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BOOK REVIEWS

Evangelicalism Divided, by Iain H. Murray. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000. 342pp. $21.50.

Many voices have raised a clarion call to the sad state of affairs existing within the evangelical movement, now about fifty years old. From its origin as a reactionary response to fundamentalism, *new* evangelicalism has charted an uncertain course. Contemporary evangelicalism embraces a wide array of professed believers from Roman Catholics to conservative Protestants.[1] How this broad coalition came about is the subject of Iain Murray's new book, *Evangelicalism Divided*. Murray is well qualified to write this history. As a close friend and colleague of the late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, he was an eyewitness to much about which he writes. He is an accomplished historian who has already penned a rich legacy of historical research. In this work, one finds another engaging and historically significant book as Murray sets out to delineate the current divided, or some might say *deteriorating*, state of evangelicalism. In describing this deterioration, he is not alone. Harold Lindsell, Francis Schaeffer, David Wells, and others have all offered an assortment of books discussing similar issues.[2] But now, for the first time, the history of the decline of evangelicalism is set forth. As it has grown larger in size and stature, its doctrinal core has dissipated. Theological certainty has given way to pragmatic opportunity. Murray tells us why this has happened.

The book begins by tracing new evangelicalism from its inception with the birth of Fuller Seminary (1947), *Christianity Today* (1955), and the rise to prominence of evangelist Billy Graham. A brief introduction sets evangelicalism in the flow of church history, beginning in the Reformation, moving to the birth of liberalism under Friedrich Schleiermacher, and tracing new evangelicalism's emergence in the post–fundamentalist-modernist controversy era. Billy Graham is

[1]See Keith Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990).

[2]Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); idem, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984); David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); idem, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); idem, *Losing Our Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

rightly seen as the key figure in this new movement. Under the strong influence of his wife-to-be, Ruth Bell, and her father, Nelson, he moved away from a separatist posture toward mainline denominations permeated by liberalism. He came to believe the denominations could be recaptured for orthodoxy if only the sound men would stop withdrawing their influence. One of Graham's often repeated slogans was: "the one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy, but love" (p. 33). *Christianity Today,* under the editorship of Carl F. H. Henry, also contributed to the new movement. The magazine's goal was not "to reach or please the American fundamentalists but to lead confused and bewildered American liberals to accept the authority of Scripture" (p. 36). New evangelicalism moved from a posture of separation from liberalism (a withdrawal of fellowship) to one of dialogue and engagement. Perhaps the liberals could be persuaded to return to the fold of orthodoxy.

However well-intended, new evangelicalism soon began to veer off course, driven by a "pragmatism inherent in the movement, an element which was to override biblical principles with disastrous consequences" (p. 51). Graham sought friendship "with all whose high profile could reflect with advantage on the message he preached" (p. 59). Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey, Malcolm Muggeridge, British journalist David Frost, Roman Catholic Cardinal Richard J. Cushing and Bishop Fulton Sheen, and powerful American presidents like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon became his high-profile friends. His ecumenical approach influenced evangelicalism to reduce its theological core. "While the vision of the 1950's had been to see a restoration of evangelical convictions in the main denominations, all these convictions save one had been whittled down" (p. 70). Evangelism was the only basis upon which a wide coalition could be built. Murray's conclusion—"the developing BGEA (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) ministry has been accompanied by a disastrous weakening of evangelical belief" (p. 72).

Murray next traces a similar doctrinal decline, opposed largely but to no avail by Lloyd-Jones, on the British scene. A group of young scholars, John R. W. Stott and James I. Packer among them, departed from Lloyd-Jones's call for a separated doctrinal purity and began to seek acceptability within the wider Anglican denomination in England. The watershed came in 1967 with the first National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele, where Stott led in the repudiation of the conservative resistance to ecumenical cooperation. This led these evangelicals to "deny in practice what they taught in theory" (p. 118). "'Cooperation without compromise' had proved an illusion" (p. 118). Murray demonstrates the pragmatic motivation behind such efforts

(p. 126) and their parallel with Billy Graham's efforts across the Atlantic (p. 127).

Murray attributes much of the theological decay to a failure to carefully define what constitutes a true Christian. The new evangelicals seemed willing to embrace all who claimed to be believers regardless of theological convictions. They considered it "offensive and intolerant to suppose that anyone can distinguish true Christians from others.... [There are] many kinds of followers of Christ and does not love demand that we regard them all as 'fellow Christians'?" (151). By contrast, the "vision" of the evangelical forerunners (Calvin through Wesley and Whitefield) "was determined chiefly by fundamental beliefs [whereas] the policy of Billy Graham in the United States, and of the Keele and Nottingham Congresses in England, was shaped too largely by other considerations" (168).

Important among the evangelicals was "intellectual respectability" (173ff.), which in turn led to a questioning of biblical inerrancy. Further reduction in the theological core was inevitable and the way opened for such recent developments as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together,* the result of which "advocates a public policy which implies that there is no *vital and essential* difference between Christianity and Roman Catholicism" (p. 243). "When evangelicals turned from emphasizing the biblical truths basic to their position, the necessity for being distinctly evangelical began to pass out of sight. It proved impossible both to co-operate in the ecumenical ethos *and* to hold together a strong evangelical center" (p. 251).

Murray's work provides an important historical contribution to the current understanding of the contemporary theological world. He rightly sees the problems endemic in evangelicalism and shows great courage in bringing this story out into the open. Contemporary evangelical leaders ought to pay careful attention to his historical record.

Also helpful is Murray's discussion of evangelicalism in both the British and North American contexts. For those living on one side of the Atlantic or the other, these details may be less familiar and Murray does a great service in chronicling this history. The problems he describes were not local, isolated aberrations but pandemic in the international movement.

However, for the fundamentalist, Murray's work is less than satisfying. It suffers from a very poor understanding of historic fundamentalism and unfortunately has left out much of its criticism of the new evangelicalism, displaying a significant bias. Fundamentalism was an important voice of dissent raised against the new attitude. Murray briefly introduces fundamentalism in the first chapter and offers simplistic comments on its nature and importance. The early fundamentalism, "instead of being simply the defender of Protestant

orthodoxy,…had itself unwittingly adopted ideas of more recent origin. Its statements of belief were brief and lacking the doctrinal coherence to be found in the churches at an earlier date…. It was too occupied with war on modernism and, sometimes, with war on denominations…[and it] gave a high priority to separatism…fuelled by popular nineteenth-century teaching on unfulfilled prophecy…[which] left little incentive to work for change in the contemporary culture" (p. 17). "Winning the souls of individuals was sometimes treated as though it was almost the only Christian duty" (p. 18).

Unfortunately, Murray offers no evidence to sustain these charges but rather assumes the testimony of evangelicalism's founders to be valid. This can be clearly seen in the final chapter, intended to be a summary of evidence. Murray baldly asserts the failures of fundamentalism without the slightest warrant or supporting evidence of any kind. For example, new evangelicalism "has shown how difficult it is to remedy the faults of one position (fundamentalism) without falling into dangers at an opposite extreme" (p. 297). Fundamentalism "too often saw people as Christians only when they were of the same persuasion" (p. 298); it demonstrated a tendency to "add stipulations not foundational to Christian believing" (p. 298). While fundamentalism "often suffered from hostile misrepresentation, there can be little doubt that in its reaction to the prevalent apostasy its definition of Christian was too narrow" (p. 298). It "erred from an unbiblical strictness" and was "narrow sectarianism," displaying "belligerence" and a readiness "to assume that its critics were unregenerate." Finally, "separation came too easily in fundamentalism" (p. 299).[3]

Furthermore, as Murray critiques separatism (p. 299), which for fundamentalists "came too easy," he offers no analysis of the fundamentalist argument. On what basis it came "too easy" is left unanswered for the reader—it is evidently Murray's unsubstantiated opinion. He either is unaware or intentionally ignores the fundamentalist literature in defense of separatism, not even mentioning Ernest Pickering's important work *Biblical Separation: The Struggle for A Pure Church,* which set forth the fundamentalist understanding historically and systematically, or any other statement of support for separatism.

[3]These kinds of broad sweeping statements are hardly fair or warranted from the evidence Murray offers. How he arrived at this assessment is difficult to determine since he has very meager fundamentalist evidence. He offers Ned Stonehouse's brief assessment regarding fundamentalism's perceived doctrinal weaknesses (p. 17) and only two fundamentalist quotations—Ernest Pickering and William Ward Ayer. Pickering is quoted too briefly and without sufficient context to sustain any criticism (p. 31) and Ayer's quotation is spoken of favorably (p. 75). How then can Murray say that fundamentalism's "definition of Christian was too narrow"?

Furthermore, separatism is not an idea rooted in dispensationalism as Murray implies. Examples of separatism abound in church history. British Baptist Charles Haddon Spurgeon departed from the Baptist Union in 1887 declaring, "we cannot be expected to meet in any Union which comprehends those whose teaching is upon fundamental points exactly the reverse of what we hold dear…. To us it appears that there are many things upon which compromise is possible, but there are others in which it would be an act of treason to pretend to fellowship. With deep regret, we abstain from assembling with those whom we dearly love and heartily respect, since it would involve us in a confederacy with those with whom we can have no communion in the Lord."[4]

Finally, Murray offers little by way of remedy for the problems of evangelicalism. His observations are so general as to have no real impact. "The church cannot succeed in the same way in which political parties may succeed" (p. 303). "This period of history confirms the painful fact that there can be serious differences of belief and consequent controversies among true Christians" (p. 306). "The history we have covered shows how hard it is for leaders to look in differenct directions at once" (p. 313). While these statements are true, could they not be said of other eras of church history? How do these summary statements tell us anything significantly new? If I go to the doctor and he tells me I have cancer, am I not interested in something more than simply a description of what cancer is? Do I not need to know how to deal with it? What are my options? Is it terminal? Murray has done a good job diagnosing the cancer, but by disparaging fundamentalism, he has offered to the patient very little hope. If the answer is not in separation (a withdrawal of fellowship), then what is it? And what is to be done when some refuse to change their course? Must they be accorded cordiality and affection while they continue to pollute the body with further error? Is writing another book about their error and then another and another, *ad infinitum*, all that can be done? If fundamentalism separated too easily, upon what basis should a believer, committed to truth, withdraw?

While Murray's work provides a valuable record of the decline of new evangelicalism, he sadly offers no real corrective to its malady. He has told the evangelical church it has a terminal cancer that if not checked, will lead to further death and decay. If separation is not an option for the evangelical church, if the cancer is not removed, the theological decay and doctrinal compromise will continue unabated

[4]From "The Case Proved," *The Sword and Trowel*, October 1887, quoted in Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon, Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), p. 834.

and the theological core of evangelicalism runs the risk of dissipating into oblivion.[5]

Jeff Straub

The Mayflower Pilgrims: Roots of Puritan, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Baptist Heritage, by David Beale. Greenville, SC: Ambassador–Emerald International, 2000. 272 pp. $19.99.

David Beale, professor of Church history at Bob Jones University, has taken advantage of recent scholarly studies and his own personal knowledge in putting together an excellent treatment of the Mayflower Separatists and their connections with other seventeenth century British dissenters. After describing their background in the context of the English Reformation, Beale details the fortunes of the Pilgrims from their beginnings in the Lincolnshire area of northern England to their landing at Cape Cod in 1620 and beyond. He references everything with the best sources and fleshes out his account with colorful descriptions of these indomitably brave souls. This is the best single reference volume on the Pilgrims in print. An added bonus for Baptists especially is Chapter Eight, "How the Earliest English Baptists Originated from the Pilgrim Separatists," in which Beale accurately describes the relationships of both General and Particular Baptists to Separatism. In doing so, he dispels the myth that seventeenth century Baptists were the product of continental Anabaptism. He also advances the position that Henry Jacob, normally considered the founder of English Puritan Congregationalism (the Independents), actually became a Separatist, having more in common with John Robinson, the Pilgrims' "consistent separatist" pastor, than with either the English Puritans or the more radical "Brownists."

What makes this volume particularly valuable are the appendices, ten in all, which consist of primary source materials highlighting significant events in Nonconformist history. Several practical selections are included in the appendix section as well, such as an explanation of "double" dates for British events and a self-guided tour of Leiden,

[5]Currently within evangelicalism, there is a debate over the nature of God. Open theism postulates a God who has little control over his universe. The doctrinal accommodation of the evangelical world of the last fifty years has left little choice for the evangelical church but to endure this error, since separation, or the withdrawal of fellowship, appears not to be an acceptable choice. See Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000) for a critique of open theism.