

# THE CHIEF ESSENTIALS OF TRUE EVANGELICAL CHURCHMANSHIP

Church Association Tract 420

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Introduction.

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Humanity has been and is affected by movements working along quiet lines, narrow in principle, numerically insignificant, yet wielding an intense and powerful influence for the highest, because finding their way through a narrow channel to those whom they are designed to help. This influence, strong in proportion to the narrowness of its underlying principles, while affording the minimum of gratification to the humour of the moment, appeals first and foremost to all that is below the surface in man, often resulting in the complete conversion of heart, will and conscience.

One great influence of this kind in the Church of England was the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century of which what is termed the "Evangelical Party" is the outward exponent. What is the position of this historic party to-day? Is it as faultless a mirror as ever of Evangelical truth? When investigating the present state of the party, one seems to revert in thought to the position of the Jewish people before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Hellenistic section, loving liberal intercourse with Gentile peoples, and outwardly triumphant, was in reality bartering away the national greatness; the moral superiority of the more narrow and insignificant "Pious" element was obvious to any impartial thinker.

History repeats itself in the present stage of the progress of Evangelicalism in the Church of England. On the one hand are the ambitious pushing people who hate to be thought narrow and who are therefore endeavouring to bring the party into contact with various forms and shades of Romanism and Rationalism, depriving it thereby of many of its individual characteristics. On the other hand are found the more thoughtful section of the Evangelical party who are vigorously termed narrow for no other reason apparently than that they have no intention of surrendering the distinctive attitude and practices of their party in the interests of a game of ecclesiastical politics based on pride, or of yielding under present conditions to the imperious demand for "a more united front."

Such is the state of parties existing at present among the Evangelicals in the Church of England; and the question of what will in future be the essentials of adherence to the party must be faced. No one with any knowledge of things Evangelical can deny that we are just now in the somewhat perilous state of halting between two opinions. Many from whom leadership might be expected are showing hesitation; they have misgivings as to the ultimate goal of what has been boastfully called the "new spirit of the party" but are at the same time dazzled by the vision of that supremacy of the Evangelical party in our Church which some suppose will be accomplished at no distant date.

But before any re-affirmation of Evangelical principles can be made, on liberal terms or the reverse, we must be tolerably certain as to what position Evangelicism, from its very nature, might

be expected to take up in relation to other Church systems, and as to the real scope of its influence. These two points should be ascertained from the principles underlying the name Evangelical. Briefly the name Evangelical signifies people of the Gospel; our Lord has intimated to such that the way they are called upon to tread is narrow; from the Acts of the Apostles we gather that the people of the Gospel are a few and that their contact with the world is on a very small scale, but that the influence exerted in connection with that contact is deep, powerful and intense, making disciples of all nations. If it be conceded that these words give an accurate idea of the status in the world of our Lord's most devoted followers-among whom all Christians accepting the name Evangelical desire to be numbered-then the new movement in the Evangelical party is in error, both as to its outlook and its aims. The former it defines as liberal, the latter as the outward and visible supremacy of the Evangelicals in the Church of England.

The time has come for rallying together the faithful that remain, who ask for the old paths; and for a clear repetition rather than a rash restatement of what constitutes those old paths, along which Evangelicals have advanced in the past as those who prevailed with God, winning souls from darkness into light; despised indeed of men but rich in the fullness of the strength of God and the assurance of the power of His might.

First and foremost among the essentials of a definite Evangelicalism must be placed-

### **I. Spirituality of Life.**

This phrase is becoming hackneyed. It is more and more being employed to signify things outward, e.g., clergy who are able to register a large number of "acts of communion" at the end of their year's work are pronounced "spiritual" by their likeminded brethren. But no such idea is primarily conveyed in the general teaching of the New Testament on this subject, neither did it form the most prominent part of what the early Evangelicals understood by spirituality of life.

Spirituality of life is no mere attribute of the crowd, but may only be enjoyed by those in whom can be found a very marked degree of receptive faith in God through Christ-a faith which is acted upon in personal separation from all known sin together with personal separation to God, finding expression in personal service for Him. In other words these three parts of the true Christian life interpenetrate one another and are interdependent. Too often one or the other of them is minimised. In the past some Evangelicals adopted separation from the world at the expense of separation to the God of love, which in many cases produced harshness and sourness; whereas at present things appear to be tending too much in the opposite direction.

The first essential of the Evangelicalism of our time should be, then, a more marked separation from the world than at present obtains in some quarters, together with the maintenance by God's grace of a spirit of love towards those who are outside the fold of Christ.

### **II. Belief in the general historicity of the Bible – that its historical characters were contemporary with the history which they made.**

Whatever may be said to the contrary, the Bible is the true basis of Evangelicalism, and without confidence in the Holy Scriptures the movement must perish. Assertions such as this have led to the sneer that the Christianity of the Evangelical is a mere Bibliolatry. While denying this, we may reply to those who in their attacks give a surprising amount of prominence to the Prayer Book, that even if it were true, Bibliolatry would be infinitely superior to Liturgiolatry.

But how may a true Evangelical express more exactly his belief in the Bible? It is insufficient to say, "we believe it to be inspired". The most extreme of rationalistic critics could say as much. The vital point at issue is whether the Bible is to be substantially thought of as a record of historical fact or merely as a collection of myths made at a late date. The true Evangelical must certainly protest against the popular delusion that the maintenance of the late date theory of the Old Testament as

opposed to a belief in its essential historicity is a matter of no importance. The fact must be faced that many cases of sad spiritual decline are attributable to the acceptance of this and other principles of rationalistic criticism. Of course it is probable that what are termed "Higher Critical" views of the Old Testament have come to stay—for a while. This could not well be otherwise when such views have the support of names representing the highest grade of scholarship in the two senior universities. Yet an ordinary examination of the main points of the Higher Critical theory will show how that it owes the continuance of its existence to two factors: on the part of those acquainted with it, ignorance of all but its outlines; on the part of scholars advocating it, an extraordinary lack of literary insight and common-sense judgment, especially noticeable in connection with texts the plain and natural meaning of which is antagonistic to their theory.

But the names of the late Professor Orr, Drs. Sayce, Reich, Keil, Troelstra, herald a new and triumphant era of sound and reverent Biblical criticism of a more searching and discriminating character. Archaeology, the most important factor of evidence for the historicity of the Old Testament is by light shed upon what were quite recently considered doubtful passages therein, adding strength and probability year after year to the conviction that its contents are matters of fact.

But the strongest possible means of confidence in the Bible is personal reliance upon it as a means of grace to the soul. It is common knowledge that missions and churches, the officers of which are consecrated to God's service, placing implicit reliance upon the Book from which they proclaim His message, are the successful missions and the live churches.

It is quite possible of course to make so much of the Bible that it obscures Christ, and this was the danger of the older Evangelicalism which sometimes attached so disproportionate a meaning to the power of the preached Gospel as to suppose that the personality of the preacher was of no account. It would be well if in this essential of true Evangelicalism it were remembered that in all ages great manifestations of the power of God have come not only through the Word preached but the sanctified personality of the preacher behind it. The Bible itself teaches us that God's Word in the mouth of, e.g., St. Paul produced far more, whether by of bringing to life or of hardening, than it did in the case of the faithless disciples (St. Matt. xvii. 19). We have paid too little attention to this fact. The Gospel message delivered in the most conventionally Evangelical manner by a dead soul will be scantily honoured by God, despite its Evangelical tone.

### **III. Simplicity of Worship.**

By no means the least important of the blessings of the Protestant Reformation was the exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the worship of the people, and the abolition of a number of useless ceremonies which hid Him from the eye of the soul. It is not too much to say that the successful spiritual results of the dissemination of Reformation truth were in a great measure due to the removal of the distractions of a too prominent ceremonialism.

Simplicity of worship may be defined as a preference for the bare outward essentials of public worship instead of the various clerical fads (e.g., monotoning of the prayers, adoption of "festal" colours for pulpit and lectern) which in their fussiness and superfluity mar that simplicity. The principle underlying simplicity of worship should be that reverence which springs from the heart rather than a craze for outward reverence which too often reminds us of the Gospel reference to the whited sepulchre.

An attempt is now being made by many calling themselves Evangelical to bring about a change in our attitude towards the externals of worship. They say that the spread of education in our day, together with the prevalence of the cult of the artistic demand from us an elaboration of our ceremonial; also that such elaboration is a matter of no importance. Such reasoning seems superficial; religion is surely intended to mould the public taste, not to be led by it. Moreover, it is known that the appearance of a church exerts a subtle influence upon the minds of those who worship therein. Surely, therefore, the best effects will be produced if, in an age like our own, the

appointments of the House of God are simple and plain, in contrast with those of the luxurious private house or house of entertainment. And if, as we are all conscious, elaborate ceremonial and music merely gratify the senses, they have little in common with true worship which is intended to please God, who seeks in those who draw near to Him a humble and sincere heart. Again, it is not without significance that in the history of religion, Laodiceanism and elaborate worship, fervent spirituality and simplicity of worship have usually gone together. What reason is there that this rule should not apply to our age?

The settlement of the question of the future simplicity or otherwise of its ceremonial is one of the most important matters now before the Evangelical party, though receiving little attention at present. On its solution will depend the progress or fate of Evangelicalism in the Church of England. It is true that when contrasted with the great spiritual realities for which we stand, outward ceremonial is of little importance; yet its very great importance as an outward expression of our views and the points at issue between us and other schools of thought is in danger just now of being under-rated. It may confidently be prophesied that elaboration of ritual on any plan must inevitably result in the absorption of the Evangelical party, into one or the other Anglican schools of thought, which means the extinction of that special form of the Gospel message and those special methods of work which go to make Evangelicalism what it is.

In any restatement of Evangelical principles a firm stand must be made to maintain a simple, even severe style of worship.

Into the question of the possible fewness in the numbers of those attracted by such a style of worship it is not necessary to enter, partly because of the principle of numerical weakness combined with power of influence already assumed, partly because of the obvious advantage of having in the Church a few true Children of God rather than a weak and shallow multitude, which, by reason of its limited witnessing power to the truth, brings little by way of addition to the Christian Church and less of good reputation amongst the "unattached."

#### **IV. A love of and demand for the expository preaching of God's Word.**

God's Word is the food of the soul; much spiritual poverty to-day may be traced to the fact that the Word itself is so seldom heard from many nominally Evangelical pulpits. The clergy are commissioned to preach not the wisdom of men but the Word of God, and they need not take the view that an expository sermon must inevitably be accompanied by dullness or undue length. The laity are crying for the Word of God, and rightly so. Let every true Evangelical preacher or speaker become known as one who in public compares Scripture with Scripture.

There is room for a revival of expository preaching at the week night services which are a feature of most parishes. There is room also for the establishment of Christian Evidence classes and week night "Bible Schools" in place of many of the somewhat poor and little appreciated church entertainments now in vogue.

#### **V. Work on Spiritual Lines.**

In this phrase we have another of the hackneyed catchwords of modern Evangelicalism. Its significance, while becoming broader than formerly, is losing its depth.

What is work on spiritual lines? If we turn for our answer to the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles we find that in the first stage of the existence of the Church her work consisted of three things only—public preaching of the Gospel, the performance of services and the relief of extreme poverty or sickness, each of these being in due proportion. There is no record of the giving of entertainments or of the secularisation of any branch of the work in order to attract outsiders. And, even after allowing for the special presence of the Holy Spirit then granted to the Church, what fullness of power prevailed!

That Evangelical Church which relies on secular means in order to maintain its membership is no true Evangelical Church. There is to-day a crying need for a return on our part to apostolic practice in the matter of Church work. The Evangelical parish should not as regards organisation be just a feeble imitation of many almost lifeless ones around it, but one in which religious meetings for soul winning work are prominent, the extreme of sickness or poverty relieved according to ability, the feature of entertainments reduced to the lowest possible minimum.

The true relationship of the Church to the world is sufficiently clear to any Bible student. She is to leaven the life of the world not by setting herself in the midst of a worldly practice and imitating it but by imparting to it from without, by God's grace, that spiritual power which alone can uplift, purify and ennoble it.

## **VI. A Determination to maintain the individuality of Evangelicalism.**

This point has already been alluded to under the heading "Simplicity of worship." It must now be considered in the light of the present tendency towards unity. If true Church unity is in the air just now than our wish to hold aloof from the general spirit of unity could not be defended. But two questions must be asked: (1) Is the present time the right one for unity? Hardly so, for our day, evidenced as it is by the growth of worldliness and lukewarmness together with the marked lack of conversions in almost every Christian body, does not seem one in which it is probable that God's people would be able to unite on any sure basis? And (2) Is the unity advocated the result of a powerful spiritual impulse or the general weakening of moral and spiritual fibre? Apparently the latter; the absence on all sides of strong leadership, the uncertainty of religious thought, and the dangerous tendency observable to insist all too lightly on some of the essentials of the Christian faith, are signs which point that way. This kind of unity places us under no obligation to abandon our individuality.

We are not to fear the reproach of maintaining a party spirit. Do those for ever hurl this reproach at us ever pause to reflect upon the absurdity of their position, which, if applied universally and to its fullest extent, would destroy individuality altogether-or that, in the very attitude they assume in the question, they themselves betray their adherence to a party of fellow sympathisers? St. Paul's well-known words in 1 Cor. i., often quoted in connection with the subject of party spirit, are no prohibition against the maintenance of individual characteristics within the general body of Christians. They obviously refer not merely to the holding of different opinions amongst themselves by Christians, but to the rise of schools of thought which in tendency would become anti-Christian. It should be noticed that three non-Christian parties are mentioned (1 Cor. i. 12) in opposition to a "Christ" party. It is quite in accordance with such a circumstance that St. Paul should strongly condemn the existence of these parties, which signified no "divisions" among Christians, but desertion from the Gospel of Christ. Yet the message of 1 Cor. 1. 10-13 contains a rebuke to any of us who place our party before our Lord and Master.

But while we desire to maintain a party spirit to which the word "approximation" is hateful, we need not discontinue to use the word "intercourse." We will have godly union and concord in our private life with Christians of other schools of thought, while we refuse to accommodate permanently our own principles or worship to theirs. Intercourse between different types of Christians needs no party machinery to generate and sustain it. It is an individual matter, and is thus more likely to be free from unreality than massed demonstrations of cordiality and approval.

A word in conclusion as to the advancement of the Evangelical party, a topic which has been much to the fore in recent years. Let us commence with the thought that we must obey God rather than man, and that we seek the glory of Christ and not the praise of man or the rewards of the world. Quiet spiritual work, a tenacious hold upon our distinctive customs, the maintenance of our own special methods in pastoral work and in the conduct of the services of the sanctuary; these things will advance the party, and these things alone. The way of strife in the arena of ecclesiastical

politics for a greater share in the loaves and fishes of the Church and for greater prominence in its councils, is the way to spiritual weakness. Its foundation is pride, its motive power the arm of flesh.

Let us wait upon God; in His good time He will advance us; till then, "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." If according to God's will we be numbered among the small and despised of the earth, our joy will be full because of the secret of His presence with us.