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INTERPRETATIONS OF EVANGELICALISM:

An Annotated Bibliography

Kevin Enns-Rempel

Since the mid-1970's a host of books on North American Evangelicalism have appeared in both the religious and secular markets. Many have been defenses or critiques from within the movement, others have attempted to interpret Evangelicalism for outsiders. This bibliography makes no pretense to include more than a few of the more noteworthy books written on the topic from that variety of perspectives.

Balmer, Randall. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. New York: Oxford University, 1989. 246 pp.

Much of the public's opinion of Evangelicalism has been shaped by the "celebrities" of that movement — television evangelists and political activists. In this book Balmer goes in search of Evangelicalism at a more grass-roots level, drawing a series of portraits from his travels throughout the Evangelical world. The remarkable diversity within the various characters presented here, all of whom accept the label "Evangelical," is striking. California's Calvary Chapel, Dallas Theological Seminary, an Arizona faith healer, religious book sellers, and radical Evan-

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gelicals calling the movement back to its historical and biblical roots all find their way onto the pages of this fascinating book.

Dayton, Donald W. *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. 147 pp.

Donald Dayton's study of the origins of American Evangelicals reveals a movement very different from the generally conservative social and political attitudes of Evangelicalism today. Dayton shows that the founders of Evangelicalism in the mid-nineteenth century were the radicals of their day, at the forefront of anti-slavery, feminist, and social welfare movements. A final chapter offers some interpretations for Evangelicalism's retreat from these radical origins to become by the late nineteenth century essentially a conservative movement characterized by withdrawal from society.

Flake, Carol. *Redemptorama: Culture, Politics, and the New Evangelicalism*. Garden City NY: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1984. 300 pp.

All theological movements must come to terms with the relationship between faith and culture. Carol Flake explores how contemporary Evangelicalism has done so. She suggests that since the 1970's Evangelicals have created a distinctive subculture with its own political agendas, its own entertainment stars (television evangelists and contemporary Christian music performers) and its own form of economic values ("Christian capitalism"). Chapters on "super churches," "sports and the total man," "selling the word," and "from subculture to counterculture" suggest the wide range of topics explored in this critical but sympathetic book.

Frank, Douglas W. *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. 310 pp.

Mid-nineteenth-century Evangelicals felt themselves to be very much at the center of American society. But by the early twentieth century, developments in science, biblical interpretation and social structures had created a culture in which

those same Evangelicals were much less comfortable. No longer influential members of society, they felt themselves marginalized and ridiculed by a secular culture. Douglas Frank suggests that Evangelicals responded in three primary ways to this social displacement. Dispensational premillennialism provided them with the hope of ultimate victory despite present defeats. The “victorious life” theology promised individual Christians the ability to live lives of “perfect obedience and emotional calm.” Revivalism, particularly that of Billy Sunday, called for the reChristianization of America and triumph over its secular foes. Frank suggests that each of these approaches represented a misinterpretation of the gospel by overemphasizing human ability to shape society and ignoring the fallibility of all human efforts.

Hunter, James Davison. *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University, 1983. 171 pp.

This sociological study attempts to understand the tensions between Evangelicalism and the modern world. Hunter suggests that modernity has caused Evangelicalism to modify its message and style in many significant ways through a combination of retreat and compromise. He calls this process “cognitive bargaining.” The author is not optimistic about the continued strength and purity of the Evangelical movement and its world view. Unfortunately, the extensive use of “sociologese” in this book may frighten away the casual reader from an intriguing interpretation of Evangelicalism.

Kraus, C. Norman, ed. *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism*. Scottsdale: Herald, 1979. 187 pp.

This collection of nine essays by several scholars examines Evangelicalism from the perspective of Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Individual essays explore various facets of the Evangelical movement — its history, variations, politics, attitude toward Scripture and eschatology. Two final essays, “Evangelicalism and the Mennonite Tradition” by Ronald J. Sider and “Anabaptism and Evangelicalism” by C. Norman Kraus, are of particular interest. Sider outlines the areas in which Evangelicals and Mennonites can learn from each other; Kraus empha-

sizes more the differences between the two traditions.

Marsden, George, ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. 220 pp.

This collection of essays describes and explains the rise of Evangelicalism as a significant force in American society. Part one explores that resurgence since World War II. Part two examines the various ways Evangelicalism has interacted with the prevailing culture. Running through this volume is the sense that the Evangelical resurgence has been a mixed blessing. What price has the movement paid for its rise to power? In what ways has Evangelicalism been shaped by the very culture that it has sought to transform?

Sweet, Leonard I., ed. *The Evangelical Tradition in America*. Macon: Mercer University, 1984. 318 pp.

While American Evangelicalism has come into its own in the mid-twentieth century, its roots can be traced back to the seventeenth-century origins of Protestantism in America. The variety within these early traditions creates considerable disagreement among historians about the meaning of present-day Evangelicalism. The essays in this collection suggest something of the interpretive variations that characterize Evangelical studies today. The range of interpretations is clearly reflected in Leonard Sweet's introductory essay on the historiography of Evangelicalism, which would make a fine starting point for anyone interested in further reading on this religious tradition.

Wells, David F. and John D. Woodbridge. *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1975. 304 pp.

This book is an introduction to the Evangelical tradition written for those intrigued with the rise of that movement in the mid-1970's. Various authors explore both the unity and diversity within Evangelical theology. Chapters on the Evangelical attitudes toward society, social concerns, politics and science make this a well-rounded guide to the tradition. George Marsden's chapter on the mid-century transition from

Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism is particularly valuable. Two chapters on Black churches explore a seldom-considered aspect of Evangelicalism.

Woodbridge, John D., Mark A. Noll, and Nathan O. Hatch. *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of America's Evangelicals*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979. 286 pp.

The authors focus on several themes that have played an important role in American Evangelical thought since the seventeenth century. Not an argument for what "Evangelical" ought to mean, it is rather "an examination of the widest possible range of those who could be classed as Evangelicals." Given this wide range, the book makes much of the diversity that exists within Evangelicalism. The book begins with three chapters on Evangelical theology, focusing on some persons who have helped shape those beliefs. A chapter on attitudes toward the Bible is followed by three chapters on the nature of the church in Evangelical thought and two chapters on the history of Evangelical interaction with culture.