BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE DISRUPTION OF EVANGELICALISM

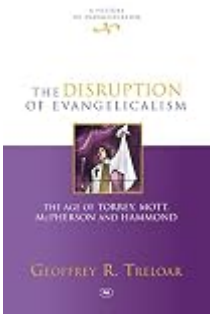
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An excellent book from an excellent series. If you want to understand evangelicalism today; you have to understand where it came from...
Category: Reviews

The Disruption of EvangelicalismÂ by Geoffrey TreloarÂ is both an excellent book in its own right and also an excellent addition to the IVP History of Evangelicalism series. If you are at all interested in Protestant history, or if you would like to understand some of the tensions within contemporary (American) evangelicalism, you really need to read this book.

Before I go on to say something about the book in hand, let me just mention the series as a whole.Â I first came acrossÂ The Global Diffusion of EvangelicalismÂ by Bryan Stanley while researching the history of the modern missionary movement. Since then, I've read the other volumes in the seriesÂ The rise of evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitfield and the Wesleys,Â The rise of evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitfield and the WesleysÂ andÂ The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and MoodyÂ and thoroughly appreciated all of them. The books are all written by respected scholars and contain enough by way of footnotes and references to keep the academics happy, but are accessible enough for the interested non-specialist. Buying the whole series in hardback would be a daunting prospect; but if you can get them from a library, I can't recommend them highly enough.

Though the fifthÂ to be published, The Disruption of EvangelicalismÂ is actually the fourth book in the series chronologically and covers the period from 1900-1940, which is often considered as a low-point in evangelical history - the lull between Moody and Billy Graham.



In concrete terms, the book is a hardback (I hope a paperback will be made available) consisting of just over 330 pages, the last 40 or so of which form the bibliography and index. It will set you back something around Â£20 if you want to get your own copy.

The bulk of the book is divided into three main parts:

1. *Fin de siÃ¨cle*Â (1900-1914)
2. Evangelicals at war (1914-1918)
3. Evangelicalism at the crossroads (1919 - c.1940)

I don't propose to give a detailed overview of the book; there are others who are better qualified than I am to do this, but I want to give four reasons why I think this is an important book and one that people should read.

Firstly,Â the first half of the C20 is often painted as being dominated by a simplistic struggle between fundamentalism and more mainstream evangelicalism, but Treloar paints a more nuanced picture. In this account the majority of evangelical Christians were more concerned with living

faithful lives than becoming involved in controversies. Though there were leaders who took extreme positions, Treloar suggests that the real creativity and theologicalÂ thinking took place at the centre, not at the extremes.

Secondly, the whole section on the First World War is excellent.Â The Great War is a mystery to contemporary readers. The reasons for the war are complex and hard to understand as is the fervent support it received from the populace, despite the horrors of life at the front. In a sensitive and undramatic fashion, Treloar examines the reasons why evangelicals were willing to go along with the war. That being said, I'd have appreciated more detail on how German evangelicals responded - the book is somewhat biased towards the anglophone world.

Another strong point about the book is its coverage of the so-called "Great Reversal" the movement away from social action by evangelicals during the inter-war years. Treloar convincingly (to me, at least) argues that there was no such movement. As this is an important issue in mission, it's worth quoting from the conclusion of the chapter.

> *Commitment to social ministry abided because the underlying dynamic of evangelicalism did not change: contemporary evangelicals at large continued to think that Christian beliefs and values should shape social attitudes and behaviour in their communities. However, the interwar decades were not a period of great evangelical social and political attainment. For all of their commitment and effort, the evangelicals of this time won no lasting reforms of moment and failed to reverse the disturbing cultural trends of the day.*

My final reason for promoting this book is that it covers an important, but neglected, period of history. Evangelicals tend to have a particularÂ approach to the study of church history; we focus on the Reformation and the C18; Â the eras which shaped a great deal of evangelical theology and our approach to Scripture. However, we pay less attention to modern history which has had just as great an impact on evangelical social attitudes. In a world where Jim Wallis and Franklin Graham co-exist as spokespeople for strands of American evangelicalism and the much of the rest of the world looks on with bafflement at US evangelical support for President Trump, it helps to know understand something of the origins of such vastly different approaches to life and faith.

I received an electronic copy of this book in return for this review; however I have not allowed the generosity of the publishers to influence what I have written.Â