

Once upon a time "Evangelical" meant either "of the gospel(s)" or "Lutheran." The latter, in contrast to other Christianity, esp. "Reformed," till in 1817 the Prussian L and R churches united into the "Evangelical Church" (E&R which, in USA, joined with the C&Cs to form the UCC, 1958). But between, i.e. in Britain, the term came to mean [477, OxDictXnCh] "the [C of E] school which lays special stress on personal conversion and salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ" [18th c.-]. "Commonly" Evangelicals [of this sort, on both sides of the Atlantic] have upheld "the verbal inspiration and sole authority of Scripture...the near return of Christ...preaching, with a relative minimizing of liturgical worship..." Till less than a century ago this form of WASP religion combined piety and "reform" (social action); after WWI, piety and not reform; after WWII, orthodoxy and not piety.

1. Coming out of secularism in 1934 into "evangelicalism," I went to a college of a denomination formed in the early 1840s specifically against slavery (Wesleyan Methodist Church--the story well documented in the Jan75 POST-AMERICAN: "Wesleyans tested the spirituality of a church by its commitment to reform, but refused to substitute reform for piety." They were, as their founder said, "anti-everything-wrong," which meant slavery, war, economic-social-political corruption--and alcohol.) By the mid-1930s social passion had considerably cooled, and the piety was deeply tinged with "holiness" (modified, often, by the adjective "second-blessing")--a lower-coil (entrail) religion that soon began to yield, in that college through its president, then the denomination's most influential brain, to an upper-coil (cortical, "propositional") religion, viz. fundamentalism (i.e., scribal evangelicalism--hyperlinguistic, with revelation limited to the sacred text called "The Bible" [Apocrypha excluded]), the particular form of intellectualism to which Protestantism is most vulnerable, "book-religion" in the bad sense [cp. rabbinism]. Though I was "into" this, even to the extent of being on the confession committee of the National Association of Evangelicals for United Action (1942), I sweated to retain the values of my earlier stages, secular and enthusiastic [the latter meaning the emphasis on "heart" instead of "head" religion]. Since then I've been layered o'er with a number of additional "consciousnesses," and am happier and sweeter than ever. For decades I've called myself an "evangelical radical" (a religiopolitical identification), "orthodox open" (a cultural identification vis-a-vis other faith-options)--roughly the position of the four-year-old POST-AMERICAN [though it hasn't yet developed cultural implications].

2. Today the editor of an "evangelical" periodical took me to lunch and asked me to define "evangelical"--which explains the existence of this thinksheet. "Jesus is the best news" is what I said first, and it's adequate in the light of my orthodox open, evangelical radical position. But Katherine Hepburn, who is atheist, says the same [meaning Jesus is the only perfect model of being for others]--so my formula can't stand alone! This morning in my devotion I ran across this in Hebrew (Is.1.13): "I won't eat [i.e., can't stomach] iniquity and piety." The moral, even revolutionary, note is essential to any "evangelicalism" that is Jewish-biblical rather than romantic-otherworldly-individualistic [or "Orphic," as I called it in my 1966 debate with B.Graham].

3. Sociologically, as every theology is "contextualized," American "establishment evangelicalism" has pushed the British context of three generations ago. Psychologically, its "consciousness" has included a triplex syndrome of sublimation-repression: anger (from 1912 "The Fundamentals" onward into hostility), fear into anxiety (1930s "Depression" onward), pain into depression (1960s onward: collapse of The American Dream, HPM, global awareness, cultural revolution, economic-political radicalization, WASP decline). The new new breed are "the young evangelicals," reuniting piety and societal change. Increase! Interface "the Hartford Heresies," Lausanne, Chicago, Geneva, New York, Rome....