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Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing (Book Review)

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as efficiency. North errs when he states that Jesus did not have a social message other than an overall plea for peace. The relevance of Jesus' teachings are seen, rather, as pointing toward a "free enterprise" system of economics, which North feels was demonstrated by the economic climate described by Jesus in His parables.

It is evident that we can not accept North's interpretation. We must be more concerned with the treatment of human beings within the economic system. We must sacrifice some efficiency to carry out these objectives. A more significant discussion would have dealt with the issue of whether the church should act as the instrument for social aid today, rather than government, or even, if such a step would be possible.

In summary, the economic content of the book is good. Many false notions are addressed. However, the material is limited in its scope and lacks effectiveness. Many of the arguments raised are questionable or unconvincing. Most importantly, the book does not challenge Christians to programs of thought and action which are in line with the teachings of Christ. It may well be that the type of system under which we operate is of secondary importance.

The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, Abingdon Press, Nashville and New York, 1975, 304 pages. Reviewed by John M. Zinkand, Professor of Classical Languages.

The editors, both professors in the Church History Department of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, have produced an impressive volume at a very critical time.

Marshalling fourteen essayists, they have covered the three areas mentioned in the subtitle. For many years the American public has not been aware of Evangelicals. Equated with "Fundamentalists," they have been identified as members of some strange minority. But in today's press the term "Evangelical" is becoming more well-known. A Gallup Poll conducted in mid-September, 1976, showed that one in three questioned (actually 38 percent) claimed to have had a "born again" experience, that was a turning point in his or her life. (See Des Moines Register, Sept. 26, 1976.)

But what do Evangelicals believe other than that they must have such a personal commitment to Jesus Christ? This question is dealt with in the first section by John H.

Gerstner, Kenneth S. Kantzer and Paul L. Holner. The first two are fairly well known to most readers of Pro Rege; Holner, of Yale Divinity School, however, is an ex-evangelical. The inclusion of his contribution has brought about some criticism. But this reviewer concedes that our best critics are often those who are "on the outside." Let this whet your appetite: Holner states that

The very roughness and somewhat abrasive dimension of the evangelicals, who are usually trying so volubly to stay straight on the God of the Bible, gives me, at least, the impression that God is not the invention of the churches. He does not show a placid hand. He is not a genial benevolence nor a surrogate for moral value.... But there are some rough edges (in evangelicalism) not made by God (p. 69).

The contributors handle such matters as the identification of Evangelicals. If Gallup's findings are valid, are there evangelical Roman Catholics? How are "Fundamentalists" to be distinguished from "Evangelicals"? Are Seventh-Day Adventists within the camp? And what is the situation in the Black Churches?

William Pannell in "The Religious Heritage of Blacks" notes that

virtually all students of the black church recognize a fairly high percentage of what could be called "evangelical sentiments" within it, but little or no serious attempt is made statistically to isolate them. This is in part due to the fact that "evangelical" has never been a term in wide use within mainstream black Christianity.... There has never, however, been a fundamental-liberal controversy with Black Christianity in America (p. 121).

He admits that the black church has not produced a major theologian; Christianity for blacks has been more activism than strict theology.

Similar valuable insights are found in this volume. The reviewer commends the editors for this crucial work. That they chose Abingdon Press rather than one of the evangelical publishers (located in Grand Rapids and the Chicago area) shows good strategy. Too often evangelicals write about evangelical subjects, publish in the evangelical press and speak, for the most part, to their evangelical friends. This work should reach more "outsiders," sharpen the evangelical witness, and critique our own lack of unity and social awareness.