

Jeff Fountain

A comparative analysis of evangelical views on European integration

Sources, implications and recommendations

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MA Research Project Dissertation

*A comparative analysis
of evangelical views
on European integration:
sources, implications
and recommendations.*

Jeff Fountain

31 August 2021

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I. INTRODUCTION: *LOOKING ON AND DOING NOTHING?*

'Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and forms no opinion. Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.' - John Stuart Mill, address to the University of St. Andrews, 1867

How have Evangelicals viewed European integration during the seven decades of its unfolding development? What factors have informed these perspectives? Are Evangelicals guilty of 'taking no part, forming no opinion, looking on and doing nothing' concerning the unprecedented project of European integration initiated after World War Two to establish and sustain peace and well-being among the European peoples?

These questions define the first level of inquiry of this research project, which reveals a clear absence of evangelical engagement with European integration for half a century after the war, especially when compared with Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant perspectives. The inquiry then examines the reasons for this absence before broadening to consider evangelical engagement in the socio-political lifespaces generally in Europe today. It also investigates what training programmes are available for the equipping of Evangelicals for socio-political reflection and engagement in general, and for European-level engagement specifically. In the recommendations section, steps are proposed to identify the necessary foundations for a European, evangelical, missional, public theology, enabling critical missional reflection and engagement of both the European integration project itself and socio-political issues at every level of society.

A neglected field?

Our contention is that public theology – applying God's Word to public life – has been a neglected field among Evangelicals, despite being a centuries-old tradition. Championing the socio-political

dimensions of the gospel among Evangelicals, John Stott wrote about 'half a century of neglect', referring roughly to the years 1920-70 when evangelicalism was preoccupied with the task of defending the 'historic biblical faith' against the 'social gospel' of theological liberalism. Stott was drafter of the ground-breaking 1974 Lausanne Covenant which affirmed the conviction that God had given us social as well as evangelistic responsibilities in his world. 'Yet the half-century of neglect has put us far behind in this area,' claimed Stott in his watershed publication *Issues facing Christians today* (2006, p. 9). Stott was keen to correct the attitude that politics was a dirty business Christians should avoid by observing that a Christian 'salt and light' presence was essential in all areas of life broken by sin.

Yet, while government at local and national levels was briefly mentioned in Stott's book, the European level was never addressed. Ironically, none of the four editions touched on Europe or European integration, the very topic that has recently polarised British opinion.

The creation mandate of the opening chapter of Genesis to 'rule in God's name' and 'fill the earth' (Genesis 1:28) was reiterated by Jesus' imperative to his followers to take the good news of God's rule, his kingdom, into all the earth. We argue that the gospel of redemption touches every sphere of life affected by sin – which is every sphere.

Today democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech and community values are under threat from inside and outside the European Union by, on the one hand, resurgent totalitarianism, populism and nationalism, and on the other, a radical individualism celebrating diversity and freedom at the cost of social cohesion. Yet a long-standing tradition of non-engagement and a fatalistic eschatologi-