

THE FRACTURED FAMILY

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pathways

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THE FRACTURED FAMILY

Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and ECONI

Alwyn Thomson

INTRODUCTION

ECONI recognises that there are many groups in this society that identify themselves as ‘Christian’. This phenomenon confronts us with the challenge of how we relate to these groups. One response, common in this community, is to categorise and condemn. ECONI rejects this approach. However, ECONI also rejects the naive assumption that with enough ‘dialogue’ the differences will disappear or be seen as things of no consequence.

Self-definition is a legitimate and important exercise, one aspect of which involves passing judgments about the beliefs of others. ECONI’s goal is to understand the point of view of others and, where necessary, to point out our disagreement, even if this results in having to dispute their views or to refuse certain kinds of involvement. However, ECONI is strongly committed to ensuring that any criticism or judgment is made in the context of respect for other people irrespective of their beliefs. At the same time, ECONI also looks for points of agreement and possibilities for co-operation.

An earlier publication, *Beyond Fear, Suspicion and Hostility*, discussed relationships between evangelicals and Roman Catholics.

This second PATHWAYS booklet, *The Fractured Family*, discusses relationships among evangelicals.

Chapter 1, **Fundamentalists**, seeks to correct the false view of fundamentalism common among many today. This requires a brief study of the roots of fundamentalism and the place of this movement within the wider history of evangelicalism.

The historical framework for understanding the origins and nature of fundamentalism is a North American one. While this may not seem to be directly relevant to the situation in Northern Ireland, a knowledge of this framework is a prerequisite for any true understanding of what fundamentalism is and, therefore, for any true understanding of the extent to which the appellation is appropriate to groups in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 2, **Evangelicals**, discusses the nature of evangelicalism in general, suggesting that fundamentalism is best understood as part of the spectrum of evangelicalism. From this it follows that the argument between ‘evangelicals’ and ‘fundamentalists’ is best understood as an argument within the evangelical family.

Chapter 3, **ECONI**, discusses the nature of ECONI’s relationship to other evangelicals in Northern Ireland, including those sometimes known as ‘fundamentalists’.

FUNDAMENTALISTS

INTRODUCTION

In certain circles to be a fundamentalist is to be beneath contempt. Some people can conceive of no greater insult.

Fundamentalists are those practitioners of religion from whom respectable people shy away, identifying them as fanatics and extremists. Fundamentalists are those Moslems who call for the death of Salman Rushdie. Fundamentalists are those Jews who massacre Palestinians at prayer. Fundamentalists are the televangelists of the United States, exploiting the weak and defrauding the state. Fundamentalists are the preachers and marchers of Northern Ireland who proclaim 'Not an Inch' and who despise Catholicism. This is the common perception of fundamentalists. They are considered to be politically reactionary, narrow-minded, intolerant, anti-intellectual, aggressive, uncompromising and sometimes violent.

Despite the widespread use of the term to refer to movements within a number of religious groupings, historically, 'fundamentalism' refers to a movement within American Protestant Christianity in the early part of the twentieth century. It is this movement and its successors that are the subject of this chapter.

To its critics fundamentalism is seen as a monolithic movement. The most extreme examples are used as the basis for the description of the nature of the movement. These examples are then woven together into a comprehensive picture of 'fundamentalism'. Having been so described, fundamentalism is then dismissed as an embarrassing relic of another age not worthy of serious consideration by sensible people.

This superficial and pejorative use of the term is increasingly common. Critics of religion hold 'fundamentalism' up as an example of everything that is bad about religious belief. Those whose religion is of a liberal persuasion label as fundamentalists those whose beliefs are conservative. Even some evangelicals

have begun to use the term in this sense. Embarrassed by their shared theological and historical roots, they define fundamentalism in a way that allows them as 'evangelicals' to distance themselves from 'fundamentalists'.

Sadly, this perception of fundamentalism - which is no more than a caricature - is all too prevalent today.

Howard Marshall, a respected evangelical New Testament scholar, sums up this caricature thus:

“The popular picture of fundamentalists is of people (1) who adhere to the literal interpretation and the supreme authority of some ancient religious book, and who hold fast to it even when to everybody else it seems totally anachronistic; (2) who are aggressive in urging other people to accept their beliefs; (3) and who are fiercely intolerant of anybody who does not share their views.”

This popular picture has gained such currency that even those who once proclaimed themselves fundamentalists are rejecting the label. Their understanding of fundamentalism as a movement for the defence of orthodox and evangelical Christianity has become so peripheral that they believe it is beyond redemption. So Ed Young, outgoing President of the Southern Baptist Convention and one who once would have identified himself as a fundamentalist, has encouraged the SBC to define itself in a new way:

“We are conservative, evangelical Southern Baptists who believe in every fundamental of the faith that is taught in the inerrant Word of God.”²

The irony is that in creating this caricature of fundamentalism the people responsible are doing exactly the thing they criticise 'fundamentalists' for doing - condemning those they neither know nor understand. Fundamentalism so perceived exists more in the minds of its critics than in reality. What is more unfortunate still is the attitude of condescension and the sense of superiority among many of these critics. This seems badly at odds with the kinds of views many such people claim to be advocating. Where is the tolerance, the attempt to

understand, the attempt to communicate? Granted, these attitudes are hardly likely to be reciprocated, but this seems a lame excuse.

The most obvious weakness of this approach is the refusal to take fundamentalism seriously as a theological and historical phenomenon. Yet unless fundamentalism is so understood any discussion of it is at best uncontrolled and at worst prejudiced.

DEFINING FUNDAMENTALISM

ORIGINS

The origins of fundamentalism are much debated. However, Marsden, in his standard work on the history of the movement, discerns four tendencies within evangelicalism which shaped fundamentalism.³

Revivalism. The revivalist campaigns of Dwight L Moody and others, with their passion for the salvation of men and women, their emphasis on the moral demands of Christianity and their commitment to the values of their American heritage, gave fundamentalism a sense of urgency and conviction. It also provided a framework for the fundamentalist defence of that heritage against the encroachments of modernism.

Dispensational Premillennialism. This eschatological scheme became, in time, the theological framework for fundamentalism. It also provided a counter-argument to the liberal idea of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth through social involvement.

The Holiness Movement. If dispensationalism provided the objective element of evangelical faith, the teachings of the holiness movement provided a personal, spiritual and experiential element. While the world was on the way to ruin and destruction, the believer was assured of acceptance and victory.

Modernism. It was opposition to the rise of modernism which led to the combining of these tendencies within evangelicalism and hence to the rise of fundamentalism. At the heart of fundamentalism was this sense of defending the faith against the threat of ‘modernism’ - a threat, not only to biblical faith, but to moral life and traditional Christian values which, in turn, were often identified with American values.⁴

These factors taken together defined the nature of fundamentalism. Its advocates strongly emphasised the individual and personal nature of salvation, denied that Christians had any mandate to work for social or political change and saw themselves as defenders of orthodoxy against renewed threats to the truth.

HISTORY

The label ‘fundamentalist’ seems to have been first used in 1920 with reference to “those who opposed modernism, and espoused the orthodox beliefs in the inerrancy of scripture and opposed the use of historical-critical methods in biblical study.”⁵ Before that, between 1910 and 1915, a series of booklets had been published under the general title *The Fundamentals – A Testimony to the Truth*.

“Their topics laid down the gauntlet for a confrontation with the theology of the Modernists with attacks on higher criticism, evolution, socialism, and modern cults. They affirmed the sinful nature of humanity, the need for regeneration, biblical infallibility, the deity of Christ, the Virgin birth, and the importance of morality.”⁶

While fundamentalist leaders debated on a broad front, one key issue dominated their agenda - the influence of ‘higher criticism’ of the Bible.⁷ Confronted with this new approach to Scripture some – notably B.B. Warfield – tried to maintain an evangelical and professional scholarship. Yet despite their efforts there was a gradual disengagement by evangelicals from the mainstream of biblical scholarship. Moreover, this disengagement affected not only the field of scholarship but had wider implications for the role of evangelicals in society.

By the 1920's, as a result of these and other developments, evangelical Protestantism had acquired a reputation for atavism, anti-institutionalism and anti-intellectualism - a reputation which, to a significant degree, survives to this day.

Fundamentalism, as a consequence of its withdrawal from society, had nowhere to go. While fundamentalists forged their own academic and social institutions, it became increasingly clear that they had no future outside the sub-culture they had created for themselves. However, it also became clear to many that this level of withdrawal could only be considered a denial of evangelical faith.

It was the recognition of this that led to the rise of the 'new evangelicalism' in the years immediately after the second world war.

Advocates of the new evangelicalism maintained their commitment to the theological heart of the evangelical faith but rejected the disparagement of scholarship and the withdrawal from society which characterised fundamentalism.

Thus, while related to fundamentalism, the new evangelicalism was distinct from it. Gradually, its ideas and values spread within American evangelicalism. However, influential as this movement became, it did not spell the end for fundamentalism. Instead, the two tendencies within the evangelical movement developed alongside one another. Indeed, the rise of the new evangelicalism in some ways provided a greater impetus to fundamentalism. The enemy was closer now; the threat greater than ever.

THEOLOGY

The key area of theological concern for fundamentalists was - and remains - the question of the place of the Bible in Christianity. The new critical approaches were premised on the assumption that the Bible was a human book - a record of religious experience, whose expression was shaped by the cultural and religious patterns of the world in which the writers lived. This belief struck at the very heart of evangelical faith.

In contrast, fundamentalists, as with other evangelicals, argued that the Bible should be accepted as inspired by God and authoritative as God's self-revelation. However, while many evangelicals displayed a willingness to adopt and adapt the methodologies of contemporary biblical criticism while rejecting its assumptions, many fundamentalists opposed even this. The very methods themselves were considered to be an assault on the Bible, while those evangelicals who made use of these methods were considered to have compromised in the vital areas of revelation and authority. These fundamentalist convictions have shown themselves in two key areas of concern - the question of the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and the debate over the nature of inerrancy.

These two areas also highlight two of the distinguishing marks of fundamentalism. The first shows the extent to which the issue of biblical authority is linked with matters of biblical interpretation. An affirmation of the authority of Scripture is not sufficient. It must be backed up with a commitment to certain key interpretations. Thus, most fundamentalists would consider it impossible to believe in biblical authority and not be a 'creationist'. It is not so much the Bible which is authoritative as the Bible interpreted in a particular way.

The second area shows the degree of suspicion with which some fundamentalists regard other evangelicals, even when there is a common recognition of biblical authority.⁸ Discussing this phenomenon Mark Noll wrote:

“Evangelical Bible scholars live in Christian communities where fidelity to Scripture is both a badge of honour and an excuse for recrimination. This wider world is one in which dogmatic ‘separatists’ lambaste the inconsistencies of other self-confessed ‘fundamentalists’, who in turn deny the wishy-washiness of ‘conservative evangelicals’, who in their turn snipe at the innovations of ‘progressive evangelicals’, who look down their noses at all of the benighted brethren to their right.”⁹

This raises the question of the extent to which fundamentalism is an attitude more than a theology.

ATTITUDES

It is often claimed or assumed that fundamentalists are anti-intellectual. This is not so.

Fundamentalists are only opposed to a certain way of ‘doing’ biblical and theological studies. For them, biblical study starts with belief in the authority of God’s revelation in Scripture. To that extent they are no more at odds with the mainstream of academic biblical scholarship than most evangelicals.

The distinctive aspect of fundamentalism is the strength of opposition to, and separation from, this mainstream. Fundamentalism has long been known for its opposition to modern presuppositions about the way the Bible should be studied. Perhaps this gives us a clue to understanding the fundamentalist attitude. For fundamentalists are not so much anti-intellectual as anti-modern.¹⁰ Again, evangelicalism generally is anti-modern to some extent, but fundamentalism is characterised by the degree of hostility and the sense of defensiveness. At the same time, insofar as fundamentalism represented a new patterning of conservative Protestantism confronted by a transformed and rapidly transforming society, it was, in the true sense of the word, a radical movement as much as a conservative one.”

This defensiveness of fundamentalism also shows itself in the sphere of politics and society. Fundamentalists are conservative people. However, this conservatism does not always result in active political involvement. Not every American fundamentalist is identified with the Republican Party or the ‘Moral Majority’. Bob Jones, for example, rejects the political project of the New Christian Right:

“A close analytical biblical look at the Moral Majority ...reveals a movement that holds more potential for hastening the church of the Antichrist and building the ecumenical church than anything to come down the pike (sic) in a long time, including the charismatic movement.
“12

However, despite these qualifications, it is generally true to say that fundamentalism can be defined by its opposition to modernity in religion and culture.¹³

An understanding of the nature of fundamentalism leads inevitably to the question of how fundamentalism relates to evangelicalism.

EVANGELICALISM

Who are evangelicals? What is evangelicalism?

The past decades have witnessed a steady growth of this movement, both in the major denominations and in new churches. More recently, evangelicals have risen from relative obscurity to a position of some prominence. In July 1990 George Carey, an avowed evangelical, was chosen to be Archbishop of Canterbury. The *Evangelical Alliance*, an umbrella body representing many different groups, is often asked to comment on matters of political or social concern.

Even the media have recognised this phenomenon, with religious documentaries focusing on the identity and role of evangelicalism. Whether discussing religious education in schools, child abuse, or aspects of social legislation, evangelical views are reported in the press - though sometimes with a certain bemusement.

Clearly, evangelicals have a higher profile now than for many years. Yet there is still a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding about them.

In Northern Ireland, of course, evangelicals have always had a high profile. Significant numbers of people, especially in the Protestant community, identify themselves in this way. Mission halls and little churches turn up among the hedgerows and fields in the country. In the cities and towns evangelical churches of all denominations and none stand side by side.

Yet despite this, many in Northern Ireland still have little understanding of the nature of evangelicalism.

So, who are the evangelicals?

Attempts at defining evangelicalism are many and varied, indicative of the difficulty of the task. There may be a naive assumption on the part of some that it is a coherent movement, easily defined and easily identifiable, but no one who has studied evangelicalism or knows it intuitively from the inside could make this mistake.

Still others do not want to make the effort to understand. Evangelicals of all kinds are lumped together as fundamentalists and their beliefs described in a flawed and misleading way.¹⁴

Yet to understand anything of evangelicalism there are three misconceptions that need to be addressed.

- The misconception that evangelicalism is a coherent group with a single creed or unifying structure.
- The misconception that evangelicalism and fundamentalism are one and the same.
- The misconception that evangelicalism and fundamentalism are discrete movements.

Any attempt to understand the nature of evangelicalism has to recognise both the coherence that enables very diverse groups of people to be so identified and the flexibility that enables evangelicalism to accommodate these very diverse groups.

Writers on evangelicalism have used a number of metaphors to explain its nature. For some, it is a mosaic; for others, a kaleidoscope; recently, it has been compared to a Rubik's cube.¹⁵ Moreover, this diversity does not merely reflect denominational differences. The trends within evangelicalism are trans-denominational, while all kinds of evangelicals can be found in non-denominational groups.

The recognition of this phenomenon is important for this study because 'fundamentalism', however defined, is an integral part of evangelicalism.

Perhaps the simplest approach is to think of evangelicalism as a spectrum. Fundamentalism is an integral part of that spectrum. Moreover, what many often fail to realise is that fundamentalism itself is best thought of as a spectrum. Among fundamentalists there is often a great deal of diversity.

Thus, as noted earlier, while some fundamentalists have been actively involved in shaping the agenda of the 'New Christian Right', others have criticised their actions as compromising fundamentalism.

The field of biblical scholarship, hostility to which is often considered one of the key distinctives of fundamentalism, reflects the same evangelical diversity. One major evangelical publishing

house recently published a work containing contributions from some who would be considered fundamentalist as well as from those who might be considered on the limits of the evangelical constituency.

Sadly, both fundamentalism and evangelicalism have consistently been misunderstood, either because of prejudice or laziness. Fundamentalism belongs with evangelicalism as one expression of evangelicalism. It is this conviction that shapes the argument of the rest of this booklet, which discusses varieties of evangelicalism within Northern Ireland, rejecting the artificial distinction often made between fundamentalism and evangelicalism.

DEFINING EVANGELICALISM

Defining the richly patterned phenomenon that is evangelicalism is no easier than defining fundamentalism or modernism. However, many have tried and have come up with some concise summaries.

Evangelicals are Bible people and gospel people, says John Stott.¹⁶

George Marsden offers a fuller definition. Evangelicals are *“Christians who typically emphasise 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.”*¹⁷

David Bebbington argues that evangelicalism is marked by four key characteristics - biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism.¹⁸

Yet, while different writers offer differing definitions of evangelicalism, there are a number of discernible common themes:

- The supreme authority of Scripture.
- The majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God, and as saviour through his work on the cross.

- The lordship of the Holy Spirit in creating and sustaining Christian life.
- The need for a personal response of faith.
- The necessity of evangelism.
- The importance of the Christian community for Christian life and growth.¹⁹

These convictions serve both to unite evangelicals around a common identity and to distinguish them from other groups.

However, evangelicalism need not be understood solely as involving adherence to a set of shared doctrinal beliefs. Marsden argues that it can be interpreted, not so much as a “category”, but as “a dynamic movement, with common heritages, common tendencies, an identity, and an organic character.”²⁰

This more dynamic approach does justice to the diversity to be found among different groups of evangelicals. It also allows room for that other defining feature of evangelicalism - constant in-fighting.

EVANGELICALISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

While many people assume that evangelicalism in Northern Ireland is uniform, this is far from the truth. Evangelicalism in Northern Ireland reflects many of the same tendencies found elsewhere.

The Presbyterians preserve an evangelicalism with a reformed emphasis, while Reformed or Evangelical Presbyterians preserve it in their own distinctive ways.

The Church of Ireland reflects the Anglican tradition; the Methodists reflect the Wesleyan tradition.

Elim Pentecostal churches are reminders of this century's first wave of pentecostalism, while many of the independent churches - some big, some small - reflect its more recent manifestations.

There are Brethren Assemblies - closed and open, City Mission halls, the Salvation Army, Congregationalists, Baptists, Free Presbyterians.

As well as the churches there are the many voluntary societies - distributing tracts, producing literature, supporting missions, working with young people - all having their own distinctive evangelical ethos.

While these are all evangelical, or have an evangelical dimension, some would have little or no contact with others - often as a matter of deliberate policy.

Hence, those who write or speak about evangelicalism - whether or not they identify with the movement - need to bear in mind the varieties of evangelicalism to be found in Northern Ireland.

ECONI identifies itself clearly as an evangelical movement. So where does ECONI fit within this pattern of evangelicalism? What distinguishes ECONI within the evangelical community? What distinguishes ECONI from other non-evangelical groups that share some of ECONI's concerns?

ECONI AND EVANGELICAL WITNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

ECONI is a single issue movement. The issue in question is the role of evangelical Christians in our divided community - a single issue, but perhaps the most important one facing us as Christian people in Northern Ireland. ECONI's goal is that all our ideologies should be subjected to the test of the Bible and that our lives should be ordered according to its teaching. ECONI's concern is that this has not always been the case.

While a number of individuals and groups have raised broadly similar concerns, ECONI's position is grounded in a distinctively evangelical theological perspective.

It is grounded in a doctrine of Scripture. The Bible is the Word of God - breathed into existence by the Holy Spirit. It is truthful and authoritative.

As a consequence, Christian people, if they are to respond to the Word of God, must be willing to scrutinise all areas of life and to test them against God's truth.

The human traditions that Scripture challenges are not only theological in nature. Human traditions can also take cultural or political forms. These, too, should be tested against Scripture.

See Matthew 22.29; Mark 7.1-13; John 5.39-40; 17.17; Acts 17.11; Romans 15.4; 2 Timothy 3-15-16; Hebrews 4.12

It is grounded in a doctrine of God. God reveals himself in Scripture as Creator, Lord and Judge.

As Creator, God has a claim on us all - a claim that extends to every area of life.

As Lord, God is sovereign in the lives of individuals and in human affairs. Nothing that can happen to us is outside the will of God.

As Judge, God holds us all - believer and unbeliever alike - accountable for all that we do. It is, therefore, imperative that we order our lives according to his Word. God's claim on our lives requires constant self-examination, a testing of all our beliefs and attitudes to see if they honour and glorify him.

See Psalms 82.8; 96.13; 100.3; Isaiah 40.10,28; 43.15; Daniel 4.17; Acts 4.23-30; 17.31; 1 Corinthians 10.31

It is grounded in a doctrine of Humanity. Human beings are fallen, corrupted by sin; human beings are made in the image of God, valued by him.

Thus we have no grounds for dismissing others, either as individuals or as members of a political, religious or cultural group. The only distinction God makes is between believers and unbelievers. All other distinctions are of our own making and can never claim the sanction of God. This is true of the distinction repeatedly made between Protestant and Roman Catholic in our own community.

The biblical position is that all people should be respected, not because the law tells us so, but because each individual is a bearer of the image of God. Biblically, it is indefensible for Christians by their attitudes, actions or words to demean or discount others.

See Genesis 1.26; Psalm 8; Ecclesiastes 7.20; Romans 3.23; 12.14-18; James 3-5-12

It is grounded in a doctrine of Salvation. All human beings are by nature objects of wrath. It is to such that God has offered his gracious gift of salvation in Christ.

In his life, death and resurrection Jesus Christ challenged and defeated every kind of evil. The salvation he achieved is comprehensive and complete. Scripture proclaims him not only Saviour but Lord. He calls men and women not only to believe but to follow. Accordingly, God's people in Northern Ireland, who have received this salvation and become disciples of Jesus Christ, have a responsibility to challenge and overcome evil, whatever its source, whatever its supposed justification. To justify or excuse evil, even as a means to supposedly good ends, is dishonouring to God.

See Isaiah 52.7; John 6.29; 13-13; Romans 12.2; Ephesians 2.3; Philippians 2.12; 1 Timothy 4.16; 2 Timothy 1.8-9; James 2.14; 1 John 4.14

It is grounded in a doctrine of the Church. As God's new community, the people of God have a new Lord, new allegiances, a new hope and a new purpose. The Christian community proclaims the gospel of God in its fullness, and enacts the gospel in its own life and practice. It is a body of people transformed by God. When true to their calling the people of God show that transformation in all of life - including political and social values and attitudes.

See Isaiah 1.17; 58.6-7; 1 Corinthians 1.2; Ephesians 3-10; 4.1-16; Philippians 1.27-28; 1 Timothy 3-15

It is grounded in a doctrine of the Kingdom. Jesus announced that in him God's reign had come. Subsequently, he sent his disciples out to proclaim the reign of God to others, calling them to accept it and to live under it - ordering their lives and their priorities in accordance with its demands.

Christians have submitted to God's rule. They recognise a new sovereign and a new citizenship. All other identities have become secondary and relative. Political allegiance is not wrong in itself, but it becomes wrong when earthly allegiance becomes the sole, or supreme, or even equal allegiance in our lives. Christians cannot live for God and Ulster. Jesus constantly challenged those who followed him to set their priorities. They were given one option - all or nothing.

See Matthew 28.18; Mark 1.15; Luke 9.2,57-62; Philippians 3-20; Revelation 1.5; 17.14

Based on these shared biblical and evangelical principles and a shared concern for evangelical witness in Northern Ireland, ECONI has drawn support from across the evangelical spectrum. Though those involved with ECONI may have differences and disagreements on many issues - some minor and some not so - all are united in their concern that evangelical witness in this community has not been as effective as it should have been, and in their desire that in every respect the lives of God's people in Northern Ireland should reflect their commitment to the glory and honour of God.

ECONI AND THE EVANGELICAL SPECTRUM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

ECONI is well aware that there are other evangelicals in this community who hold different views on some of these matters.

Some argue that the task of the Christian community is to preach the gospel so that men and women will be brought to faith. Anything else is a distraction and is doomed to fail since it does not address the heart of the matter.

However, this view results from a narrowly circumscribed understanding of the nature of the gospel. God's good news is comprehensive - it has implications for all of life. God's people are not called to withdraw from the world but to be a force for good within it. Here, the same biblical principles that underpin ECONI's work are equally relevant. They form the basis of Christian concern for, and involvement with, society.

They point to the truth that the gospel has implications, not only for the individual believer, but also for society as a whole; that the gospel has implications, not only for our future, but also for the present.

Other evangelical Christians share ECONI's concerns over the role of evangelicals in Northern Ireland but are reluctant to identify with it because they are uneasy with the diversity of views ECONI reflects. These are evangelicals who adopt a more separatist stance generally.

While ECONI would like to encourage as many as possible to identify with its work, this is not the most important consideration. What matters is that there are other evangelicals who are equally committed to challenging the failings of evangelicalism in this country.

There is one other view which is in direct opposition to the position of ECONI. This view is best described as a kind of religious nationalism - a position well summed up in the phrase *'For God and Ulster'*. This view is held, sometimes in a quite unreflected way, among many evangelical Christians across the ecclesiological spectrum.

Yet the recognition of this is not a justification for dismissing all such people as sectarian or bigoted. The great majority of these folk are godly and spiritual people, leading exemplary Christian lives in many ways. The story of God's people, both in Scripture and throughout Christian history, is a story of God's mercy and patience with flawed people. When God sees flaws in his people he does not reject them - instead, he remakes them. Persistent disobedience does bring judgement - but the judgement belongs to God. We do, however, have a biblical responsibility to challenge attitudes and beliefs that are dishonouring to God, and religious nationalism, whatever its source, dishonours God.

The most notable feature of this religious nationalist viewpoint is the extent to which the conflict in Northern Ireland is interpreted by religious images, or specifically, by images of religious conflict.

So, a correspondent to a local newspaper writes:

*"...the banning of a gospel meeting proves what to expect under an all-Ireland IRA government, which, by the grace of God, will never come to pass..." "Let us...call on the government to scrap the Anglo-Irish Dictat, the Declaration and any further discussions with a foreign state, and let us go forward with 'For God and Ulster'."*²¹

The *Ulster Bulwark* declares:

"...we are aware that an IRA victory in Ulster would be a victory for Romanism. It would not be very long till we would see the hand of the Roman Hierarchy dictating to us in many aspects of our lives."

*"Our people have said no through the Ballot Box. We also say no through the preaching of the Gospel and in the declaration of the Word of God."*²²

The *Protestant Telegraph* claims:

"The struggle to destroy Ulster Protestantism cannot be viewed in isolation. Ulster is the last bastion of Bible Protestantism in Europe, and as such Ulster stands as the sole obstacle at this time against the great objective of the Roman Catholic See: a United

Roman Catholic Europe. ²³

The *New Protestant Telegraph* repeats the claim:

*“Rome’s unconfessed aim is to detach [Northern Ireland] from the United Kingdom and turn its Protestant majority into a minority, at the same time destroying the United Kingdom as a nation-state.”*²⁴

Moreover, this is only one aspect of a much more sinister scheme:

*“The principles and structures of the Maastricht Treaty are demonstrably Vatican-inspired and Vatican-orientated and represent an already advanced state of a subtly-devised politico-economic ploy to re-invade by stealth and ultimately control the lives and thoughts of the peoples of Europe.”*²⁵

Behind this interpretation lies one crucial conviction - Ulster is the last faithful defender of Protestant truth. Consequently, the violence is interpreted as an assault on Protestantism by the undifferentiated forces of Dublin, Rome and the IRA.

This is no mere matter of politics - eschatological conflicts are being played out in the fields and lanes of Ulster. At peril is not just a community but the future of the Christian gospel itself.

This is an analysis that ECONI firmly opposes as incompatible with true evangelicalism.

- It is wrong to claim that any one country is uniquely special to God. While it can only be a source of great gratitude that God has been so gracious to us in Northern Ireland, God’s blessings have been known in many places and at many times.

There is no biblical warrant for claiming that any one nation has a privileged position before God, or a special place in his plans. The only nation that ever enjoyed such a privilege was Israel. However, in contrast to Israel, the people of God in the New Testament constitute a trans-national community with an identity that transcends the constraints of nationalism or patriotism. In God’s world, Northern Ireland is no more or no less important to God than any other place.

- It is also wrong to identify the Protestant people with the people of God; Protestantism with true Christianity.

Many people seem to use the terms evangelical and Protestant interchangeably. Most evangelicals come from within the Protestant community, but for many others within that community 'Protestant' is simply a label that identifies them politically or culturally. It does not imply that there is any awareness of, or commitment to, the gospel. In this instance evangelicals and Protestants are fundamentally different groups. If evangelicals are Christians, these Protestants are not. They are no different from other unbelievers, they enjoy no special status before God. It is a major error and a dangerous error to introduce such confusion. Unfortunately, some evangelicals do just this.

While some argue that 'Protestant' is being used as a theological term defining those who identify with the principles of the reformers, it is evident that this distinction is, historically, largely untenable; that this distinction is far from clear in the kinds of speeches made on these themes; and that the great mass of unbelieving Protestants do not understand the word to bear this meaning.

- It is also wrong to argue that Northern Ireland should be shaped by the particular ethos of Protestantism.²⁶

The truth is that a Protestant state is not a Christian state - whatever that might be. It is therefore imperative that evangelicals denounce the very notion of a state founded on the views of a religious group. A Protestant state is no more godly than a Catholic state or a secular state. Indeed, in taking the name of God as justification for such a position these individuals risk taking the name of God in vain - the practice of idolatry.

Moreover, this ideology marginalises those citizens in our community who are not Protestant. The consequence is that forty per cent of the population of Northern Ireland is written off as unfit to exercise political power. For if citizenship and political identity are clearly tied to a religious identity, where does this leave those in the community who do not share this religious

identity? How can they be anything other than second class citizens in Northern Ireland? No matter how decently treated, the institutions of the state are a constant reminder that they are aliens.

Scripture could not be clearer - the people of God are **not** to be identified with any religious community, not even the Protestant people of Ulster; the people of God are **not** to be identified with any national group; the land of Northern Ireland is **not** uniquely special to God. The people of God are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. The people of God transcend the identity of religious communities and denominations. No nation can claim God's special favour.

CONCLUSION

Evangelical Christians form a major grouping within this community. This group is, however, deeply divided on a number of matters, not least on the question of the role of evangelicals in Northern Ireland. It is unrealistic to expect evangelical unity -it has not happened before; there is no reason to expect it to happen now.

Yet the challenge for all evangelicals, whatever their point of view, is to commit themselves to ensuring that their lives in all respects are shaped by their calling in Christ and by the teaching of the Word of God. Evangelicals should not be afraid to ask if they have been faithful to this calling, or if they have instead allowed themselves to be conformed to the pattern of this world (Romans 12.2) which comes to expression in the political traditions of this community.

The evangelical community undoubtedly has great potential to be a force for good in our country. Evangelicals are in a position to respond distinctively and constructively.

They can respond distinctively, not for the sake of novelty, but because their convictions are shaped by biblical values and by Christian discipleship.

They can respond constructively, not in a naively optimistic way, but because they are a people of hope whose confidence and trust is in God.

God has been good to us. We have known much of his grace. However, it is important that Christians in this country remember that where there is much blessing there is often much judgement. If God has in the past brought many to faith in Northern Ireland, that is not a reason to presume on God's grace.

There is always the danger that having known God's blessing we become arrogant, presuming on God's grace. But there is no place for spiritual pride, arrogance or complacency among God's people.

Our lives should reflect both this godly fear and humility as we wonder at God's grace to us and consider the holiness that God demands of his people - a holiness that is not just personal but 'political', affecting **all** our values, attitudes and actions.

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NOTES

1. I.H. Marshall, 'Are Evangelicals Fundamentalists?' 7-24 in *Vox Evangelica* XXII (1992) 10
2. Speech to SBC Convention reported in *Christianity Today* (July 18 1994) 61
3. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (London 1980). Also important is Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids 1970).
4. Modernism, like fundamentalism, is a complex and much debated phenomenon. Elsewhere, Marsden has summarised fundamentalist and modernist views thus: "Fundamentalists were especially militant evangelicals who battled against the modernists' accommodation of the gospel message to modern intellectual and cultural trends. Modernists, on the other hand, allowed little room for an authoritative Bible, traditional supernaturalism, or a gospel of faith in Christ's atoning work. In short, they abandoned the essentials of evangelicalism." George Marsden, 'The Evangelical Denomination' vii - xix in George Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids 1984) xii
5. Morris Ashcroft, 'The Theology of Fundamentalism' 31-44 in *Review and Expositor* LXXIX.1 (1982) 32
6. Bill J. Leonard, 'The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism' 5-17 in *Review and Expositor* LXXIX.1 (1982) 12
7. See Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible* (Leicester, 1991)
8. It is worth noting that James Orr, who contributed to *The Fundamentals*, was not a believer in inerrancy and that B.B. Warfield, another contributor, managed to accept both inerrancy and a form of the theory of evolution.
9. Mark Noll, 'Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible' 103-121 in Marsden, *Evangelicalism* 109
10. Or, more accurately, evangelicals, including fundamentalists, oppose late modern or postmodern outlooks while remaining distinctly early modern. As George Marsden notes: "Evangelicalism as a distinct phenomenon was early modern in its origins and hence early modern in its assumptions."

- ‘Evangelicals, History and Modernity’ 94-102 in Marsden, *Evangelicalism* 98. See also Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* 202
11. See Martin Marty, ‘Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon’ 56-68 in Marsden, *Evangelicalism* 58-59
 12. Cited in Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right* (Clarendon 1990).
 13. See Bruce, *Rise and Fall* 182-193
 14. James Barr’s work, *Fundamentalism* (London 1977) is only the most obvious example of this approach.
 15. Cullen Murphy described evangelicalism as a “12-ring show”, while Timothy Smith lists fourteen varieties of evangelicalism. See George Marsden, ‘The Evangelical Denomination’ in Marsden, *Evangelicalism* viii-ix. Derek Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals* (London 1994) 19-24, lists six approaches to the church, six to the world and five to spirituality found among evangelicals which can be combined in a host of different ways.
 16. John Stott, *What is an Evangelical?* (London 1977)
 17. George Marsden, ‘The Evangelical Denomination’ in Marsden *Evangelicalism* x
 18. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s* (London 1989) 2-19
 19. See Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London 1994) 51-80; Kenneth Kantzer & Carl Henry (eds.) *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids 1990) 27-38
 20. George Marsden, ‘The Evangelical Denomination’ in Marsden, *Evangelicalism* x
 21. Letter in *Belfast Telegraph* (23 August 1994) 12 concerning the policing of a republican parade to the City Hall in Belfast.
 22. ‘Bombed, Battered, Bruised: But Not Beaten’ *Ulster Bulwark* 23.3-4 July /August 1993 2
 23. ‘A Call to the Protestants of Ulster’ *Protestant Telegraph* 9 January 1982 6
 24. “The Mass Trick Treaty’ *New Protestant Telegraph* November 1994 3

25. "The Mass Trick Treaty' *New Protestant Telegraph* November 1994
26. Craig's boast in 1932 was that "we are a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people." De Valera's in 1935 was that "since the coming of St Patrick...Ireland has been a Christian and Catholic nation...she remains a Catholic nation." See John Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1979* (Dublin 1980) 48. While the historical circumstances are forgotten, the mentality is as strong as ever. However, neither position can be justified biblically.

THE FRACTURED FAMILY

ALWYN THOMSON

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