

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 42 | Number 3

Article 10

---

March 2014

## Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott (Book Review)

Keith C. Sewell  
*Dordt College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sewell, Keith C. (2014) "Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 42: No. 3, 50 - 52.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol42/iss3/10](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol42/iss3/10)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

ous stages of bodily decay. Bodies in *I Want To Show You More* get tattooed, they defecate in ditches while running marathons, they transform under the rhythm of running, they transform quite differently under the ruin of cancer, they fall off cliffs to their deaths. No doubt in all this bodily shock and awe, Quatro follows one of her self-noted influences, Flannery O'Connor. (Others include Alice Munro, Grace Paley, and Amy Hempel).

While most of this "bodiliness" dwells primarily in a reality we recognize — at summer camp with physically- and emotionally-compromised adolescents, in the suburbs with a depressed husband and self-assured wife, at the lake home of a bereaved husband and his children — three of the collection's best stories begin in worlds we think we recognize, before spinning us off into slightly altered realities.

One of these stories, "Demolition," follows the bizarre path that Lookout Mountain Church takes toward what it thinks is enlightenment. A deaf man named Corbett Earnshaw comes to the church one Sunday, and as the congregation watches him being signed to, they become rapt. The signing "partook," the narrator, an anonymous member of the congregation, tells us, "of the nature of holiness itself: one man giving himself in surrender, the other receiving in gratitude" (160). But almost immediately, two problems develop with Corbett Earnshaw. The first is that, on the third week of his visits, the stained glass of the church starts falling apart; the second is that, on the same day, in the middle of the service, Corbett Earnshaw declares that he doesn't believe in Christianity and never will. The church responds to this dastardly admonition in two ways. Officially, "The Elders declared Corbett Earnshaw's confession and departure either a) evidence his soul was still unregenerate, or b) an act of apostasy, but only if his soul was — and this was doubtful — regenerate to begin with." A "faction" of the congregation, however, says "that God worked in all sorts of ways, not only through what we considered our religious life. . . In leaving us, they said, Corbett Earnshaw was nearer to the real presence of Christ than he was before he left" (162). It's between these two opposing statements

— one of them seemingly formulaic and ancient, with its unwieldy terms "unregenerate" and "apostasy" so distasteful to the postmodern mouth, and the other formulaic in its own way, a relativist spin — that the story moves. As the stained glass crumbles around the congregation and swallows begin nesting in the beams of the church, the revelation seems clear: "Authenticity, some of us said. Our natural longing, revealed" (168).

For this reader at least, the supposed ideal of "authenticity" in the life of faith is at the heart of the collection as a whole. At times it feels like *I Want To Show You More* wants to move us toward authenticity through unabashed honesty about the habits of our minds and sexual urges. However, in "Demolition," we get another side to this "authenticity." In the name of authenticity, the church demolishes its sanctuary, moves worship to "the Natural Bridge Park," and finally turns sex into communal sacrament. By its end, "Demolition" is a kind of dystopic parable about "bodiliness," about "word becoming flesh" but then ceasing to be word. However, if you take the degree of bodily yearning and desperation throughout the rest of the book as somewhat accurate of the world in which we live, the extreme events of "Demolition" don't seem that far off.

Nor is the antidote to the body-mind divide that gives "Demolition" and many of Quatro's stories their energy: "A restlessness remains in our children," the narrator tells us at the story's end. "At night we hear them singing, hymnlike strains bright with major harmonies" (182). Below the contemporary confusion of many of Quatro's characters lies an understanding of the human being as basically religiously oriented.

As a whole, *I Want To Show You More* looks certain contemporary societal fascinations right in the eye, and for this reason, some readers will want to look away. But for those who allow themselves to get "caught up," the book's tangles of love and lust, of sin and obedience and cyberspace, should hit you somewhere between the gut and the heart, which is exactly the bodily place that Jamie Quatro seems to be aiming.

---

Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, (History of Evangelicalism, People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World, Volume V), Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8308-2585-1, and Northampton, England: InterVarsity Press, 2013, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84474-621-7, both 288 pp. incl. bibliography. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, emeritus professor of history, Dordt College, living in Melbourne, Australia.

---

The demographic charts confirm what we already know. The "redcoats" are *not* coming! Americans have the British well and truly outnumbered — yet in some matters the British remain capable of achievements that exceed their proportional weight in population. Of the five volumes of the *A History of Evangelicalism* sequence published on both sides of the Atlantic by InterVarsity

Press, one is by an American, one by an Australian, and three by Brits. One of the Brits is Brian Stanley, author of the fifth volume, dealing with the period from 1945 to the present day.

Known to some *Pro Rege* readers as the co-editor of the *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* series published by William B. Eerdmans, Stanley is Professor

of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and Director of the *Centre for the Study of World Christianity* at that university. Stanley's volume, subtitled *The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, evokes admiration, sympathy and something else besides.

There is certainly much here to admire. Stanley offers an overview that is sure-footed because it is grounded in an in-depth and detailed knowledge of the era. He is well informed on Anglo-American developments, but also on the immense changes in the "global south" — in Africa and beyond, during and after the era of decolonization (60). For example, his coverage of the East African revival is itself a fine summation of a complex development (81-85). Stanley's scope is global (e.g. 117-120, 200-204) — and his account of the intense maneuvering in connection with the 1974 Lausanne Congress is superb (155-177).

As to the USA and Great Britain, the rift between fundamentalists unwilling to participate in doctrinally mixed "mainline" denominations, and evangelicals willing to do so, is present on both sides of the Atlantic, while differently manifested on each side (28-37). Stanley's presentation of the October 1966 confrontation between Stott and Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899-1991) concerning separation or participation is careful and measured (49-52). Moreover, Stanley is on sure ground in insisting that the globalization of (more or less fundamentalist) *American Evangelicalism* is the hallmark of this period (65-71), as marked initially by Billy Graham's attainment of "global celebrity status" (65). Stanley's observation of Americans — that, for them, the defense of the gospel merged with the defense of the "free world" — merits serious attention (62).

Along with his investigation of crusading activism, Stanley addresses the recovery of evangelical biblical scholarship from its low-point in the 1930s, through the establishment of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and their emulators in the US (94-98). But there were perils and pitfalls for this scholarly recovery. James I. Packer (b. 1926) might utilize the teachings of "old Princeton" to combat critics of Graham's (actual or imagined) fundamentalism (42-43), but detailed and textually acute study of the biblical texts, while they rarely overthrew belief in their inspiration and authority, could challenge received notions of infallibility and inerrancy (104-111). Hence the profound internal struggles experienced by Fuller Theological Seminary (36-38, 129-131) and within the Southern Baptist Convention (110-111), as well as the furor sparked within Anglican evangelicalism in 1982 by the paper by James Dunn on "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture" (221). Evangelicals have been slow to come to grips with the issues presented by philosophical hermeneutics (220-229), and they remain backward in the scholarly study of the Old Testament (97). All these issues Stanley handles with the finesse of one who

not only understands the issues, but also the personalities of the interlocutors.

Moreover, it is hard not to sympathize with the formidable task of authorial compression that writing a brief history of evangelicalism in this period inevitably entails. To provide an account of the "global diffusion" in the twentieth century of a movement as profoundly variegated as contemporary evangelicalism, within the span of less than three hundred pages, is as good as impossible. It is therefore inevitable that Stanley will not satisfy everyone — his abridgement of some topics leaves the reader crying out for further explanation.

This may be why, except for New Testament studies, Stanley insufficiently explores the inadequacies of evangelical thought and scholarship. The vicissitudes of the career of Francis Schaeffer (1912-84), and his debt to both Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) and Hans Rookmaaker (1922-77), are all discussed (122-128, 134-144), and Alvin Plantinga is rightly recognized (139-142). However, although Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) contributed to *The Evangelical Quarterly* (94-95) in its early days, they do not appear in Stanley's text, and neither does H. Evan Runner (1916-2002). This omission is regrettable because they pointed the way to the reformation of evangelicalism itself. The omission is nevertheless understandable, as Stanley only has room for those leaders and movements who have already made strong marks.

The contemporary evangelicalism that Stanley writes about is now more diverse than ever (11), possibly approaching a point of disintegration (235). The already formidable challenges of maintaining narrative coherence multiply — seemingly exponentially — as soon as the history of modern Pentecostalism and the trans-denominational impacts of the "charismatic movement" are added to an already highly combustible evangelical-fundamentalist mix. All this, and more besides, Stanley capably addresses. He pays particular attention to how the charismatics took a Pentecostal message into the evangelical heartland of America. Much here was fueled by the evangelical hunger for "revival" and its conjunction with the "latter rain" movement within the Assemblies of God branch of denominational Pentecostalism (185-187).

In Stanley's discussion of Pentecostalism, we encounter doctrines and movements strange and exotic for those whose life and thought stand closer to the doctrine and practice of the reformation. These include, for example, the global activities of Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International (192); the widespread adoption of charismatic styles in public worship (195-196); the rise and decline of the "shepherding movement" (198-199); the manifestations of the "Toronto blessing" (206-208); and, not least, charismatic claims to have restored the apostolic office to the institutional church (206-7, 239-240).

Stanley has his reservations about at least some charismatic claims and practices (197, 208) but apparently deems asking the tough questions about charismatic claims to be beyond the purview of the historian (210). Some American readers might find Stanley's coverage somewhat Anglo-centric. Nevertheless, they should persevere. What has happened in England has more than once proved to be a harbinger of American developments. For example, in respect of homosexuality, the recent apology and closure of "Exodus International" in the US was in some measure prefigured in the much earlier decision to discontinue "Courage," a comparable organization in the UK (233).

Indeed, as Stanley's narrative provokes respect for his wide-ranging coverage, and sympathy for his predicament in having to account for such burgeoning complexity, his references to C.S. Lewis (124, 145-149) might serve to jolt us out of the prevailing crusading evangelicalism paradigm to contemplate alternative possibilities for England and beyond. It may be argued that, in the 1930s, England — although still exhausted in the aftermath of the first World War — saw the beginnings of an authentic Christian renewal. No human planning brought this about. No corporate strategy was being implemented. No pre-orchestrated crusade was swinging into action. This process continued until the mid-1950s, through the horrors and privations of the Second World War, and into and beyond the grim years of post-war austerity.

Consider the best-selling works of Lewis (1898-1963). These touched the lives of hundreds of thousands in the British Isles and America. Recall: *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *The Abolition of Man* (1943), *The Great Divorce* (1945), *That Hideous Strength* (1945), *Miracles* (1947), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), and *Mere Christianity* (1952) — first given on British radio in 1943. Consider also the powerful impact of Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), whose *The Man Born to Be King* (1943) was also broadcast on radio. In her youth Sayers repudiated evangelical pietism, but in her drama the call to discipleship was arrestingly clear.

These were preceded by the widely influential book, published under the pseudonym of Frank Morison, by a man who set out to disprove the resurrection but who came to believe in it, entitled *Who Moved the Stone?* (1930). To this picture, we might add the lectures on *Christianity and History*, given to crowds of students in 1948 by Herbert Butterfield (1900-79). Those were hard

days, but there was enough of a spiritual groundswell to produce a new scripture translation. J.B. Phillips' (1906-82), *Letters to the Young Churches* appeared in 1947 — the full New Testament came later (1958). Phillips once said that re-translating the New Testament was like re-wiring a house with the electricity still on! And, there was Bernard Lord Manning, the non-sectarian Protestant Dissenter who commended the "strong air" of Calvin's teaching to his fellow countrymen.

While writers were something of a mixed bag, we need to remember that no churchly tradition or doctrinal persuasion can rightly claim the exclusive presence of the Holy Spirit. What, arguably, both over-rode and harvested this rising spiritual tide were successive "Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusades." Research has shown that many crusade "decisions" were affirmations or re-affirmations made by persons already drawn into local church settings.

Stanley rightly notes evangelical apprehensions concerning the secularization of Anglophone, and not least English, culture (13, 23), but the brutal reality is that, in England, church numbers began their massive decline soon *after* the big Billy Graham crusades. It was at just this point that the steep downturn in public commitment to Christianity commenced. Since the 1960s, English Christianity has been in retreat, some highly active enclaves notwithstanding. The typical evangelical mix of fundamentalism and private piety (sometimes laced with high doses of anti-intellectualism) has proved incapable of addressing the mounting challenges of secularism. Unsure about how the Bible is to be read, evangelicals, as Stanley observes, are taken up with protracted debates on women in office (213-220) and homosexuality (227-234), with post-evangelicals — including figures as diverse as Brian McLaren and N.T. Wright — waiting in the wings (243-246).

As it is, we are left to reflect on what might have been if we had not had the Billy Graham style of crusading evangelicalism, with its emulators and successors. Might another kind of development have taken place? Possibly a renewal that was deeper although less spectacular. Certainly, we are now left with an evangelicalism that still fits Graham's description as "confused, bewildered, divided, and almost defeated" (237). For the future, Stanley points us to the global south (247). What Christians there will do with what they have inherited remains to be seen. Meanwhile, Stanley's valuable historical overview provides all of us with a great deal to consider.