

**EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY; ITS
HISTORY AND WITNESS: A SERIES
OF LECTURES DELIVERED AT
MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD,
IN THE HILARY TERM, 1911**

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THE HISTORY AND WITNESS OF
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

ITS HISTORY AND WITNESS

A SERIES OF LECTURES DELIVERED AT MANSFIELD
COLLEGE, OXFORD, IN THE HILARY TERM, 1911

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE genesis and purpose of the lectures in this volume will be found explained in the following statement, which was issued in the first instance to the lecturers themselves, and afterwards to those who were invited to hear the lectures delivered:—

“As sequel to a lecture on “The Positive Protestant Idea of Church and Ministry as rooted in Early Christianity,” delivered last November in Mansfield College, a series of lectures will be given on the “Evangelical” idea of Christianity as unfolded in modern times in the history and present influence of various communions, differing in organisation but agreeing in their essential view of the Gospel and Church of Christ. By “Evangelical” is here meant that type of Christian life and truth which regards as primary and determinative, alike for the individual and for the Church, living faith in Christ as all-sufficient mediator of God’s grace. That is, its emphasis falls upon the experimental and personal rather than the sacramental and institutional aspects of Christianity.

“The series will, it is hoped, furnish at once proofs

of spiritual unity amid formal variety and an impressive appeal to history and experience as authenticating "Evangelical" religion. The sphere of this appeal will be the English-speaking peoples, as affording a fairly homogeneous field of study. Further, as regards the various species of Church life dealt with, the aim will be to bring out the contribution of each to the common religious and moral life of the several national units, and of the larger whole which they jointly constitute. For this purpose it has been decided to include all the typical historic communions in which the "Evangelical" spirit has embodied itself, and to treat these as far as possible in the order of their emergence in our national history.

"The standpoint of the series is essentially positive and fraternal. But it should be easily understood that the various lecturers are not to be thought to approve all that is distinctive of any one communion whose providential place in the Kingdom of God and Church of Christ is yet gratefully recognised by those responsible for organising the lectures. Thus, for instance, they are not to be thought to regard as among things indifferent in themselves, still less in relation to the prospects of closer union among Christians, the special sacramental views or usages either of the Baptists or the Society of Friends. The latter may, indeed, by their spiritual record and witness be a standing object-lesson in the truth of the "Evangelical" theory of sacra-

mental grace, as being secondary to that conveyed through the Word of faith. Yet while this consideration goes to the root of the matter, it does not cover all that bears on the being and well-being of the visible Body of Christ.

“More and more it is felt among Churchmen of all types that no one existing order of ecclesiastical polity is complete in itself, and that the only hope of attaining the fulness of Christian life lies in a candid and sympathetic recognition of the positive truth committed to all the living communions of Christ’s people. As a step to this end, this series of lectures is designed ; and it is hoped that even those who belong to the opposite tradition to that termed “Evangelical” may recognise some value in it, at least as a necessary preliminary to the better mutual understanding through which alone reunion can ever be realised. Accordingly, the presence of “Catholics,” no less than “Evangelicals”—to use for convenience terms which neither can wholly concede to the other save in a technical sense—will be heartily welcomed at these lectures.”

This statement speaks for itself. But it may not be out of place here to indicate somewhat more in detail how far the lectures may be regarded as having fulfilled the hopes of their promoters, and the contribution they make towards the great question of Christian reunion. It is the growing importance of this question which led to their inception. In Oxford, as in other places, there are many Christian

people who regard the divisions of the Church with indifference, or who are quite hopeless as to the possibility of bringing about a better state of things. There are others, however, who are painfully alive to the shame and mischief of the present situation, and who see clearly that the Church of Christ must achieve some kind of unity amid diversity if she is ever to do her proper work, or meet the needs of the present age. They understand also that while the exigencies of modern life and thought are giving a new urgency to the problem, they are also providing certain elements necessary to its solution. Historical research is making it less and less possible for men to assume a tone of dogmatic assurance in regard to forms of Church government, and is providing an atmosphere in which those who differ on things ecclesiastical may find it more possible to understand one another.

The careful and sympathetic study of Church history shows how varieties in ecclesiastical form and doctrinal belief arose, not from superfluity of naughtiness and mere love of division, but from the conscientious convictions of good men under the stress of changes in time and circumstance. It shows, too, how many of the positions thus reached became themselves untenable and ceased to be. Others of them, however, had within them the elements of a more enduring life, and appealed to men and women in such a way as to become permanent vehicles of religious experience. Having

stood such a test, and possessing such a justification, they cannot be regarded as altogether outside the Providence and purpose of God. The narrowest judgment will suffer them all to grow together until the harvest, while a more sympathetic view will see in them the appointed means of meeting and satisfying the varied spiritual needs of men. For while men differ as they do in mental outlook and spiritual development, it will be quite impossible to secure a dead uniformity of religious worship or belief. It is possible even to make out a good case for our divisions, as having contributed effectively to the life and progress of the Christian Church. And they may still be made to do so, if it can be shown that they do not necessarily interfere with the real spiritual unity of Christendom. The only unity worth aiming at is one amid and compatible with diversity—a unity of faith, sentiment, experience, and devotion which shall be allowed to express itself in forms and organisations suited to varying degrees of temperament, mental culture, and spiritual progress. Under existing ecclesiastical conditions in the English-speaking world such a unity may be difficult of attainment, but ought not to be impossible. In many parts of the Mission field it exists already, and has resulted in fruitful co-operation. It only needs a better understanding of the causes and meaning of our differences, and a spirit of charity which is content to put first things first and all other things in their