plan for the created order, and not primarily in terms of the doctrines of incarnation, redemption and God's plan for his church'.³²

Yet none of these writers confines himself to the doctrine of creation as his sole principle of involvement. Moberg sees the role of the incarnation in this context as confirming the sacredness and dignity of men; he suggests that if a man is redeemed himself he is inevitably involved in the healing of broken relationships; he sees the Holy Spirit as the source of love and hope as a present possession of the Christian.³³ Catherwood asserts, on the basis of Matt. 5:13, that Jesus gave two 'outside' tasks to the church 'the preaching of the gospel to society and the work of preserving society as it is found on earth' and that these tasks belong together and must not be separated.³⁴ Anderson concurs with the others as to the variety of principles which demand Christian social involvement and adds that the cross of Christ 'has somehow reconciled not only the world of men but the whole material and spiritual universe' (Col. 1:20).³⁵ But unfortunately he does not explain his understanding of Paul's saying in Colossians and does not relate it to those who talk of redeeming the non-personal structures of the universe. Does he believe

[p.68]

²⁸ A. N. Triton, *Whose World?* (1970), 9-28.

²⁹ Triton mentions Albert H. van den Teuvel, *The Humiliation of the Church* (1967) as a recent popular exposition of this view.

³⁰ Triton, *op. cit.*, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³² Anderson, *op. cit.*, 15.

³³ Moberg, *op. cit.*, 36-8.

³⁴ Catherwood, *op. cit.*, 28.

³⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 15.

for instance that this earth, its human institutions and politics and all orders of creation will be brought back into harmony with God?

Their evangelical justification of social involvement, then, is presented as a relatively coherent and harmonious statement of the implications of creation and providence. Only one discordant note is struck in the symphony and that might be more apparent than real. In an address to over 12,000 evangelical students in the United States in 1970, Tom Skinner took issue with the view that 'the kingdoms of the world belong to Christ'. Such a view, he argued, rendered the temptation of Christ unreal and caused the Christian to be complacent about the racial question. His view was that the Bible taught that 'Satan is the prince and power of the air, he is the prince of this world and has not been removed from his position'. Therefore he called upon evangelical Christians to become infiltrators, 'fifth columnists in Satan's world for the purpose of preaching liberation to an oppressed people'.³⁶ Skinner's concern not to provide Christians with an excuse for a *laissez-faire* attitude is understandable and it must be argued that he has Biblical warrant for his statements. The resolution of the apparent conflict is surely that Skinner is talking about the Devil who controls the world temporarily by sufferance of God, whereas the concern of these other evangelicals is to state who controls the world eternally and of right.

The evangelicals under review have not only established from scripture that they ought to be concerned for the world, but have appealed to scripture to discover how they should be concerned for it. It has already been pointed out that they view the incarnation as much more than Christ leaving us an example, although they agree that there is a sense in which the incarnation is just that. So John Stott, in his apologetic for Evangelical Christian faith, devotes a chapter to the contrasting attitudes of Jesus Christ and the Pharisees on the issue of involvement. He confesses that the attitude of the evangelical church has often been Pharisaic for '...(their) first concern was themselves, how to preserve their own purity, whereas Jesus Christ's first concern was others, how to seek and to save the lost'.³⁷ He pleads for evangelicals to overcome the 'monastic' spirit of their existence and offer, in the words of Bishop David Sheppard, 'unjudging friendship' to men outside their churches. Stott asserts categorically that the kind of evangelicalism which concentrates exclusively on saving an individual soul is not true evangelicalism. And he concludes that if we are really to be followers of Christ we must display as much involvement in the world as separation from it and as much 'worldliness' as 'holiness'.

Another evangelical scholar, Dr A. Skevington Wood, has analysed the example of the early church.³⁸ His review passes from one incident to another in the Acts and Epistles which give us a glimpse of the apostolic church dealing with social problems and institutions. He posits that Christianity never attempted to present a programme of social reform, but it did permeate the society in which it grew on a whole range of issues. It dealt with the problem of property by voluntary generosity not political theory. Among the good works practised we know that

³⁶ T. Skinner, *Christ the Liberator* (1971). His address is entitled 'The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism', 189-209.

³⁷ John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (1970). The chapter is called 'Responsibility: Withdrawal or involvement?', 173-191.

³⁸ Dr. A. Skevington Wood, 'Social Involvement in the Apostolic Church', in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. XLII, No. 4, 194-212.

the early Christians relieved famine, healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, visited prisoners and offered hospitality. Wood qualifies Montefiore's view that Paul narrowed the teaching of Jesus to loving one's fellow-Christians by agreeing that the epistles do give the fellow-Christians the priority of love, but they also contain many wider references to loving all men. There was no revolt against the institu-

[p.69]

tion of slavery but 'it was robbed of its sting'. Among the early Christians the family was much-discussed as a divinely-given institution. Then Wood vindicates them from the accusation that their social concern was inadequate because they never presented a programme of total social reform by pointing out that the New Testament era was a period when the church was struggling for its very existence. He warns against trying to evaluate the views of the early church by using the measuring standards of the twentieth century. His verdict is to accept the judgement of Troeltsch who believed that the ultimate achievement of the Apostolic church was to destroy the Roman State by alienating men from its ideals.

RECURRING THEMES IN THESE CONTEMPORARY WRITINGS

A number of themes are mentioned in these works with such frequency that they are almost raised to the level of foundational social principles for any general philosophy which these authors might wish to construct. They emerge from the Bible and when applied to contemporary society form the limits within which any social action must be operated.

1. *The Dignity of the Individual*

'The Biblical view of man does not set a tension between man as individual and man as a member of society, but rather blurs the distinction and thereby emphasises that either of these aspects in isolation is artificial...', wrote David Clines in a paper on the Biblical Doctrine of Man.³⁹ In abstract terms all evangelicals would agree. But in the discussion of particular social issues it is the dignity of man as an individual which comes across again and again. His dignity has its origin in the creation of man in the image of God. And that doctrine is believed to have inherent within it certain rights for the individual. One such right is the freedom of the individual to 'practise and preach their faith without persecution or coercion'.⁴⁰ Much of the contemporary writing reveals a fear of the totalitarian state or of any regime which curtails religious liberty. But Catherwood, at least, is consistent in that he relates his belief in the freedom of the individual to the economic and political sphere as well as the religious sphere. In response to the question of what values a Christian should wish to promote in economic and political life, he embarks on a discussion of the meaning of individual liberty in industrial society. For him 'the essential economic freedom is the right of a man to change his job'.⁴¹ Employees need to be protected against the whims of an employer who, wishing to keep his workers, uses unfair sanctions to prevent their leaving. In this respect the non-unionised worker is in a less satisfactory position than the one with a union to protect him. Catherwood argues that this freedom will be maintained by a diffusion of economic power. Further he

³⁹ David J. A. Clines, *A Biblical Doctrine of Man* (1972). Revised texts of papers read to the Social Workers' Christian Fellowship in 1969. Cf. p. 29.

⁴⁰ H.F.R. Catherwood, *The Christian in Industrial Society* (1964), 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

argues that each individual ought to have a little money to spend how he likes. There is a united welcome for technological progress, but Anderson poses the problem of the possible resulting degradation and depersonalisation of the worker in industry. He opts for the view that this is by no means inevitable, but that technological changes should signify that workers at all levels are valued more highly than before. For him the sheer drudgery of many jobs has been removed. One wonders if men on the factory floor would agree? Against blind progress he cautions that in some industries Christians must argue that the welfare of human beings must be

[p.70]

given precedence over economic gain and that Britain's industrial situation now demands that we work out a proper approach to leisure.⁴²

On yet another level the concern for the individual is evident and that is in discussion of the welfare state. All are supporters of welfare programmes but recognise that there is still a place for the personal element which was the great strength of evangelical social action in the last century. It is interesting that in a selective review of Christian Social Responsibility published by the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship⁴³ which starts by affirming that '...we can no longer stand aloof, anti-union, anti-vote, anti-politics and still hope to help, on anything but a personal level, broken homes, broken lives, broken marriages and broken hearts,' the personal element is dominant in the topics discussed (i.e. marriage guidance, old age and the after-care of offenders). A further cautionary note on the Welfare State is entered lest it makes a man less than responsible for himself. In Anderson's words, 'It would be tragic indeed if the manifest virtues of the Welfare State were indirectly responsible for undermining a man's proper spirit of independence and sense of duty to support his family, for inducing a spirit of unquestioning acceptance of benefits as nothing less than his due, or for slackening his moral fibre.'⁴⁴

This emphasis on the value of the individual is obviously related to an evangelical's view of personal regeneration yet it must be clearly distinguished from it. As we have seen, both the view of salvation and the view of man's social situation held by these thinkers find their source in creation. They are not saying, even if their predecessors in the evangelical tradition ever did, that the only and immediate hope for man's social problems is an individual experience of conversion. But the question remains whether any socially-minded evangelical will not ultimately be prevented from ever adopting a through-going social philosophy whilst he still makes the individual his constant reference point.

2. The Institution of Government

Two social institutions are mentioned as divinely given for the maintenance of creation in the face of the destructiveness of sin. One is the family and the other is the state. Curiously enough in the literature under review it is the latter which receives most of the attention and the concept of the former is left relatively undeveloped. Catherwood defends it against the opposition of the humanists, but no one outlines any principles.⁴⁵ This is not to deny that much

⁴² Anderson, *op. cit.*, chapter 3 'Work and Leisure'.

⁴³ *The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*, No. 11, February 1966.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 82.

⁴⁵ Catherwood, *The Christian Citizen*, 22-3.

has been written on the family by evangelical Christians, but this has fallen within the context of practical advice rather than within the context of social concern.⁴⁶ The work of the Shaftesbury Project may prove a corrective to this in the future.⁴⁷ But generally speaking it is the institution of government which holds a certain fascination for the authors under review.

In essence their teaching is that the Christian has a duty to obey his government and also to pray for it. The doctrine of obedience is based on Paul's teaching in Rom. 13; but Anderson, at least, admits that Paul was writing in the context of an autocratic government and that a twentieth century Christian view must, of necessity, be an adaptation of the New Testament position.⁴⁸ Apart from the unanimous rejection of totalitarianism and the warning that all institutions are under the judgement of God little positive is said as to the form any government should take. This silence presumably means that most are content that no one

[p.71]

system or government is more 'Christian' than another. Catherwood, however, is a passionate supporter of democracy and believes it is '...the only form of government which a Christian can accept as his ideal...'.⁴⁹ He is not blind to its limitations and the dangerous position in which a minority might find itself yet he agrees with Churchill that though democracy might be a terrible way of choosing a government, every other way would be worse. His conclusion in this respect is probably influenced by his belief that democracy is the flower of a seed planted in reformation times, for he looks with favour on a variety of approaches, whose origin can be traced back to the Reformers.

Accepting that our particular form of government is a democracy how does an evangelical see his role within it? Stress is laid on the conviction that the obedience of the Christian should be an active obedience. Anderson speaks of the church as having a prophetic role. Triton believes that it is the duty of the Christian to be continuously pushing the government to do its work.⁵⁰ And none of these authors disputes the right of any Christian to become involved in party politics. If a Christian wishes to make politics his full-time occupation, he is encouraged to do so providing he chooses this vocation in the same way as any Christian should choose any occupation, believing it to be the will of God for his life. Yet because politics is inevitably seen as a work of compromise—'the pursuit of the possible rather than the attainment of the ideal'⁵¹—it is not felt that the Christian church should be too identified with any one political position or form a party or pressure group of its own.⁵² No one has discussed the issue more competently than William Temple and it is with his conclusions written in 1942 that most evangelicals would wish to be identified.⁵³ Recently Triton has succinctly mentioned other dangers which prevent the church from becoming an official political party. He notes that (a) legislation often has side effects with which the church may not wish to be identified; (b) the

⁴⁶ The outstanding recent example is Larry Christensen, *The Christian Family* (1971).

⁴⁷ The Shaftesbury Project brings Christians together with interests in various aspects of involvement in society to form study groups. It is under the direction of one full-time secretary.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 39.

⁴⁹ Catherwood, *The Christian Citizen*, 86.

⁵⁰ Triton, *op. cit.*, 61.

⁵¹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 42.

⁵² Triton, *op. cit.*, 61. A recent book by Michael Green may be taken by some as a departure from this position. See M. Green, *New Life New Lifestyle* (1973), 155-6.

⁵³ William Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (1942), chapter 2.

church is often agreed on main objectives but not so often on practical policies; (c) the church may not speak with authority on issues other than those where Christian principles are involved; (d) its spokesmen may not be technically equipped (though there seems no reason why they may not be competent); and (e) the impression given would be that the main concern of the church was a temporal rather than eternal gospel.⁵⁴

It must be asked if the emphasis on obedience is always present in the writings of these evangelicals? Do they not see occasions when a Christian ought to disobey the state? Each of these writers reserves the right for Christians to disobey the state where obedience would entail disobedience to God. But some go further and argue that the state must be resisted. over other issues. Is there any guideline which will point the Christian in the direction of obedience or disobedience? Catherwood sees it as follows, 'If the power is a minister of evil it has, to that extent, lost its authority' and therefore presumably the Christian is absolved from the responsibility of obedience.⁵⁵ In view of the political context in which Paul wrote about obedience to the state one wonders quite how Catherwood could thoroughly justify this view—though perhaps the problem was Paul's rather than his. Other than this the evangelical is relatively acquiescent. Violent opposition to a government is generally ruled out, even in a situation where other Christians might argue that it was a Christian duty to replace an existing government. But the topic of revolution is a development of the area now under discussion and will be considered later.

[p.72]

3. The Obligation to Work

Judging by the amount of space devoted to the topic of work the evangelical sees something fundamental about it. Even if the Weberian thesis of the Protestant Ethic is open to severe criticism one wonders if the evangelical today, regarding himself as the heir of the Protestants in question, does not consciously attempt to conform to the image Weber presented.

'The very first picture of God is that of a worker busy at the task of Creation,' writes Moberg, who sees the whole doctrine as focusing more upon God than upon man.⁵⁶ The command to work is one that antedates the fall since at the very beginning man was instructed to subdue the earth.⁵⁷ So work has a dignity which is unaffected by the fall and which was enhanced by the Incarnation.

It is recognised that the majority of men do not see work in this light but rather view it as a necessary evil. As Carl Henry puts it even if they do not view it as the most time-consuming factor of their lives they do see it as the most time-oppressive factor.⁵⁸ Here the writers under review are more explicit than elsewhere about the Christian having a direct answer to the problem. For them all work, of whatever sort, is recognised as a calling and vocation. Though they admit that this idea was not fully developed until Reformation times they see it as implicit in the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers. A Christian, it is believed, will adopt an entirely different attitude to his work than another because, according to

⁵⁴ Triton, *op. cit.*, 62-9.

⁵⁵ Catherwood, *The Christian in Industrial Society*, 54.

⁵⁶ Moberg, *op. cit.*, 147.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁵⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (1964), 32.

Anderson, for him work is worship.⁵⁹ He will be doing it for his Lord and not for himself. The basic problem of industry, in the view of Sir Frederick Catherwood, is not getting a man to put in the necessary hours but getting a man to put his mind into his work.⁶⁰ The Christian, it is thought, should have no problem here. Indeed the New Testament precedent for such views is fairly strong.⁶¹ But one wonders if Carl Henry does not apply such views with slight naivety when he sees this also as the answer to the problems of assembly-line production. In theory he agrees that where such means of production takes away the dignity of man it is to be condemned. But he goes on to argue that even here the '...valid "personalising" of work will come only with his spiritual awakening'.⁶² Similarly one wonders if the deductions made by Catherwood from this same premise (they are that a Christian must apply himself to the limit; that he must exercise method in his work and that he must be self-disciplined) are really justified by the datum.

Much of their discussion about work is concerned with very practical issues such as the problem of being a Christian on the shop floor, or the occupations which because they are morally doubtful are considered closed to the Christian. On the reduction of working hours there is a disagreement, with Anderson welcoming them and arguing for a Christian understanding of leisure and Catherwood arguing that we should increase our production and standards rather than reduce the number of hours worked.⁶³ When Trade Unions are discussed in *The Christian in Industrial Society*, they are supported as having a positive role to play within industry and pride is taken in their Christian origins. Their malfunctioning is put down to a failure to apply their democratic constitutions properly. The right to withdraw labour is essential. It is also argued that because they are of a different nature to employers' organisations they should not be made subject to an equivalent law. In all this it is apparent that recent political and economic events have

[p.73]

rendered much of Catherwood's argument irrelevant and there is a need for him to modify his views to meet the new situation.

It is evident that in this area particularly these evangelicals are still looking at a social issue through the spectacles of individualism. Their perspective in approaching the whole discussion is what is permissible for an individual in a particular situation. Some of the important issues which have to do with work are therefore either much underrated or simply omitted. There does not appear for instance to be very much discussion on the topic of unemployment, with the result that many of the former misunderstandings about an evangelical view of employment are still considered justified. There needs to be answers to such questions as the following. How should a man view redundancy? What is the responsibility of the state to the unemployed? How can the church help the unemployed? Silence among evangelicals on issues which have been widespread and recurring problems for post-war economies is difficult to understand.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁶⁰ Catherwood, *op. cit.*, 5.

⁶¹ Eph. 6:5-7.

⁶² Henry, *op. cit.*, 60.

⁶³ Catherwood, *op. cit.*, 6.

4. The Role of Legislation

A further area of concern is the attitude Christians should adopt towards legislation about moral and social issues. As a lawyer J. N. D. Anderson writes with penetrating insight and expertise on the topic. His basic proposition is that a Christian ought to 'ensure that laws are drafted, enacted and put into operation which give the greatest effect to these principles (i.e. those which evangelical Christians regard as important) which is feasible in the circumstance of contemporary society'.⁶⁴

No one childishly believes that legislation can be used to eradicate sin. Evangelicals claim to be too realistic about human nature to believe that. Their answer to the problem of sinful human nature is personal and inner spiritual regeneration. But they do believe that there is some relationship between any society and sin. Lord Devlin is quoted with approval when he reasons that any society must have a community of ideas i.e. a public morality which should govern the lives of its individual citizens. This would have an effect not just on the criminal laws but civil legislation as well. The Christian supports his desire for such legislation because he feels man's unregenerate nature needs controlling by such laws. Therefore several evangelicals have felt that they have had something to contribute to recent debates on such topics as homosexuality, divorce, and pornography. Their role then basically is seen in terms of influencing the formation of good legislation. Anderson recognises that once such law is passed they have a duty to see that it is applied with justice and impartiality.

But is the Christian in danger of imposing on his country standards which only a minority accept? Catherwood feels this fear is totally unjustified because he believes that any law, if it is to be effective, must have the support of public opinion. In fact, the problem which these writers discuss most is the limitations of law. They do not see it as the great instrument which can totally curtail the freedom of others. Though they see it as necessary, they recognise that at best it can only do a partial work. For example, a Race Relations Act may be able to prevent men stirring up hatred of other men by the use of inflammatory words and in this respect it is good; but it cannot prevent him from feeling hatred in his emotions, in which case the law is limited.

[p.74]

SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES

The article so far has introduced the background, doctrine and principles of the evangelical social concern under discussion. But the question which most men would see as more pressing is whether an evangelical ever descends from the realm of theory to apply his principles to specific social problems. An overall view of contemporary literature would suggest that these writers leave a lot to be desired in their applied social thinking for there are a number of issues on which they have remained silent. In response to the question of what are the vital issues to be met in the twentieth century Catherwood mentions the dignity of the individual; religious toleration and the preservation of the family.⁶⁵ Though he also refers to the 'rootless society of great urban sprawl' and the stability of new nations, he does not develop these topics and it is disappointing that other important issues are not included. The poverty of the Third world

⁶⁴ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 57. See also the discussion in Triton, *op. cit.*, chapter 4. Anderson further elaborates his arguments in *Morality, Law and Grace* (1972).

⁶⁵ Catherwood, *The Christian Citizen*, 147.

which so much exercises the compassion of others is virtually unmentioned. Though it is true to say that many of the social issues are approached from an English perspective, it is equally true to say that there are many great social problems of our own technological society which are almost totally neglected. Unemployment, town planning, the provision of housing, penal reform and the poverty of the welfare services are examples of this. Two issues which do receive attention are race and revolution and it may be worth looking at these in more detail.

1. Race

As has been mentioned one of the strengths of the evangelical social thinking under review is the popular level of its publications. This is especially demonstrated by much that has been written on the topic of race relations which is clearly intended for the church member rather than the theologian.

David Edgington has written a general introduction to immigration in Britain in an attempt to help the average Christian overcome prejudice and direct his compassion into channels of worthwhile action. He examines the nature of prejudice and feels that ignorance is the source of much of it. He draws freely on the research work done by the Rev. Clifford Hill to put the immigration statistics into focus and categorically concludes that 'we can state without hesitation that the notion that our present population crisis has been caused by the influx of coloured immigrants is a myth'.⁶⁶ He then proceeds to outline the background and cultures of those who come to this country from the West Indies, India and Pakistan and the reasons for their coming. All this is an attempt to help Christians more confidently to take some steps towards integrating and helping the immigrant. Having set himself firmly against racial prejudice Edgington pleads with the churches to 'radically rethink' priorities and consider the possibility of appointing workers to meet some of the demands of the situation. He believes that the only alternative to definite Christian action now will be racial conflict in the future.

A number of other works which have been published in Britain within the last few years have been of an autobiographical nature. The readers have been able to hear of the feelings and attitudes of a coloured person from their own lips. Tom Skinner's *Black and Free* is a good example of this approach. Recounting his own childhood in Harlem and his subsequent bitter hatred of both whites and the church, he moves on to talk of his conversion to Christianity and

[p.75]

the love which was consequently brought into his life. Later he became an evangelist with a burning social burden for his own people. He was a supporter of Dr Martin Luther King whom he believed made a great contribution to the potential freedom of the negro in America, yet he feels he was mistaken in viewing man as inherently good and rational.⁶⁷ Ultimately he believes the only answer for his people's social problems is to be found in an evangelical social gospel. This answer he subsequently develops in a sequel to *Black and Free*, entitled *Words of Revo-*

⁶⁶ David Edgington, and *Christians and Colour in Britain* (1970), 38. He relies heavily on the research work conducted by Dr. Clifford Hill and published in *How Colour Prejudiced in Britain?* (1967). A contrasting approach to the issue of race will be found in Dr. Jean Russell, *God's Lost Cause* (1968), where she argues that there may be something in the theology of the church which accounts for its failure to grapple with the racial problem. She feels the primary witness of the church 'is to an achieved reconciliation which lies beyond human personality'. And she characterises its work as 'proclaiming, listening, standing and interceding', 137-140.

⁶⁷ Tom Skinner, *Black and Free* (1969), 117.

lution.⁶⁸ Another example of this biographical approach is the personal description of a mixed marriage by Joyce Gladwyn.⁶⁹ On a different but still popular level two American authors survey the whole history of race in the United States and analyse the current situation and the part that Christians should be playing. With an emphasis on photography *Your God is too White* is both for the general reader and for educational purposes and it is hoped that it will be used as the basis for discussion in schools.⁷⁰

There appears to be unanimous condemnation of racial hatred by all evangelical spokesmen who have ventured into print in Great Britain. There is also much lament over their inactivity in this field since the victories of Wilberforce. In a paper read to an international conference of evangelists Professor Kortekangas mentions with horror that research shows that racial 'prejudice is worse in the circles where evangelicalism has most of its adherents'.⁷¹ He goes on to confess the imbalance of those willing to condemn sexual immorality in South African work camps yet remain silent about the 'inhuman, damnable system which allows such conditions'. These conditions should cause all men to feel deeply hurt. None of the writers under review shows any sympathy with apartheid. Anderson unequivocally condemns it as 'cynical in its conception, hypocritical in its arguments and grossly unjust in its application'.⁷²

Such are the feelings of modern evangelicals who have written on the issue. What they do about those things which they consider to be evil and how they endeavour to overcome evil is a separate issue.

2. Revolution

A pressing issue in the modern world is that of Revolution. Both the political and theological climate in which we live demand that some response be formulated for those who call for revolution. As we have seen the stress of the evangelicals under review is on submission to the authorities of a country and therefore one would assume that they staunchly resist any suggestion of revolution. In fact, none of them is willing completely to close the door to the possibility of revolution. Triton speaks for the others when he writes that there may be a place for violence but not 'without the most anxious heart-searching and the attempt to explore all other means'.⁷³

The most thorough attempt made by evangelicals to grapple with the issue is published in a small paper-back entitled *Is Revolution Change?*⁷⁴ This work does not present a coherently or carefully argued thesis on revolution but is a collection of five individual essays by different authors both from Britain and South America. The golden thread which runs through them all is that revolution is a 'fantasy' which never fulfils its own aims. So Catherwood claims that a revolution 'devours its own' and that 'the history of revolution is a history of failed ideas'.⁷⁵ Brian Griffiths analyses the streams which go to make up the river of dissent in Britain.

⁶⁸ Tom Skinner, *Words of Revolution* (1971).

⁶⁹ Joyce Gladwyn, *Brown Face, Big Master* (1969).

⁷⁰ Ronald Behm and Columbus Salley, *Your God is too White* (1973).

⁷¹ Professor Kortekangas in *Evangelism Alert* (ed. Gilbert W. Kirby, 1972).

⁷² Anderson, *op. cit.*, 93.

⁷³ Triton, *op. cit.*, 76. For a very full discussion of the place of violence in the Christian Church today, see Jacques Ellul, *Violence* (1970). His treatment arose out of his ruling that W.C.C. pronouncements on violence lacked clarity.

⁷⁴ Brian Griffiths (ed.), *Is Revolution Change?* (1972).

⁷⁵ Catherwood, *op. cit.*, 40-41.

[p.76]

He sees these as socialist dissent, anarchism and the hippie movement. The basic fault of each, he believes, is that they assume that man is basically rational, loving and good. He then turns to justify the need for authority and argues that it is essential because its origin is God. He complements his discussion of authority with a discussion of justice which is equally of God. Catherwood rejects revolution on pragmatic grounds and suggests that the historic Christian method, and the method most likely to work, is that of reformation. This stance leads him to examine the claim that some of the great Protestant heroes have been revolutionaries. He rejects the authority of any Christian to act in defiance of apostolic teaching and questions whether all the so-called heroes have been as beneficial as is popularly believed.⁷⁶ But the crux of his reply is that most of these men would have argued that they under God were the properly constituted authorities and were not therefore in rebellion. It was their opponents, those normally taken to be the government, who were in rebellion. Following the initial publication of this essay, in a journal, some interesting correspondence was published in the *Christian Graduate*.⁷⁷ Here the immense difficulty of defining just who 'the powers that be' really are in a war or revolutionary situation is discussed. Obviously the Christian has to decide in such a situation, whom he regards as the legitimate authority under God. It seems that unintentionally, Catherwood has opened the door to those who would make what he believes an absolute command to obey the civil authority into a relative one. If as he argues the French had every right to support the government in exile, will not others argue, with justification, that they can support the government in embryo, i.e. the government that they wish to form as a replacement for an existing political authority.

Canon Sutton, in reviewing this collection of essays, has pointed out the different motivations which the various authors see as causing revolution. Those who write from Britain see revolution as caused by a sense of frustration, but those who write from the Third World see it as a fight for survival.⁷⁸ The difference in atmosphere is certainly discernible, but the conclusions are still similar. Alan Kreider looks at the recent discussion about the attitude of Jesus to the Zealots and shows that his way was in marked contrast to theirs. Jesus went the way of the cross and so 'Instead of establishing revolutionary cadres, pietistic communities or big prosperous churches, Christ calls the church to be the sacrificial society which he established to be the servant of mankind.'⁷⁹ A cautionary note is entered by René Padilla, who examines the motives of evangelical Christians for rejecting revolution. He himself rejects it in the end, but only after ensuring that he has fully realised that 'Biblical faith does not permit the Christian to be resigned to the status quo nor to align himself with the oppressor.'⁸⁰ He

⁷⁶ The heroes Catherwood mentions are Coligny in France, William the Silent in Holland, Cromwell and William of Orange in England, Gustavus Adolphus in Germany. He is undecided on the inclusion of George Washington. It is not clear exactly who regards these men as heroes. Presumably he thinks that Protestants will view them as heroes, but there would be many Protestants who would not do so.

⁷⁷ *Christian Graduate*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 13-15. The correspondence is between Catherwood and Dr. Paul Snell.

⁷⁸ *Christian Graduate*, *ibid.* The review is written by Canon Harry Sutton, 15-17.

⁷⁹ Alan Kreider in *Is Revolution Change?*, 69. This essay contains a critique of S. G. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (1967). Brandon argues that 'there seems to be nothing in the principles of Zealotism... that we have definite evidence for knowing that Jesus would have repudiated'. 355. Kreider offers evidence to the contrary, rejects some of Brandon's presuppositions and finds evidence in O. Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (1957), to support his case.

⁸⁰ René Padilla, *ibid.*, 74.

readily concurs with Berdyaeff that the Christian is the 'eternal revolutionary who is not satisfied with any way of life'.⁸¹ Like other evangelicals he pleads for the disease to be dealt with, not merely the symptoms. A final essay is a rousing call to social action because that is the way of the incarnation, cross and resurrection. Samuel Escobar points out that any church which is going to answer his call will have to distinguish between those things which are fundamental and biblical and those things which are social and cultural. If a church responds to him seriously one can expect a rejection of the middle-class mentality which he and others see as so common.⁸²

Other theologians may be enthusiastically constructing or welcoming a theology

[p.77]

of revolution. But it seems that these evangelicals reject such a possibility despite their deep feelings about social injustice. For them obedience to apostolic commands takes precedence over natural desires for to them such obedience is obedience to God.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Actual evangelical social thinking is probably far less homogeneous in practice than this review has implied. It is recognised that there are those who have grave doubts still about social involvement and look with suspicion on those who argue for it. There are others who would protest their evangelicalism as strongly as anyone else, but whose solutions would be more radical than the ones reviewed here.⁸³ But those with different views have not, on the whole, put pen to paper to impress those views on others. Recognising that many qualifications are necessary before any general conclusion about evangelical social thinking is reached, the impression that remains from reading this contemporary evangelical material is of a relatively common concern for social issues based on common doctrine and working itself out in common principles.

The question whether these contemporary evangelicals escape the criticisms so often and sometimes justly levelled at their forefathers would demand extensive investigation before an accurate reply could be made. Part of the difficulty in making such an evaluation here is that the criticisms of the past have nearly always been levelled at their actions rather than at their literature. But a review of the literature here suggests that they have not completely learnt their lessons. Individualism is still at the basis of much social thinking and thus an evangelical is prevented from ever constructing a thorough-going social philosophy. They may still be better at dealing with the symptoms of social problems than the social causes of those problems. They still seem unwilling to commit themselves to a general social policy, lest they be accused of thinking too much of 'this world'. They nevertheless maintain the same personal element, which decidedly marked the social concern of their forefathers, but which is so often lacking in state agencies.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸² Two recent publications by evangelicals have been about the middle-class church. John Bennington, *Culture, Class and Christian Beliefs* (1973) and J. A. Walters on 'The Class-bound Church', in *The Christian Graduate*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 38-45.

⁸³ See Fred Brown, *Secular Evangelism* (1970), for a very different approach by a Salvation Army Officer who would not wish to be thought other than an evangelical.

A common criticism of evangelicals in the past has been that they have used their social involvement for the ulterior motive of evangelism. Their desire to minister to the needs of the whole man is still strongly apparent. They are not content to minister only to his social needs to the neglect of his spiritual needs. But the charge of having an 'ulterior motive' is perhaps too simple a charge to be treated with serious consideration. Some words of David Winter at the 1967 National Assembly of Evangelicals surely brings the matter into perspective 'This social involvement is not a substitute for evangelism as some falsely allege. It is the other side of the ministry of grace. "This ought you to have done, and not left the other undone."'⁸⁴

The literature which has been reviewed demonstrates that some evangelicals are not complacent about the issues which have disturbed so many others in the world in which they live. But their approach is both cautious and distinctive. It is cautious because there is no desire to identify with the politically left or radical. The way forward is through gradual reform and piecemeal social programmes rather than revolution or force. It is distinctive because it desires to be Biblical and largely ignores many of the major theological debates that occupy others

[p.78]

within the church. This simplicity of approach is both its strength and its weakness. Simplicity encourages the average church member to action. But a simple approach also needs a good foundation if it is to make a lasting contribution to the social thought and action of the church. It would seem that the greatest need for the evangelical approach represented by the authors reviewed is for a deeper theological and academic basis for its social concern.

© 1973 *London School of Theology* (<http://www.lst.ac.uk/>). Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in March 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

⁸⁴ David Winter on 'Social Responsibility', in *Unity in Diversity* (1967).