

Book Reviews

The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression. By Michael Gauvreau. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. ISBN 0-7735-0769-8. Pp. xviii + 398.

Michael Gauvreau's published doctoral dissertation proposes that the theologization of history was the motif of evangelical (Presbyterian and Methodist) thought in nineteenth and early twentieth-century English Canada. He maintains that Baconianism was the philosophical foundation of evangelicalism and induction its epistemological principle. Thereby, the author argues, the evangelical creed subsumed, mitigated, or bypassed contemporary intellectual currents, all the while retaining its soterial agenda and biblical orientation through the instrumentality of historical theology or the "theology of history." This was particularly the case with Canadian evangelicalism vis-à-vis evolutionary thought, historical criticism and social reform. However, he concludes, its ideological consensus disintegrated in the face of "relativism," harsh post-World War I social reality, and the consequent interpretation of Christianity as "immanent" rather than "transcendent."

Gauvreau's thesis deserves attention for three reasons. First, he demonstrates the theological mobility and diversity of Victorian evangelicalism in Canada, as well as its common worldview. He rightly points out that evangelical thought was in transition throughout this era, and therefore was intellectually dynamic, not static. With reason, he cautions against its study in fixed, mutually exclusive terms of "theological liberalism," "fundamentalism," "social gospel," etc. Instead, he aptly affirms biblical "synthesis" as the evangelical ethos.

Second, and a corollary of the latter, the author justifiably challenges Richard Allen's, et al., supposition of "the dichotomy between individual regeneration and a commitment to social action" (256) which ostensibly became the watershed of the early twentieth-century Canadian church. Gauvreau counters with the holistic soteriological archetype of evangelicalism, whereby salvation expanded concentrically from the individual to society. This somewhat clarifies the contemporary theological perspective of social reform.

Third, he articulates the evangelical philosophy of history and its apologetic use to formulate a coherent, biblical rationale in the intellectual vortex of the nineteenth century. This is the most significant contribution of *The Evangelical Century* to the historical study of religion in Canada.

However, Gauvreau's argument lacks adequate historical development and theological distinctions. On the problematic presupposition of their common evangelicalism, he attempts to deal with individuals as historically distant and theologically divergent as Thomas McCulloch (1777-1843), author of *Popery Again Condemned*, and John Baillie (1886-1960), a keen ecumenist and a past president of the World Council of Churches. Without any differentiation Gauvreau speaks of ". . . the creed as represented by a succession of clergymen from McCulloch to Chown . . ." (282). This perspective telescopes the nineteenth-century evolution of evangelical theology. The author sometimes gives the impression that Canadian evangelicalism developed in an ideological vacuum, and held philosophy in abeyance. For example, Gauvreau asserts, "In transcending the legacy of Baconianism in the 1920s, Baillie and his colleagues . . . enabled the theological outlook of the United Church to move, in the space of a single decade, from the intellectual world of the late eighteenth-century Awakening to a twentieth-century climate . . ." (282). This conclusion truncates the development of contemporary evangelical thought, and circumvents its changing historical context.

Gauvreau calls for ". . . a history less oriented to the meaning of particular events and more informed by the vision of the 'longue durée' advanced by the French historian Fernand Braudel" (291). While this principle bears consideration, Gauvreau's deduction is questionable. He concludes, "Although Braudel's argument was specifically concerned with the continuity of relatively unchanging structures underlying the economic and social life of human communities, it can be applied . . . to mental 'structures' or bodies of belief such as the evangelical creed. . ." (291). Gauvreau needs to substantiate the applicability of this socio-economic paradigm to the history of ideas, in order to justify his methodological analogy.

Nevertheless, this book reads well, is thoroughly researched, and will help in understanding "the evangelical mind" in late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century Canada.