
When two Christian historians collaborate to write a history of the global evangelical movement, does the vantage point from which they observe this global movement influence their portrayal? The answer is definitely “yes.” Hutchinson, of the University of West Sydney, Australia, and Wolffe, of the Open University, UK, both stand within the global evangelical movement that they describe. They analyze developments in evangelicalism from the vantage point provided by the United Kingdom (as a former colonial power) and the Antipodes (where the UK’s once imperial influence has given way to the ties of the Commonwealth).

This perspective carries with it certain limitations. Yet initially, it should be recognized that given that global evangelicalism advanced in a kind of uneasy relationship with European and Western expansion since the age of Columbus, the state of the global evangelical movement of today could hardly be investigated without reference to it. The United Kingdom and Australia certainly represent “players” in that story (though in very different ways). Further, this project is certainly the stronger by reason of its being coauthored. Though it is not always evident where the UK-based author leaves off and the Australia-based author takes up, it is clear that this is a better account by reason of their collaboration.

In an initial chapter, Hutchinson and Wolffe overview evangelical commonalities and divergences since the eighteenth century. There have always been core beliefs at the heart of this movement, and they are able to provide examples from Thomas Haweis’s attempts in 1757 to David Bebbington’s attempts in 1988 to detail what these are. They also show that in settings as varied as Europe’s state churches, America’s separation of church and state, and regions of the former USSR a striking range of social differences—dictated by place and time—have been found compatible with evangelicalism.

A second chapter grapples with the question of the chronological origin of the evangelical movement. Is it defensible to go on claiming (as it has been since 1988) that evangelicalism “began” in the 1730s because that is when cross-denominational evangelical collaboration arose in connection with the era of religious awakening? Hutchinson and Wolffe acknowledge a substantial pre-history of eighteenth-century evangelicalism extending back into the preceding century’s English Puritan, Scottish Presbyterian, Anglican High Church, and Continental Pietist movements. By doing so, they bring us abreast of the best scholarship of the last forty years. It can also be noted that they leave unexplored the question of whether evangelicalism extends back to the Reformation era and beyond. This claim has been a favorite of apologists for the evangelical tradition going back at least two hundred years.

In a third chapter, the authors tell an underappreciated story: it was the early nineteenth century that was the era of great “traction” for evangelicalism. For example: “In the early nineteenth century . . . Methodism was the most dramatically expansionist religious force on both sides of the Atlantic” (p. 62). That particular example of expansion was but a part of something much larger. In this period, evangelicalism ceased to be merely the growing but still minority position within existing denominational structures and spawned denominational and mission structures that reflected explicitly evangelical priorities. To this era are traceable the Bible and Tract societies, early mission societies and Sunday School movements that are still in existence. Yet this era of
burgeoning growth also brought with it friction and division over millenialism, over new understandings of
revival, and over international mission strategy.

A fourth chapter depicts evangelicalism—a movement still associated with Western Europe, North America and
the Antipodes—grappling with social and intellectual changes that became ever more obvious after 1840. By
reason of its proclivity towards activism (evangelical causes and projects), this international movement was not of
one mind as it considered the plight of the laboring classes in the newly industrialized cities, the push for popular
democracy, or the questions Charles Darwin posed for Christianity. The authors depict evangelicals on both sides
of the Atlantic as too inclined to treat revivalism (along lines Charles Finney popularized) as the panacea for the
problems of the age and, in consequence, engaged too little with the social, scientific, and political movements
that were all the while shaping modern societies.

Though these deficits were carried forward into the period following 1870 (ch. 5), this era was also one in which
it was possible to speak of international evangelicalism in an enhanced sense. Transoceanic telegraph and rapid
steamship travel meant that critical news spread rapidly and that key personnel became household names on three
continents. The authors tellingly establish the idea that American leadership of global evangelicalism began to be
established in this period through the transatlantic labors of D. L. Moody and his successor R. A. Torrey, who
having exercised effective guest ministry in Britain (the then-industrial and financial center of the world) were
thereby commended to the larger world. Of special note, however, are the international tensions that this subtle
shift brought with it. Late nineteenth-century American evangelical ascendancy brought with it both a missionary
urgency fueled by premillennial expectation of Christ’s return and the recruitment of missionary personnel by
new agencies (such as the Student Volunteer Movement) that were effectively outside denominational control.
The Keswick Conference in England’s Lake District recruited missionaries; so did the fledgling Moody Bible
Institute of Chicago. German evangelicals had not liked the already existing British leadership of global
evangelicalism; they liked the American ascendancy less. Yet it was the surge in missionary recruitment in this
period before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 that helped to make global evangelicalism the phenomenon it
has become.

Before the early twentieth century (ch. 6) faced the Great War, it witnessed a chain of awakening movements in
Wales and Korea, India and Australia, Ontario and California (the latter being “Azusa Street”). The movements
were essentially one; only geography separated these proto-Pentecostal movements. War, when it came in August
1914, was warmly endorsed by evangelical leaders as a righteous cause. Yet in Europe, North America, and the
Antipodes, the Christian embrace of war would unwittingly contribute to a widespread disillusionment with the
Christian faith in the years following. Non-Western colonies, pressed to send troops to assist the Europeans at
war, now had a further reason to think poorly of “Christian Europe.”

To add to this trouble, the decade following the war witnessed the outbreak of a theological conflict that had
simmered since the pre-war years. Hutchinson and Wolfe do better than some earlier interpreters in showing that
this modernist-fundamentalist conflict was fought out on British and Australian (as well as North American) soil.
They suggestively highlight the linkage between the movements through the career of the Ulsterman W. P.
Nicholson (1876–1959), connected with the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1918–1920) before returning to
ministry in his homeland, and in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The early Inter-Varsity movement,
traceable to 1910 but formally organized in 1923, also played an important role in ensuring that there would be an
ongoing conservative evangelicalism.

In the very same post-war decade, however, in the regions of the world into which a previous generation of
Western missionary recruits had gone, indigenous experimental forms of evangelical Christianity were springing
up; these were “movement-critiques of European Christianity and entirely indigenous” (p. 167). Indigenization
was advanced also by the growing hostility towards Western missionaries in 1930s China and the forced
withdrawal of many Western missionaries from Southeast Asia during the hostilities of a second World War.
It is refreshing to observe that in documenting global evangelical developments since the 1930s (ch. 7), attention is drawn to the far-reaching effects of the East Africa Revival (Balakole), which crossed numerous African political boundaries and still pervades much East African Christian life. This, in addition to the evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham (who, like D. L. Moody before him, established his international credentials in Britain), the 1951 resurgence of the World Evangelical Alliance (renamed World Evangelical Fellowship), and the steady advance of global Pentecostalism into the evangelical mainstream served to make the evangelical movement expansionary in what was otherwise an increasingly secular century. In the matter of the post-WWII resurgence of evangelical biblical scholarship, Hutchinson and Wolfe are keen to make the point that the resurgence was led by a troika: F. F. Bruce, Leon Morris, and I. Howard Marshall, scholars who did their work in research university settings. Today evangelical theological education in the Western world is increasingly at the service of the evangelicalism of the developing world.

If we wish to talk about numbers (ch. 8), impressive global evangelical growth is—as we have heard from other sources—concentrated in the “Global South” (a reference not simply to the sub-equatorial but to the developing world) and associated especially with regions characterized by above-average population growth (p. 221): Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Yet close-up analysis of these regions shows considerable variation from country to country. The parallel story is of the surge of missionary “sending” from regions that we in the West might still consider to be needy. Hutchinson and Wolfe speak of 10,000 Latin American missionaries now working cross-culturally.

The volume concludes with a survey of evangelicalism’s prospects, which in Europe and North America are less sanguine than those in the Global South. Showing a highly impressive grasp of literature reflecting the western evangelical world’s current ferment in face of the challenges of cultural and religious pluralism, the authors see the evangelical future as entailing a simpler articulation of Christian dogma and a lesser emphasis on traditional ecclesiastical structures.

One cannot but be impressed at the range of history, geography, and literature covered by the coauthors. Their blending of insights as Anglophiles drawn from northern and southern latitudes has certainly been a strength. Yet we too often observe traces of disdain for some excesses of American evangelicalism; the volume also periodically singles out Reformed evangelicalism for its perceived intransigence. Lacunae in this admirable survey include central and eastern Europe and (more surprisingly) the post-Mao Chinese church.

Kenneth J. Stewart
Covenant College
Lookout Mountain, Georgia, USA