

I. THE RECEPTION GIVEN *EVANGELICALISM IN MODERN BRITAIN* SINCE ITS PUBLICATION IN 1989

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A 2005 Web visit to www.amazon.com revealed that, approaching eighteen years since it was first published, David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989) was still in print.¹ Moreover, this online bookshop sometimes scans the entire texts of books and, from within this e-collection, it identified no fewer than ninety-seven other books that cite Bebbington's landmark study.² Authors so listed include Alister McGrath, John Stott, Callum Brown, Pamela Walker, David Hempton, Sue Morgan, D. A. Carson, Bruce Hindmarsh, Hugh McLeod, Mark Noll, Doreen Rosman, Doug Sweeney, George Hunsinger, Linda Woodhead, Adrian Hastings and John

1. The first edition of the book was D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

Technically, there has been no 'second edition' in terms of a revised text, but 'first edition' is used in this chapter to refer to the original publication of the book by Unwin Hyman. The book is currently in print with Routledge, which has thus far reprinted it five times: 1993, 1995, 1999, 2000 and 2002.

2. See <<http://www.amazon.com>>, accessed 24 Oct. 2005. I am grateful to the students from my course in the spring 2005, BITH 677 Modern British Religious History, who helped to gather sources for this study: Anna Thompson (who did double duty as my teaching assistant), Todd Thompson, Robert Wagner and Jeremy Wells.

Wolffe. That list of ninety-seven authors does not come anywhere near to mapping the whole terrain to be covered when exploring this theme: the guest list to write this article on the reception of Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* turned out to be as large as that for the reception at a royal wedding!

If we begin at the beginning, to highlight another set of germane sources, I have also read all the reviews I could find (forty-four in total) of the first edition of Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. As reviewers are wont to do, they make a wide range of minor complaints that accumulate across this literature. Alan Munden, for instance, claimed to have found a misplaced footnote on page 211, although I have not been able to work out what he means.³ Indeed, one of the more delicious aspects of my current task is that it provides the rare opportunity to review the reviewers, whose usual position, perched up where they are unanswerable, is often so infuriating to authors. How solemnly should we receive the cavils of another reviewer, for example, who persistently refers to the author of the work under his consideration as 'Bevington'?⁴ Or who consistently has 'innerancy' for 'inerrancy'?⁵ Most reviewers felt that some aspect or other of the subject had been unjustly neglected, and therefore one could compile quite a list of alleged lacunae from these reviews. Notably, there were recurring concerns that David Bebbington had given insufficient attention to the providence of God and/or the principality of Wales.

Nevertheless, in general terms, the book was remarkably well received. Derek Tidball enthused, 'This is one of the most significant books I have read in a long time.'⁶ Summary statements of admiration emphasized that it would be an obligatory text for the foreseeable future. Callum Brown claimed that it was 'little short of an indispensable guidebook for the social historian'.⁷ Robert Clouse pronounced in the *American Historical Review* that it should be 'required reading', and Ian Sellers also used a similar phrase.⁸ John Wolffe warned in *History* that 'no one can now be regarded as a serious student of evangelicalism unless they have read this book'.⁹ Colin Matthew declared that Bebbington had 'written what will be the standard history of the subject for many years

3. Alan Munden, *Anvil* 6.3 (1989), pp. 287–288.

4. Arthur Bennett, *Churchman* 103.3 (1989), pp. 276–277.

5. Dave Roberts, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain', *Today* (June 1990), pp. 33–34.

6. Derek Tidball, *Third Way* (June 1989), p. 27.

7. Callum G. Brown, *Scottish Economic and Social History* 10 (1990), p. 100.

8. Robert G. Clouse, *American Historical Review* 96.1 (Feb. 1991), pp. 165–166; Ian Sellers, *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings* 47 (Feb. 1990), pp. 133–134.

9. John Wolffe, *History* 75 (1990), pp. 346–347.

to come'.¹⁰ And so it went on. Reviewers were universally impressed by the extensive research on display. A surprisingly high number of them observed in a staggered tone that the book had some seventy-five pages of endnotes.¹¹ The liberal churchman David L. Edwards found this effort not only meticulous but downright heroic, marvelling at Bebbington's ability to quote 'the tracts, the magazines and the conference reports which must have been considerably less than fascinating to read through'.¹² Despite all this, most reviewers seemed to be unaware of just how influential Bebbington's book would become. The reviewers who came just a few years later than 1989 seem to have become bolder. A review in 1991 was already referring to it as 'David Bebbington's classic study'.¹³ One from 1992 pronounced, in a stronger version of Callum Brown's earlier claim, 'this book can fairly claim to have made itself indispensable'.¹⁴ By 1993, David Bundy was using the much-coveted adjective 'magisterial'.¹⁵ A decade on, Bebbington's 'magisterial study' was being used in the *American Historical Review* as a gauge by which to judge new works.¹⁶

This chapter on the reception of *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* is the first in a volume primarily concerned with rethinking Bebbington's claim that evangelicalism began in the 1730s. This question was not a primary preoccupation of the original reviewers of *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, but it was a concern of a handful of them. It must be said that this point was often raised by reviewers whose own confessional commitments loomed large—indeed most reviewers who made this point were writing for the journals of theological seminaries or religious denominations. Ian Rennie wrote in *Crux*, a journal whose very name bears witness to Bebbington's crucicentrism and is published by Regent College, an evangelical institution, 'it would have been helpful if rather than being assumed, the continuities of evangelicalism with the previous ages of orthodox Christian vitality had been spelled out in even a

10. H. C. G. Matthew, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 41 (Oct. 1990), pp. 765–766.

11. Alastair Durie, e.g., observed in wonder that 'there is virtually a second book in the seventy-six pages of notes', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 11.1 (spring 1990), pp. 60–62.

12. David L. Edwards, 'Evangelical Varieties', *Church Times*, 17 Feb. 1989.

13. C. Peter Williams, *Themelios* 16.3 (Apr.–May 1991), pp. 34–35.

14. M. J. D. Roberts, *Journal of Religious History* 17 (June 1992), p. 108.

15. David Bundy, *Asbury Theological Journal* 48 (autumn 1993), pp. 79–80.

16. Kenneth Brown, 'Europe: Early Modern and Modern', *American Historical Review* 108.1 (2003), p. 923.

brief page or two'.¹⁷ That point has been made in the subsequent interaction with Bebbington's work as well. For example, Timothy George employed Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism in a 1999 article in *Christianity Today*, but with the caveat 'While such a list is helpful in pointing out major emphases, it can also obscure the basic continuities linking evangelicals with other orthodox Christians on such key doctrines of the faith as the Holy Trinity and the classic Christology of the early church.'¹⁸ D. A. Carson had also made the same point in his 1996 book *The Gagging of God*.¹⁹ To return to the original reviews, David Bundy suggested in the *Asbury Theological Journal* that the Caroline divines represent more of a bridge between the Puritans and the evangelical Anglicanism of Wesley than Bebbington's work indicated. Donald MacDonald warned readers of the *Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* that Bebbington's presentation of a radical discontinuity between Puritanism and evangelicalism was 'controversial'.²⁰ Diana Butler laid particular stress on this point in her review in *Anglican and Episcopal History*:

There are a few weaknesses as well. Most notably, one has the impression that Evangelicalism was created out of nothing in the 18th century. A brief mention of the precursors of the movement (for example, Pietism, Puritanism, and medieval reform movements) would be helpful to the reader.²¹

Other reviewers for confessional reasons emphasized continuity with what preceded evangelicalism. Thus, Gary Williams welcomes a historical account of evangelical identity that makes Wesleyanism more marginal and Reformed traditions more central.²² Some might be tempted to contrast Bebbington's 'evenhanded scholarly approach' with such over-riding con-

17. Ian S. Rennie, *Cruce* 25.3 (Sept. 1989), pp. 39–40.

18. Timothy George, 'If I'm an Evangelical, What Am I?', *Christianity Today* 43.9 (9 Aug. 1999), p. 62.

19. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 450.

20. Donald M. MacDonald, *Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (Aug. 1992), pp. 179–180.

21. Diana Butler, *Anglican and Episcopal History* 59 (Dec. 1990), pp. 522–527.

22. Garry J. Williams, 'Was Evangelicalism Created by the Enlightenment?', *Tyndale Bulletin* 53.2 (2002), pp. 283–312 (p. 312). Reprinted in this volume. See also, from a different perspective, Roy Wallis, 'Against the Current of the Age', *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (26 May 1989), p. 19.

fessional concern.²³ However, as postmodern theorists remind us, none of us observes from a neutral vantage point, and Bebbington was ahead of the curve. The back cover of the first edition states, 'David Bebbington writes as a participant observer, for he is a Baptist deacon and lay preacher.' Deprived of this exposé, reviewers tended just to quote that sentence without comment in stunned amazement at a British Baptist with an academic position at a secular university testifying so brazenly.²⁴

When surveying the reception of Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* since 1989, what immediately stands out as a truly remarkable achievement is the extraordinary way that its definition of evangelicalism has become the standard one. The Bebbington quadrilateral, of course, as anyone interested in this chapter must surely already know, identifies four characteristics that mark evangelicals: *conversionism*, *activism*, *biblicism* and *crucicentrism*.²⁵ The reception for his book must have been exceeding abundantly above all that even Bebbington himself could have asked or imagined.

Certainly the original reviewers were not generally aware of the significance of this achievement. Many of them did not refer to it at all. Others simply cited it as delineating the scope of this particular study with no hint that it might have a more general utility. Some were actually a bit derogatory about it. Michael Watts limited his reflections on the quadrilateral to the opinion that it was expressed 'inelegantly'.²⁶ In a similar vein, Arthur Skevington Wood dubbed it 'ponderously'.²⁷ And I must confess that when I turned up in Stirling in the early 1990s as a research student, I began my reply to David's question regarding what I thought of his book with the penetrating observation that I found 'crucicentrism' to be an ugly word. John Kent, in a way that has become increasingly fashionable, wondered if 'the word "Evangelical" has become too vague to be useful'.²⁸ Others expressed a kind of cautious or non-committal welcome. The review in the *Churchman*, for example, merely said, 'The opening chapter

23. Bundy, *Asbury Theological Journal*, pp. 79–80.

24. See Desmond Bowen's review, *Victorian Studies* 33.3 (spring 1990), pp. 505–507.

25. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 5–17.

26. Michael Watts, *English Historical Review* 107.424 (July 1992), pp. 747–748.

27. Arthur Skevington Wood, 'The Evangelical Factor', *Methodist Recorder*, 20 Apr. 1989. As far as I can tell, Wood has the unique distinction of having reviewed the book twice. See his review in *Evangelical Quarterly* 63.4 (Oct. 1991), pp. 360–361.

28. John Kent, 'Evangelicals and Evangelicalism', *Expository Times* 101 (Oct. 1989), pp. 24–25.

on evangelical qualities deserves close study.²⁹ Donald M. MacDonald simply declared that ‘we cannot quarrel’ with this definition.³⁰ Ian Rennie conceded, ‘While detailed study could point out variations within these themes, the author is undoubtedly correct in identifying these abiding themes.’³¹ Out of this pool of forty-four reviews, the number of reviewers who seemed to come anywhere close to grasping what Bebbington had achieved in this area was certainly fewer than five. David Bundy is among this perceptive handful. He wrote:

This functional definition of Evangelicalism allows Bebbington to provide an evenhanded scholarly approach to the range of phenomena normally understood as Evangelicalism and helps him avoid the ideological pitfalls into which many American scholars fall. This phenomenological approach cannot be too highly praised.³²

A particularly insightful appreciation was made by John Wolffe in the journal *History*:

His book is especially helpful in presenting and applying a working definition of evangelicalism that represents a satisfactory middle course between the theological innocence of some social historians and the excessive ideological rigour of party theologians. Bebbington is thus able to explore the internal diversity of the phenomenon while maintaining overall coherence.³³

The real story of the reception of Bebbington’s quadrilateral, however, comes not with the reviewers, but when others have needed a working definition of evangelicalism in order to delineate the scope of their own studies. In this area, Bebbington has developed a near monopoly position. Even those dissatisfied with the quadrilateral who wish to see it replaced approach their work as if they have taken on the Herculean task of vanquishing a hydra whose ugly heads reappear as fast as you can cut them off. D. A. Carson, for example, is well aware that Bebbington’s four characteristics ‘have been the most frequently quoted’.³⁴ Many other sources engage in much hand-wringing and hedging, emphasizing that evangelicalism is a complex and diverse

29. Bennett, *Churchman*, pp. 276–277.

30. MacDonald, *Monthly Record*, pp. 179–180.

31. Rennie, *Crux*, pp. 39–40.

32. Bundy, *Asbury Theological Journal*, pp. 79–80.

33. Wolffe, *History*, pp. 346–347.

34. Carson, *Gagging of God*, p. 449.

phenomenon difficult to define. Nevertheless, when one examines carefully what has been said in such discussions it is generally noticeable that, in the midst of all these declaimers, the Bebbington quadrilateral is the only definition that has actually been offered. This is the approach taken, for example, in a 1995 article by Paul Galloway.³⁵ This is also true of two articles that appeared in *Christianity Today*.³⁶

The fact that *Christianity Today* is in the habit of reaching for Bebbington's definition (George and Yancey are both editors) is itself indicative of its astounding success. *Christianity Today*, after all, was already considered by many to be *the* authority on evangelicalism back before Bebbington had even been baptized as a believer. Such ironies abound. Ian Randall and David Hilborn, in a study of the Evangelical Alliance in Britain, published in 2001, declare at the outset that they are using the quadrilateral to define evangelicalism.³⁷ One presumes, however, that in its 143 years of history before the arrival of Bebbington's seminal study, the Evangelical Alliance must have had some working definition of evangelicalism of its own. Bebbington's book was sometimes reviewed alongside Kenneth Hylson-Smith's *Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1734–1984*, which also appeared in 1989. In his 1997 study, however, Hylson-Smith had accepted the quadrilateral, thus obviously finding Bebbington's 1989 study of evangelicalism more helpful on this point than his own.³⁸

It would be tedious to list all of the works that have used Bebbington's definition to explain their own use of the term 'evangelical'—not to mention the fact that any boast that such a list was exhaustive would in all likelihood quickly be disproved by other scholars who identified additional titles. It is, for example, the definition accepted by the two major works of reference works containing biographies of evangelicals that have appeared since 1989, Donald Lewis's *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (1995) (the fact notwithstanding that Lewis seemed to find the quadrilateral potentially problematic in some ways when he reviewed the book in *Fides et historia*) and my own *Biographical*

35. 'Evangelicals: Groups Defy a Simple Definition', *Post and Courier* (Charleston, S. C.), 11 June 1995.

36. George, 'If I'm an Evangelical', p. 62; Philip Yancey, 'A Quirky and Vibrant Mosaic', *Christianity Today* (June 2005), pp. 37–39.

37. Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), p. 2.

38. Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, vol. 2: 1689–1833 (London: SCM, 1997), p. 183.

Dictionary of Evangelicals (2003).³⁹ John Wolffe identified the quadrilateral as the common, working definition for a collaborative effort he had edited (1995).⁴⁰ My former colleague Mark Noll has said in print often enough (in these precise words) that Bebbington's is 'the most serviceable general definition' of evangelicalism, but I shall not risk embarrassing him by giving a grand total.⁴¹

Derek Tidball affirmed in 1994 of Bebbington's definition, 'His suggestions have met with a ready response from across the spectrum of evangelicals and has quickly established itself as near to a consensus as we might ever expect to reach.'⁴² Tidball is a particularly credible witness to make such a statement, since he is as well placed in British evangelicalism personally as one could hope for. In addition to his long service to the Evangelical Alliance, he is currently the chairman of its council, he is also the principal of the London School of Theology (formerly London Bible College), and has served as the chair of British Youth for Christ, as a speaker at the Keswick Convention, and much else. Other tributes to the triumph of the quadrilateral include that of the authors of *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide* (1999), who concede, 'In recent years, those with a normative bend reached a consensus around a set of convictions offered by the British scholar David Bebbington.'⁴³ A general, online encyclopedia also uses Bebbington's quadrilateral for its entry on evangelicalism, identifying it as 'the most common definition'.⁴⁴ Such dominance led Reg Ward to begin his 2004 chapter on 'Evangelical Identity in the Eighteenth Century' in his own inimitably arch and waggish way:

The title which I have been given might well be thought otiose, for it is an orthodoxy among many of us that the whole matter was clarified long ago by our good friend

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39. Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), vol. 1, p. xix; Donald M. Lewis, *Fides et historia* 22 (winter–spring 1990), pp. 103–105; Timothy Larsen (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), p. 1.
40. John Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780–1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), p. 4.
41. For examples, see Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 185; *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.
42. Derek Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of the Modern Movements* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), p. 14.
43. Robert J. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), pp. 6–7.
44. See <<http://www.nationmater.com>>, accessed 24 Oct. 2005.

David Bebbington; indeed the famous Bebbington Quadrilateral has become the most quoted sentence in the whole literature and was for long virtually the only beacon the suffering student had to distinguish men walking like trees in the gloom (Mark 8:24).⁴⁵

Indeed, Bebbington's definition is now receiving the ultimate compliment of being cited without acknowledgment, as if it is not one scholar's opinion but simply the truth we all know. K. Theodore Hoppen, for example, in his 1998 volume in the influential New Oxford History of England series, simply slipped it in without a citation, 'Stressing conversion, activism, the Bible, and the atoning death of Christ upon the cross, Evangelicals . . .'⁴⁶ When *Time* magazine did its cover story on 'The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America' in 2005, its definition of evangelicalism was clearly recognizable as a watered-down version of the quadrilateral.⁴⁷ In one of the more interesting interactions with Bebbington's book, the Canadian sociologist Sam Reimer, following a lead set by historian George Rawlyk, has even done research that empirically verifies the validity of the quadrilateral. Having done 118 interviews in 'the evangelical subculture', Reimer discovered that 'These four components are emphatically upheld in nearly all the interviews.'⁴⁸ Bebbington's four pillars of evangelicalism have no rival anywhere near as influential or popular and are unlikely to be replaced by an alternative structure any time soon.

Now, having cleared all that ground (questions of chronological scope and definition were in fact merely necessary preliminaries), we can get on

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45. W. R. Ward, 'Evangelical Identity in the Eighteenth Century', in Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 11.
46. K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846–1886* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 436. Hoppen does, however, cite Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* at another point on the same page.
47. David Van Biema, *Time* (7 Feb. 2005), p. 34: '[I]ts members share basic commitments: to the divinity and saving power of Jesus, to personal religious conversion, to the Bible's authority and to the spreading of the Gospel'.
48. Sam Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide: The Conservative Protestant Subculture in Canada and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 43; G. A. Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). Rawlyk uses the quadrilateral, affirming that Bebbington's arguments for it are 'persuasive' (pp. 9, 227).

to what Bebbington was actually doing in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, namely offering an ambitious attempt to connect the history of evangelicalism to broader currents in intellectual and cultural history in British society as a whole. He argued that British evangelicalism had been shaped, consecutively, by the Enlightenment (as exemplified in John Wesley and the first generation of evangelicals), Romanticism (as exemplified in the Keswick Convention and the nineteenth-century Holiness movement) and modernism (as exemplified in Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group and then the charismatic movement). Many reviewers thought that some of Bebbington's evangelical readers, thinking of their movement as one that handed down doctrines unaltered from generation to generation, would find these claims regarding change over time due to wider cultural forces unsettling. Grant Wacker, for example, indicated that Bebbington's thesis might come as a shock, 'especially if one believes, as many evangelicals do, that the apostle Paul was just Billy Graham with a Greek accent'.⁴⁹ The liberal churchman David L. Edwards noted gleefully, 'That is dynamite for Evangelicals who have been accustomed to thank God that they are not as the Catholics, with their takeover of pagan ceremonies, or (even worse) the liberals, with their submission to contemporary trendiness.'⁵⁰ Yet just as when they experience Hollywood films, it seems much easier to find evangelicals who assume that other evangelicals will be offended than to find ones that feel personally affronted. For example, the review in as conservative a venue as Dallas Theological Seminary's *Bibliotheca sacra* was an entirely favourable one, with the author, John D. Hannah, declaring unapologetically, 'Bebbington's thesis that evangelicalism, despite its self-perception of antiquity, is a modern form of Christianity with its own contextualized forms, values, and perceptions, is insightful.'⁵¹

Unease can be found occasionally, however. David Gillet reviewed the book as a self-declared evangelical for the *Church of England Newspaper*. He apparently was persuaded by Bebbington's arguments in some measure, but his imaginings of concerns that evangelicals might have seemed to be a refracted way of expressing some of his own reactions:

To many this will come as a surprise as evangelicals normally blame the Enlightenment (somewhat justifiably) for the kind of rationalism that, step by step, squeezes God out of humanity's view of the world. . . . Many of his conclusions will

49. Grant Wacker, 'A British Panorama', *Christianity Today* 34 (5 Feb. 1990), pp. 62–64.

50. Edwards, 'Evangelical Varieties', p. 6.

51. John D. Hannah, *Bibliotheca sacra* 151.602 (Apr.–June 1994), p. 256.

strike some evangelicals as startling . . . As evangelicals consider themselves to be ‘biblical people’ many find it uncongenial to think of secular culture having such a pronounced effect on the development of our message. . . . This book argues further that we are children of our culture to such a degree that we modify the very content and stance of our message . . . I want to say much more on the relationship between the providence of God and the meeting of gospel and culture . . .⁵²

Peter Wortley, writing in the *Baptist Times*, said that these connections were ‘disturbing’, but he was careful to add that they might nevertheless be true.⁵³ Donald M. MacDonald, writing in the *Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, rather transparently accepts all the cultural connections Bebbington made for theological positions MacDonald did not adhere to, but questioned them whenever they touched upon his own beliefs. Thus, he saw Bebbington as having nailed brilliantly Edward Irving, Keswick holiness, and the nineteenth-century premillennial movement, but found him to be wrong about the discontinuity with Puritans, the way that cultural forces shaped the original evangelical revival (which is better viewed, he asserted, as ‘primarily due to an outpouring of God’s Spirit’), the literal, personal return of Christ, and the inerrancy of the Bible. Still, MacDonald ends his review endearingly with the observation ‘No doubt the rather superficial criticism I have offered betrays my own prejudices but at least I was made to think!’⁵⁴ Likewise, the sole complaint made in a notice in the *Reformed Review* was that the charismatic movement should not be described as ‘renewal’.⁵⁵ The *Criswell Theological Review*, also apparently not finding the charismatic movement and cultural modernism a happy ending, suggested that the book should have been called ‘The Rise and Fall of Evangelicalism in Britain’.⁵⁶

Scholars sometimes felt that Bebbington had linked cultural forces to the history of evangelicalism in a suffocating manner. William Sachs, in a review published in the *Journal of Religion*, claimed:

52. David Gillet, ‘What Is an Evangelical?’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 31 Mar. 1989.

53. Peter Wortley, ‘The Story of Evangelicals—and Our Uncertain Roots ...’, *Baptist Times*, 12 Oct. 1989.

54. MacDonald, *Monthly Record*, pp. 179–180.

55. Harry Buis, *Reformed Review* 46 (spring 1993), p. 246.

56. John Powell, *Criswell Theological Review* 6 (spring 1993), pp. 336–338.

Bebbington does not believe Evangelicals triumphed over their circumstances.

He endows contextual forces with the power to circumscribe religious forms.

. . . Even faithful initiative could not overcome the forces of context.⁵⁷

Likewise Ian Sellers referred in the *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings* to Bebbington's 'own distinctive (some would say obtrusive) philosophy of history which is a species of cultural determinism'.⁵⁸ A related critique was that Bebbington did not demonstrate how evangelicalism had influenced the wider culture as well as having been changed by it; this despite the fact that he had asserted in the first paragraph of the preface, 'In the mid-nineteenth century [evangelicalism] set the tone of British society.'⁵⁹ For example, in a review in the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, David Smith observed after presenting Bebbington's views on the impact of wider trends on evangelicalism, 'These points are well made, although it is not altogether clear how a movement so profoundly shaped by successive cultural waves can then be said to have "remoulded" society in its own image.'⁶⁰ Colin Matthew, in a very thoughtful and astute review, likewise remarked, 'Indeed the author rather surprisingly sees the process as one way.'⁶¹ A popular traditional British comic song is 'The Vicar of Bray'. Its lyrics recount how the vicar lives through a whole series of contradictory policies as new monarchies implement opposing views on churchmanship, theology, politics and liturgy. The vicar promptly adopts each one accordingly, revealing in the chorus his one unalterable conviction: 'And this is law, I will maintain unto my dying day, Sir. / That whatsoever King may reign, I will be the Vicar of Bray, Sir!' Does Bebbington present evangelicalism as the Vicar of Bray? Certainly not. The much-quoted quadrilateral is precisely intended to identify the immutable marks of evangelicalism's core values that continue to persist while forms, emphases and articulations change. Nevertheless, many would have liked to have heard more from Bebbington's book about how the evangelical Vicar of Bray denounced changes for the worse and fostered changes for the better as well as how he adapted to changes from without.

57. William Sachs, *Journal of Religion* 72.1 (Jan. 1992), pp. 114–116.

58. Sellers, *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, pp. 133–134.

59. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. ix.

60. David Smith, *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 8 (autumn 1990), pp. 133–134.

61. Matthew, *Journal of Theological Studies*, pp. 765–766. See also Bruce Guenther, *ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University* 19 (spring 1991), pp. 123–125.

Such a critique, however, must not be allowed to take on undue proportion. Many reviewers were awed by the audacity, bravery and mammoth scope of what Bebbington achieved in showing how cultural movements had influenced evangelicalism across 250 years: to ask him to have shown the reverse as well is to demand considerably more than we should expect from any one scholar, let alone one book. To allow such a critique too much room is also to forget how unfashionable both religious history and intellectual history were in British academic circles in the 1980s. As David Hempton rightly observed, 'Bebbington boldly asserts, as against a quarter of a century of Marxist scholarship, that the main agent of change within Evangelicalism is neither economic nor political, but ideological and cultural.'⁶² It should also be emphasized that many reviewers were persuaded by the connections Bebbington made. A review in the *Canadian Journal of History* judged that Bebbington had made 'a compelling case' for the links with the Enlightenment.⁶³ Alan Sell confessed that he was persuaded in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, as did M. J. D. Roberts in the *Journal of Religious History*.⁶⁴ Albion Urdank affirmed in the *Journal of British Studies*, 'He insists convincingly that John Wesley's enthusiasm was suffused with the rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment, despite the fact that scholars have commonly thought of evangelicalism as its antithesis.'⁶⁵

Nevertheless, some reviewers suspected that, although he was on to something, Bebbington had overplayed his hand. A review in the *Mid-America Theological Journal* spoke for many: 'The author overstates his arguments about Enlightenment and Romantic influences on evangelicalism, but they stand as his most original and provocative contributions.'⁶⁶ Several reviewers specifically pointed to John Wesley's belief in 'the power of witchcraft' as revealing that this evangelical leader was also out of sync with the Enlightenment in some ways.⁶⁷ Hugh McLeod articulated this critique in general terms in the *Journal of Modern History*.

62. David Hempton, *Christian Arena* (Dec. 1989), pp. 33–34. This same point was made in another review: Roger Brown, *Journal of Welsh Ecclesiastical History* 7 (1990), pp. 70–71.

63. Malcolm Greenshields, *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d'histoire* 35 (Aug. 1990), pp. 267–270.

64. Alan P. F. Sell, *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (Apr. 1993), pp. 200–203; M. J. D. Roberts, *Journal of Religious History*, p. 108.

65. Albion M. Urdank, *Journal of British Studies* 30.3 (July 1991), p. 341.

66. James A. Patterson, *Mid-America Theological Journal* 17 (1993), p. 114.

67. R. Brown, *Journal of Welsh Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 70–71.

My only major criticism of Bebbington's work would be that the reasons for these changes are explored too briefly and dogmatically. . . . In the nineteenth century romanticism is made to explain too much; and in the twentieth century a similarly exaggerated emphasis is placed on the repercussions of the modernist movement in literature and the arts.⁶⁸

Weighty reviewers such as David Hempton, John Wolffe and Desmond Bowen expressed some unease that categories that are 'dangerously imprecise' such as Romanticism were being brandished about in 'somewhat monolithic fashion' or 'used very loosely'.⁶⁹

Another interlocking critique was a sense that Bebbington had made the story too much a top-down one, thereby overemphasizing intellectual elites. Michael Watts, in comments that seem to betray a somewhat patronizing view of evangelicals, declared that Bebbington had 'exaggerated the rationality of his subject'.⁷⁰ Ian Sellers complained, 'there is a marked preoccupation here with the upper echelons of society: popular evangelicalism is virtually excluded'.⁷¹ Hugh McLeod made the same point in more measured language: 'the more plebeian forms of Evangelicalism such as Primitive Methodism or Pentecostalism, seem a bit neglected'.⁷² David Hempton went one step further by actually calling into question the degree to which popular culture is changed by elite trends, suggesting that work by some social historians indicated that popular belief and practice are 'stubbornly impervious to influence from above and from without'.⁷³

Having said all that, many reviewers recognized that Bebbington had delivered so much more than one could have expected in a study of the history of evangelicalism. His book was so much more ambitious, sophisticated and intellectually rigorous than traditional church history. David Bebbington had brilliantly reconnected the history of Christianity with other historical

68. Hugh McLeod, 'Varieties of Victorian Belief', *Journal of Modern History* 64.2 (June 1992), pp. 321–337.

69. Hempton, *Christian Arena*, pp. 33–34; Wolffe, *History*, pp. 346–347; Bowen, *Victorian Studies*, pp. 505–507.

70. Watts, *English Historical Review*, pp. 747–748.

71. Sellers, *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, pp. 133–134.

72. McLeod, 'Varieties of Victorian Belief', pp. 321–337. Likewise John Briggs wanted more on the Salvation Army: 'Evangel, Evangelicals and Evangelicalism', *Baptist Quarterly* 33.7 (July 1990), pp. 297–301.

73. Hempton, *Christian Arena*, pp. 33–34; Wolffe, *History*, pp. 346–347.

subdisciplines and the wider story of the history of Britain and beyond. For myself, I can still recall the thrill that *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* gave me. It was energizing enough to learn that church historians working on theologically conservative Protestants could talk about such exciting themes as the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and modernism. It made one positively tingle with excitement to be told that evangelicalism was not some backwater that was inevitably a generation or two behind intellectually, which even then was still attempting to fight from the losing side battles long over, but that it was actually just as much in the main story of the history of ideas as theological liberals or anyone else. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* was taken very seriously and treated with tremendous respect by historians outside the religious history subdiscipline and, as that was undoubtedly the game plan, it must be judged as outstandingly successful at achieving one of its own goals. To take a random example, Callum Brown enthused that Bebbington's book was evidence that church historians were 'starting to absorb the best of social history and combine it with the "inside" understanding of organised religion'.⁷⁴ As authoritative a voice of the wider culture as one could hope for, *The Times Literary Supplement* testified that the links that Bebbington had made between evangelicalism and cultural trends were 'impressive'.⁷⁵

How historians have subsequently built upon Bebbington's work in this area of cultural and intellectual connections is a more elusive matter to track and assess. No doubt Bebbington has emboldened numerous scholars to attempt to explore the interplay between church history and other historical subdisciplines. Thinking about it now, although there are certainly no footnotes acknowledging the debt, I doubt very much that I would ever have thought to write a PhD thesis which argued that conservative evangelicals were actually on the cutting edge of political liberalism and radicalism, or a subsequent monograph with such a brash and counterintuitive subtitle as 'fundamentalism and feminism in coalition', if my doctoral supervisor at Stirling University had not given me permission to think this way with such startling juxtapositions as Wesley as an Enlightenment thinker and the charismatic movement as an expression of cultural modernism.⁷⁶

74. C. G. Brown, *Scottish Economic and Social History*, p. 100.

75. Barbara Godlee, 'Messengers of Salvation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 Oct.–2 Nov. 1989.

76. Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999); *Christabel Pankhurst: Fundamentalism and Feminism in Coalition* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002).

An example of an even more direct influence, although still not acknowledged specifically on this point, would be Mark Hopkins's monograph *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England*.⁷⁷ Hopkins cites Bebbington repeatedly, and it is unlikely that Romanticism would ever have made it into his title if it were not for *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. Careful discussions of the relationship between evangelicalism and the Enlightenment, such as the one offered by Mark Noll in *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, also betray a debt to Bebbington's seminal achievement.⁷⁸ An example of a popularization of Bebbington's views is Derek Tidball's *Who Are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of the Modern Movements* (1994), a volume that leans heavily on *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, including accepting Bebbington's interpretation of the connections with the Enlightenment.⁷⁹

In conclusion, in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, David Bebbington made as significant and substantial a contribution to scholarship as the author of any book could ever hope for, in the ambitious way that he related church history to other forms of history and wider cultural developments. Along the way, he also happened to provide us with the standard definition of evangelicalism.

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77. Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

78. Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: IVP; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), esp. pp. 150–151.

79. Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals?*