

Recent historical scholarship of evangelicalism

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Abstract

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*Evangelical historiography is an attempt within evangelicalism to assess its own history. Books like Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), Stuart Piggin's *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World* (1996) and David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989) are evidence of a sustained attempt by evangelical historians to re-appraise the history of their religion. In this review Mark Noll's argument about the "mind" (or lack of it), of American evangelicalism is assessed. His historiographical method is scrutinised. The conclusion is that the scandal is wider than the "life of the mind". Evangelicalism, as presented by Noll, Bebbington and Piggin, also involves an unelaborated philosophy of history, which finds great difficulty in distancing itself from the popular sentiment, if not the doctrines, of modern society. The recent historiography of evangelicalism needs a Christian method for criticising itself, lest it become another form of post-modern romantic populism.*

- **Trying to assess the history of evangelical historiography**

In this review article I mainly discuss the work of Mark Noll in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994)¹. The work of Bebbington, or the more recent study of Piggin, are different in style, providing points for comparison and contrast. The critical examination of the movement of evangelical historical scholarship which these works represent must include much more than these three works. But as they stand they raise important questions that need to be addressed.

Mark Noll says that Christian thought and scholarship among evangelicals, particularly American evangelicals, is a scandal. The scandal is that there simply

¹ Henceforth referred to as *Scandal*

is no evangelical mind. His treatise is conceived as a provocation to the people he is talking about, the very people who have nurtured his faith.

Scandal is diagnostic. Any book can only be rightly understood if we keep the genre to which it belongs in mind. And for *Scandal* that provides a difficult task. It truly belongs to an international literature written by evangelicals about evangelicalism. But it is not just the “American version” of the kind of material provided by Piggin and Bebbington. It is also something else. An examination of Noll’s method and the conclusions he draws might help us explain why *The Scandal* had to be written in the way it was. *Scandal*’s idiosyncrasies need explanation.

We can ask: How does one write about the “evangelical mind” as an historian, or more exactly, how does one write as an American historian? Bebbington, we note, has written about the “non-conformist conscience” (Bebbington, 1982) in an historical text that takes the reader up to 1910 when the non-conformist conscience had come to an end (Bebbington, 1982:160). Noll writes about the present with an historian’s retrospection. It is an account of the history of evangelicalism, but it is framed to transcend the academy.

Piggin’s study is a chronicle of events, persons and places. It seems as if the biggest hurdle for Piggin is the definition of the term *evangelical*. Once that has been achieved – then the historical research follows as a logical progression, itemising significant developments and pointing out why important persons came to such prominence.

The idea is that evangelicalism is best understood, not as a theology, a party, or an ideology, but as a movement concerned with three major elements – Spirit, Word and world – and that when these three are synthesised the movement is strong, and when they are separated the movement is weak ... it is the only single hypothesis which to me makes sense of the vast and variegated data which the movement has produced ... (Piggin, 1996:x)

But Piggin seems to have made a logical oversight. What started out as a definition of evangelicalism becomes a hypothesis by which Piggin argues about the inner historical coherence of the movement. This might indicate that Piggin’s historiography of evangelicalism aims to prove the validity of his definition of the movement. Noll acknowledges something similar.

... ‘evangelicalism’ has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. All discussions of evangelicalism, therefore, are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide

some order for a multifaceted complex of impulses and organisations (Noll, 1994:8).

There is an important methodological problem identified by this statement. It is, however, not immediately clear whether Noll is appealing to a principle about the way to approach all historical study (eg. after Max Weber's ideal-typical attempts to sympathetically reconstruct bureaucracy, capitalism or Protestantism) or whether he is making a point which is peculiar to the object of this historical study – evangelicalism. Could Noll's indeterminacy be an expression of Noll's evangelicalism, an aspect of the evangelical mind itself, as is implied by Piggin in the quote above? The context in *Scandal* does indeed give credence to this latter interpretation.

As an academic argument about social and historical processes *Scandal* utilises something like Weber's ideal-typical methodology (see Bebbington, 1979:158-159) to derive an ordered picture with which he can work. But how can Noll, the historian, represent his argument to other evangelicals? The opening sentence is pregnant – “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind” (Noll, 1994:3). It is almost as if Noll is saying: I cannot commend the historian's task to you (i.e. evangelical readers) as long as the historical disposition of evangelicals to avoid “the life of the mind” is maintained. *Scandal* represents Noll's scandalous challenge to his American evangelical brothers and sisters; their intellectual distinctiveness lies in this – they have no distinctiveness. American evangelicals are exceptionally good at not being exceptional.

It may also be the case that Noll is giving himself room to enter into discourse with academic colleagues who do not share his Christian faith. By contrast Piggin is an evangelical within the context of Sydney Anglicanism who is seeking to give himself room not only to discuss the place of evangelicalism in Australian history, but also to make a point about its historical contribution to the (Anglican) church. Argued in this way, by Noll and Piggin, evangelicalism appears to imply a subtle philosophy of history.

- **An attempt to reconstruct evangelicalism's inner rationale**

Noll's argument is in part a variation on a theme in a long-running American historical and sociological debate. In the first decades of this century the emerging disciplines of history and sociology were embroiled with the ideology of American exceptionalism (Ross, 1991; Marsden, 1980) – under Noll's supervision discussion about “exceptionalism” is now also affixed to American evangelicalism. The “mind” of evangelicalism might defy historical definition, but evangelical defiance in the face of historical trends has always been close to its heart. Henry May has observed that in America new evangelical churches

regularly emerge in defiance of authority (May, 1991:183) – such defiance is almost a leitmotif of evangelicalism. Gypsy Smith's aphorism: "If I am dreaming, let me dream on, my sins are gone" captures the spirit.

From this we note that the historical discussion of evangelicalism becomes a description of, and an attempt to re-construct, evangelicalism's inner rationale. History, as an academic discipline, becomes the means by which evangelicalism's special characteristics can be discerned.

The Scandal has shifts, alliances and heroes of its own. But what and who these are is not always immediately obvious. *The Scandal* functions in a line of academic literature produced by self-professing conservative evangelicals emphasising that the history and sociology of evangelicalism must be of intense interest to historians and to evangelicals. Henry May recognised this; being Christian, in some form or other, has everything to do with defining how Americans view their place in the American scheme of things.

One must look hard at the great and rising popularity of many kinds of evangelical Christianity and pentecostalism, kinds of religion that are not anything like civil religion, and that have all sorts of different relations, antagonistic as well as friendly, to the religion of Americanism (May, 1983:159).

May's reference is to Quebedeaux's taxonomy of evangelicalism (Quebedeaux, 1974), an attempt to classify the bewildering diversity of evangelicalism diffused throughout the nooks and crannies of civil society.

Noll's *Scandal* may mean that the diversity amongst American evangelicals is so diffuse that no mind can arise to compare with the non-conformist "conscience" identified by Bebbington (1982), and on that count the lack of evangelical intellectual distinctiveness is due to its inability to overcome its history. But on the other hand we might say that the inability to overcome its historical diffuseness is borne of a refusal to participate as evangelicals in the "life of the mind".

- **Noll's publication also functions in the market place**

Noll has written a work which also functions in the market place. The argument is directed to the North American academy – he wants to spark critical historical discussion about evangelicalism's cultural and social history. The concern is undeniably for the evangelical community and presumably he would stir the moribund culture of American Christian colleges into life, contributing to a renewal in the "mind" of evangelicalism. The curious thing about *Scandal* is, however, the absence of any concerted discussion about the mind with which the evangelical historian will address the history of evangelicalism.

In contrast to Piggin's book – which as an evangelical's chronicle of major evangelicals – Noll's is a more "popular" work. *Scandal* is an evangelical's equivalent to Allan Bloom (1987) or Robert Hughes (1993), and no doubt Eerdmans and IVP were pleased to promote the book in this niche. The public intellectual side of such a work requires some discussion.

When *Scandal* is contrasted with Bebbington's approach (1979; 1982; 1989) we would have to say that the latter are "more" academic in terms of the anticipated audience. This is not to say that *Scandal* lacks academic depth; it is to say that Noll has written a book for a diffuse audience. It reads as an expanded annotated bibliography. It usefully identifies relevant literature in American studies, particularly in historical and religious studies, helping to throw more light upon American evangelicalism, in the sense that Henry May (1983) had anticipated.

- **The focus on the absence of an evangelical mind**

But Noll is, however, not only concerned with definition; he is concerned with the basic life-orientation of evangelicals: how have American evangelicals approached the "life of the mind"? The concern is diagnostic, if not therapeutic. By seeking to provide an ordered description of the complex set of evangelical impulses and organisations, Noll would help evangelicals overcome the dilemma they build for themselves. Thus *Scandal* is a didactic book; it focuses upon the "lack" of an evangelical mind and it also tries to identify the places where its "absence" is most sorely felt. In this sense it is neither a treatise outlining a evangelical *Weltanschauung* nor is it an historical and scholarly account. It is a work which tries to combine both.

- **Emphasis on the relevance of historical scholarship**

Given the preponderance of "the time is near" dispensationalism in many currents in American evangelicalism it is not hard to see Noll deviating from traditions of anti-intellectualism. Noll wants to be a professional historian. For so many evangelicals the study of history is irrelevant; they have been so busy charting the "end times" that they have overlooked their own history. After all, if the second coming is near, what could a historian contribute to the evangelical preparation? If the Bible tells us about creation, the fall and redemption what else in history is there worth knowing? If the new birth, a literal biblicism, activism and the cross is what being an evangelical is all about, then what place could there be for serious historical scholarship? In this sense the book represents a concerted move away from anti-historical and anti-intellectual evangelicalism. Even dispensational millenarians presumably need a better understanding of history, and Noll's work, with that of his international colleagues, has helped foster a significant network (Noll *et al.*, 1994). The conference on "Faith and History" and its journal *Fides et Historia* is the organised American expression of

this “school”; the Evangelical History Association, of which Stuart Piggin is a leader is the comparable body in Australia.

But once the historical vocation is affirmed by concerted organised effort there are still some further questions: is this a vocation which is solely or pre-eminently concerned with the writing of the history of Christianity? Should not the vocation in the study of history be viewed in terms of a Christian world-and-life-view in which a Christian scholar can also become a historian of Marxism or Islam, of music or social institutions? Are not such studies equally “Christian history”? *Scandal* does not address this question directly, and whilst such absence is not scandalous it does raise questions about the depth of self-criticism upon which the book is based.

Noll has also tried to write a “Christian” book for a general audience. He hopes that many evangelicals will read it, but has ensured that it has an “academic” side to it. The Paul Klee painting on the cover – “*Gezeichnet*” (Marked Man) 1935 – indicates the polemical side to this book. This alone sets it off from the work of Piggin and Bebbington. This is to be a discussion about culture rather than sub-culture, thinking about many things in a Christian manner rather than simply writing about the same old things according to sacralized fashion. But who is the marked man? Noll may be suggesting that the evangelical academic is precariously poised in the post-modern academy. The evangelical scholar’s tenure might be secure, but evangelical discipleship is put at risk without a Christian mind.

Yet it is a “Christian” book for a general audience, an academic historian’s book, like Robert Hughes’ *The Culture of Complaint: the Fraying of America* (1994). Noll’s complaint is that the evangelical intellectual tradition stops short – it does not respect scientific research and political policy as it should. Evangelicalism does not have a mind for these things. Why?

- **The re-direction of scholarly reflection to a popular audience**

The book belongs to a genre which re-directs the results of scholarly reflection to a general and popular audience. This is a style in “Christian scholarship” which mediates between the “academy” and the “Christian community”. Such a “mediating” approach subordinates scholarship to the consulting role of the “public intellectual”, epitomised by Harold Bloom, Robert Hughes and Paul Johnson. Karl Mannheim referred to this academic style when formulating his famous concept of the “free floating intellectual”. This kind of intellectual is very common, the pragmatic motif leading social thinkers to a remarkable degree. Edward Shils noted that this kind of intellectual has dominated universities in this century. The pragmatic motif prevails. It is a strategic accommodation to the threat of market-led scholarship – it focuses its contribution on the scientific role

of the public intellectual rather than the scholarship and theoretical argument of the academic theorist. It is not a contribution to theoretical reflection as such, but a critical account of public attitudes and intelligence. For all of its other merits, it is not directly a contribution to theoretical reflection as such; rather it sees its contribution in subjecting public attitudes to critical scrutiny. Many sharp insights may be generated. Noll, the Christian academic, seeks to contribute a book which is both confessional and professional in the market place of academic publishing.

- **A book which is both confessional and professional**

The book is in the form of an expanded and elaborated bibliographical essay and for this reason should be used as a point of departure for historians and social scientists concerned with charting the recent history of North American evangelicalism through the historiography since Quebedeaux. For this reason a real “absence” in this book is the failure of the publisher to require an expanded and comprehensive annotated bibliography.

We might surmise that the book as published might not fully conform with Noll’s initial intention. It seems to be addressed to many audiences at the same time. The reader is made aware of its congruence on the bookseller’s shelf with other popular “prominent academic best sellers” particularly Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) (Noll, 1994:30 fn 1) but it is in Henry May’s intellectual shadow that the work finds its “academic” niche. May’s “didactic Enlightenment” (May, 1976) thesis is expanded by Noll in his suggestive Chapter 4 – “The Evangelical Enlightenment” (Noll, 1994:83-107). And where Noll sees a deep and perplexing mystery about the thorough-going way in which the Evangelical Protestant tradition adopted the Enlightenment discourse, Henry May suggests that the “whole movement in American culture from the Enlightenment to Romanticism” (May, 1991:181) has to be kept in view by the historian of America’s development. The illumination of such a complex cultural transformation “is the most important as well as the most difficult assignment for a historian” (May, 1991:181). May explains evangelicalism as part of the post-Enlightenment attempt to make “human culture and society ... more orderly and predictable” (May, 1982:182). Some sort of programme for the life of the masses was essential in the wake of the French and Industrial revolutions.

In many different ways, and on many levels, the nineteenth century put a premium on dynamism rather than stability, expansion rather than classical restraint, sentiment or even passion rather than rationality (May, 1991:183).

In May’s terms Evangelical Protestantism is a form of Christian romantic populism. The Great Revival of Jonathan Edwards at the turn of the 18th

century began the development of a “looser, more various, and above all more popular” (p. 183) religion. Later, after the ideologies of progressivism and liberalism had gained momentum, this resulted in the secularised civil religious motif of American exceptionalism (ref. Ross, 1991).

By contrast Noll’s account is, however, constrained by his view of the withered evangelical root of American exceptionalism – evangelicalism no longer displays anything exceptional; presumably it has not been exceptional since late-nineteenth century liberal Christianity took over the mainstream. This root has lost its roots.

- **Contradictions and ambiguities inherent in American evangelicalism**

What I miss in Noll’s account is some of the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in American evangelicalism. For example, it was the writings of Rheinhold Niebuhr which convinced May that there was more to Christianity than his former Marxist arrogance would allow. This does not make him an evangelical, but May is unabashed in describing himself as a Christian. Such profession, and May is not the only prominent academic to say so, also needs a place in Noll’s discussion.

Moreover, there is much more written to develop a “Christian mind” in psychology, sociology, economics, political science, philosophy and aesthetics from an evangelical standpoint than *Scandal* might imply. Baker, Zondervan, Eerdmans and many other publishing houses have been publishing Christian perspectives in a wide range of academic subject areas for years. The culture of the American Christian colleges might not now be able to name a Harvard or Princeton as an evangelical university, but the earnest search by Christian academics for a Christian *Weltanschauung* within the mosaic of American higher education is truly amazing.

North American evangelicalism is a broad church and Noll sketches the developments from Jonathan Edwards, revivalism, dispensationalism and fundamentalism. Noll is a cosmopolitan American who seeks to learn from evangelicals and other Christians north of the border. In this sense *Scandal* gives evidence of a healthy inclusivism; it aims to search for an evangelical perspective while remaining catholic in scope.

There is also a *sub rosa* concern in *Scandal*. Noll is also worried about prosperity-oriented sectarianism among those who confess Christ. He is concerned with the drift away from the social relevance of Christian sacrifice and self-denying, as Christian churches, schools and colleges develop sub-cultural dogmatism and socially-structured schemes of selfishness. Fundamentalism is discipleship gone awry. As the new right dismantles the Welfare State and the

wreckage mounts, Noll is alarmed that the rhetoric of dispensational fundamentalism is used to justify “bottom line” dismantling of welfare dragging the evangelical cause into an unholy alliance with a new civil religion.

The historic drift from evangelicalism into progressivism and liberalism is, however, not really explored. The drift is pictured as the failure of the evangelical theology to expand and take in natural science, philosophy and politics.

There is no discussion of various Christian attempts, within reach of evangelical culture, to articulate an intellectual response to the various modalities of post-modernism. It is not clear whether Noll would include Cornel West, the latest in a long line of black Christian progressivist thinkers, into the circle of evangelicalism (cf. West, 1989). Similarly, Jean Bethke Elshtain (cf. Elshtain, 1990), an apologist for a Biblical world-view within the discourse(s) of feminism, is another prominent thinker whose published writings might throw light upon Noll’s problematic. Noll observes that the stimulus to evangelical scholarship in recent decades has come from outside the tradition. The Lebanese diplomat, Charles Malik, threw down the challenge in 1980 at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and the subsequent scholarly renewal among evangelical thinkers has seen the importation of creative ideas from mainline Protestantism, and Continental Reformed, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions (Noll, 1994:239).

Noll (1994:227) observes that Rheinhold Niebuhr, no evangelical, is now routinely “borrowed” by evangelical political scientists. It was Niebuhr who convinced May to reconsider Christianity. Such Christian profession by non-evangelicals deserves more precise discussion in Noll’s account, not only to round out Noll’s account but to give a better sense of Noll’s historical method. After all it could be argued that Noll is seeking to give an evangelical’s twist to May’s historical vision. Or is this part of the problem? Noll, the evangelical historian, makes his contribution without giving his readers an adequate explanation of his view of the impact of non-evangelical and non-Christian thinkers to his own thinking

- **A lack of in-depth interaction with modern culture?**

Noll’s *Scandal* is important; there is no denying that. But what is it demonstrating? Is it solely that there is no evangelical mind? Is it not something more profound, namely, something about the way in which evangelical Christianity finds its life by gaining momentum by forces outside of itself which causes it to change? Is American evangelicalism a self-defeating project such that each generation of evangelicals simply re-discovers the “scandal” for its own

time and turns away from former attempts of previous generations of evangelicals to “start again”? Consider Noll’s comments very early on in his tract :

Evangelicals sponsor dozens of theological seminaries, scores of colleges, hundreds of radio stations, and thousands of unbelievably diverse parachurch agencies – but not a single research university or a single periodical devoted to in-depth interaction with modern culture (Noll, 1994:3-4).

What is an evangelical? This is not only a central question put forward by Noll; it is part of the thesis that evangelicals, as Christians of the post-Enlightenment era, are beset by a failure to find an adequate cultural definition of themselves. In sum Noll’s argument could be read to mean that evangelicals are that group of Christians who try to discover their “self” and when they do they have expended so much energy doing so they have little left to say, and little left to offer.

In this sense the book is curiously silent on postmodernism. But maybe that is what the sequel will be about. After all, if postmodernism is the passing of Enlightenment Humanism into history, then maybe we are at a point where evangelicalism as an attempt to develop an Enlightened Protestantism is passing out. Is this why the ana-baptists do not really get a look in? Jim Wallis (1995) and the Sojourners community are not given much “presence” as part of evangelicalism’s broad church.

• Other questions which need to be raised

There are other questions which need to be raised. What about Biblical studies as an academic discipline and the relation of such to the evangelical mind? Is there not a place for considering the contribution of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies? The ongoing debates of *Biblical Archeological Review* are significant and should also be included in a general discussion of the evangelical mind, or the scandalous absence thereof, alongside of creationist, dispensationalist, and scholastic controversies.

What kind of a book is this? What is the structure of the situation which confronts Christian and evangelical academics like Noll? A deepening sense of the spiritual crisis of modern humanism is manifest in the plethora of post-modernisms. Such come to expression in the day-to-day workings of American Christian academics like Noll; and Noll knows, deep down and to his sense of profound spiritual embarrassment that evangelical culture simply has little or no response to the Post-Modern tsunami. Ned Flanders is no match for Jacques Derrida. This is the underlying cultural problematic.

- **The context of the author's voice and the audience being addressed**

When the rip-tide of North American publishing dominance disperses books like Noll's, or Lundin's *The Culture of Interpretation* (1993) or Skillen's *The Scattered Voice* (1991) or even the ana-baptist Wallis' *The Soul of Politics* (1995) to our shores, the immediate temptation is to re-interpret their arguments for the local situation and conditions. We have to read these works not only with an appreciation for the voice of the author, but the context in which the author's views have been formulated and the audience which is being addressed.

True, we are part of an international cultural market place, but a *Scandal* imported from the USA will have significant impact. I suspect that in Australian evangelicalism Noll's work will have greater appeal than Piggini's. But those outside USA still have much to learn from *Scandal*. It should be read with historically informed discernment. Different books, addressing diverse issues, have to be read with discernment.

- ***The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* – concerned with the character of American evangelical religiosity**

The Scandal is a different genre to *Dancing in the Dark* (Schultze *et al.*, 1993). This latter book – a sociological and historical examination of popular culture – addresses the x-generation, MTV and the latest fashions in popular culture in ways that can immediately translate to post-modern culture outside the USA wherever Bart Simpson's skate-board surfs the net and airwaves. The analysis reads as relevant to Berlin as to Seoul, from Karioké Bars in Jakarta to Burger King restaurants in Debrecen and MacDonald's in Soweto. The analysis is useful, proffering a framework for interpreting popular culture whether it is the latest blatant soft-pornograph from Madonna, a dropped car from U2 or whatever REM will turn on next. Indeed, we get a handle on local popular culture, as part of the international music market, when we read Schultze *et al.* with care.

But this is not the case which *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. For one thing, the form of argument is not the same. Schultze *et al.* is analytic and applicable to the global market; Noll is didactic and concerned with the character and shape of American evangelical religiosity. Schultz *et al.* is the result of a combined research project; Noll's is a *crie de coeur* from a wounded lover. Noll's book is an American book about American evangelicalism, but it is presented as an American evangelical's understanding of how they serve Christ in that cultural and national milieu. In so far as this is the case outside of the USA, Christians wherever they are, can read it with profit but should read it with historical circumspection.

- **Ambiguous elements of the evangelical view of American history**

What I also miss in Noll's account is a discussion of the contradictory and ambiguous elements of the evangelical view of American history, in particular its preoccupation with reminding us of how prominent popular evangelicals like William Jennings Bryan were in previous generations. In giving primary attention to demonstrating to how evangelicalism (once) had a place in the mainstream of American culture it is almost as if Noll is implying that the Christian approach to the study of American history is the inclusion of the evangelical factor in the narrative. Presumably, on this basis, one cannot embark upon any Christian investigation of Eskimo or Sioux society and culture before they made contact with evangelicals!

Evangelical historiography seems to involve a systemic ambivalence to philosophic discussions about the foundations of historical research and historiography. The "mystery" of evangelicalism's absorption of the Enlightenment world-view could be turned into a critical question which could throw a penetrating light upon its history and help explain why it has run aground on its cultural and intellectual irrelevance. The Enlightenment sentiment is as un-Christian as its doctrines, but Noll's American evangelicalism somehow feels it has avoided outright apostasy by maintaining a "balance" between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism.

Scandal indirectly points to such a potentially critical line of inquiry. And I wish it was more explicitly defined. At a time when Christian colleges are heavily absorbing the "post-modern condition" we might have expected Noll to resolutely align himself with the critique of modernity articulated by, for example, Abraham Kuyper (Noll, 1994:237 – fn 44), and advocate an approach to the historical disciplines which maintained the critical historical examination of the connection between unbelief and revolution. But he does not. And this failure means that Noll's treatise, if not Noll himself, exhibits the personal dissonance he divines as characteristic of evangelical intellectuals. *Scandal* concludes on a typically fideistic note, reminiscent of Ernst Troeltsch: the evangelical hope is not in its history but in its faith.

- **Conclusion**

Nevertheless, the analysis of *Scandal* does imply that evangelicalism has developed its own approach to the historical disciplines. Noll, along with Piggin and Bebbington, represent an important development in evangelical scholarship. The philosophical questions broached by Bebbington (1979), however, have to be taken up again by these evangelical scholars. The purpose of historical study is not established by the results of historical scholarship even if these results are

said to illustrate that evangelicalism is a valid way of deriving a meaningful world-view in the flux of social and cultural developments. Evangelicalism's embeddedness within the cultural matrix of modernity needs greater critical examination, particularly now when the post-modernist consumer-Christianity markets itself.

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