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NEAC3: Retrospect and Prospect

PETER WILLIAMS

Keele '67

'For many years we have been a small minority, despised, rather self-conscious and irresponsibly inward looking', said John Stott to a press conference on the eve of the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in 1967. 'We want now to emerge from our ghettos, to speak in such a way as to be heard, and to take a positive and responsible part in the work of the Church in this country, especially during this era of a revolution'.¹ There is little doubt that most, if not all, of these priorities for evangelical Anglicanism have been achieved. Keele is already accepted as 'perhaps the most significant evangelical landmark in twentieth-century Anglicanism'.²

Why 1967? Why should evangelical Anglicanism, which had for most of the twentieth-century been in a state of siege, want to emerge from behind the barricades and become involved in affairs of Church and world? The clue, in part at any rate, lies in Stott's words 'especially during this era of revolution'. The sixties represented a decade in which the western world questioned its inheritance, discovered youth, permissiveness and sex, discarded authority and became confident in the unbounded possibilities of the new technology. It was the decade of John Kennedy, of Martin Luther King, of Vatican II and of student riots. It was a world in which all the old values were questioned in a way which was sometimes creative, frequently divisive and always unsettling. Adrian Hastings describes it as follows:

The world of youth, of pop, of irreverence, of unprepared happenings, was all, in sociological terms, a classical case of *communitas*; a brief but intense experience of ecstasy, of unstructured almost incoherent fellowship, a world in which norms are temporarily derided and seem unnecessary. The Beatles, heroes of 1963 and 1964, were in their cheerful, generous way completely dismissive of the

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- 1 *Church Times* (hereafter *CT*), 17 March 1967, p 16. The fact that I have used *CT* rather than the *Church of England Newspaper* as a primary source for this period indicates problems of time and of access and is in no sense a commentary on the importance of the *CEN*.
 - 2 Randle Manwaring, *From Controversy to Co-Existence: Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1944-1980*, CUP, Cambridge 1985, p 177.

structured world of class, Church, institutions of any kind. All the complex pattern of hierarchies seemed for a brief blissful moment boringly unnecessary.¹

Evangelicals were no more immune to this world than anybody else. They were affected in two ways. First, they, like the rest of the Church, had to face the challenge, from inside and outside, to the traditional order. Much of what was said about the Church and about the evangelical establishment rang true to the more thoughtful. Secondly, as it happened, there was a group of extremely able, confident and young evangelicals who reflected very accurately the questioning, probing, creative, dissatisfied mood of the times.

Evangelicalism had been in a state of change for some considerable time. In the post-war period Jim Packer had established that it was possible to study theology to a high standard in a non-evangelical context and to remain convinced of the traditional evangelical beliefs about Scripture and the Atonement. He made popular what Colin Buchanan calls the "neo-puritan" movement.² Such reformed theology challenged the evangelical orthodoxies of the past, not only in that it emphasized the importance of the head as opposed to the heart, not only in that it had a tendency to be world-affirming rather than world-renouncing, but in that it by-passed the normal processes of evangelical socialization and control. So, says Buchanan, by the sixties evangelical ordinands were going to the Bristol colleges to study theology under Jim Packer, and others of a similar outlook, 'instead of to the Oxbridge ones where public school ordinands tended to ignore the teaching which was on offer, and to concentrate rather on schooling the next generation of converts in the OICCU and CICCU in the principles of VPS camps and gospel'.³

The actual decision to hold a Congress appears to have arisen out of another challenge to the accepted order of the evangelical establishment. Northern evangelicals had been meeting informally and then more formally, since 1956. They felt that 'too many initiatives of evangelical thought and action tended to stem from London' and so proposed the idea of extending their Northern Conference into a National Congress.⁴ Rather like the Second Vatican Council, to which it has been compared more than once,⁵ the Congress was taken over by the more radical elements. Again, rather like the Vatican Council, this was almost certainly because the

1 Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985*, Collins, London 1986, p 516.

2 Colin Buchanan 'Anglican Evangelicalism: The State of the "Party"', *Anvil* 1, 1984, p 10.

3 *Ibid.*, pp 10-11.

4 Philip Crowe, ed., *Keele '67: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress Statement*, Falcon Books, London 1967, p 7.

5 For example, David Paton, in immediate reaction to the Congress (*ibid.*, p 16); David Edwards in *CT*, 13 June 1969, p 11 and John Stott citing David Edwards in *CT*, 28 January 1977, p 11.

recognized leader, in the case of evangelicals John Stott,¹ was persuaded of the truth of their analysis. Indeed it is probably more accurate to say that they, in a more strident fashion, were spelling out the implications of the sort of Evangelicalism he had been pointing towards for some time.² He came, at any rate, remarkably soon to echo their aspirations.³

The original intention appears to have been 'to subject a thousand delegates to nine, hour-long, addresses . . .'.⁴ An Eclectics meeting in October 1966 gave the younger evangelicals – George Hoffman, Gavin Reed, Frank Entwistle, Eddy Shirras, Philip Crowe and Michael Seward – the chance to organize themselves, to make it clear that they wanted a Statement and the addresses in a book, which could then be read before and discussed during the conference. In response to these proposals, the planning committee seems to have disbanded itself and to have given the running of the Congress to a group which represented the outlook of these 'Young Turks' and under the nominal chairmanship of Jim Packer.⁵

The *Guidelines*, containing the Addresses, gave only a few hints of what was to come and these largely buried beneath mounds of rather traditional evangelical theology. John Stott attacked the evangelical 'proneness to an excessive individualism' and suggested 'that some of our doctrinal disagreements have been, and still are, due rather to pride and prejudice than to principle, of this we need to repent. We must recognize that the Holy Spirit illuminates other minds as well as ours . . .'.⁶ J. N. D. Anderson took evangelicals to task for losing their social concern which had historically been so important, and for failing to develop a 'theology of the secular'.⁷

It was these themes which were to emerge as the most important during the congress. What it in effect did was to establish that evangelicals took the rest of the Church seriously and were concerned about relating their theology to the world. The Congress met in April 1967 and issued a Statement which has been regarded as highly significant. Its immediate importance is not obvious to those unversed in the history of evangelical Anglicanism. It lacked depth and excitement. The *Church Times* found it a

1 He had long been accepted as the most able evangelical leader (see Michael Seward, *The Anglican Church Today: Evangelicals on the Move*, Mowbray, London 1987, p 31).

2 It is important to remember that he had turned down a plea from Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in October 1966 to evangelical Anglicans to secede from the Church of England (Manwaring, op. cit., p 201). He had also refounded the Eclectics. It was the radicals base (Seward, op. cit., pp 32 and 37-8).

3 *CT*, 17 March 1967, p 16 and 31 March 1967, p 11.

4 Seward, op. cit., p 38.

5 Nominal because he was away in the USA throughout this period (Buchanan, op. cit., p 17, note 13).

6 J. I. Packer, ed., *Guidelines: Anglican Evangelicals Face the Future*, Falcon Books, London 1967, pp 61-2.

7 *Ibid.*, pp 213-4.

'disappointment', 'sadly lacking in cutting edge . . . hardly designed to set in motion any great forward movement in the Church of England'.¹ To the more historically perceptive, it was otherwise and Hastings judges it to be 'one of the most important ecclesiastical documents, not only of the sixties but of this century'.² It was a declaration of evangelical *glasnost*.

What it did was to signal fundamental changes within evangelical Anglicanism. First, there was no triumphalism, rather a great deal of penitence. 'We have been suspicious of experimentation and frightened of change, and have tended to individualism. Furthermore, we have been slow to learn from other parts of God's Church' (para 65). Second, it committed itself to the Church of England and specifically renounced secession (para 87). Third, it pledged itself to organic unity (para 81), and therefore to the need for serious dialogue. This was to be conducted in a spirit which admitted faults on the evangelical side and which eschewed what the Statement called the 'negative and impoverishing "anti"-attitudes . . . from which we now desire to shake free' (para 84). It welcomed the possibility of dialogue with Roman Catholicism (para 96). It called on the Church of England to enter into full communion with the Methodist Church and the Church of South India. Fourth, it committed itself to establishing what were the ethical implications of evangelical doctrines (paras 37-52), and specifically to work 'not only for the redemption of individuals, but also for a reformation of society' (para 38). In this area Margaret Duggan found that, where rigidity and repression might have been expected, there was rather 'humility and great reasonableness'.³ Fifth, evidently amidst considerable debate, it committed itself to 'the practice of a weekly celebration of the sacrament as the central corporate service of the church' (para. 76).⁴

There were uncertainties and much that was unsophisticated. There was no united mind as to whether charismatic 'manifestations are of the same sort as the corresponding New Testament "gifts of the Spirit" or not' (para 14).⁵ The ordained ministry was seen in strictly functional terms (para 53) and CSI was declared to be the way forward for Anglican-Methodist Union (para 102) with a confidence which scarcely took account of the real forces within the Church of the day.

The question remained whether Keele actually made any difference. Was the Statement, as Beckwith asserts, over-influenced by 'certain young

1 CT, 14 April 1967, p 10.

2 Hastings, op. cit., p 554.

3 CT, 14 April 1967, p 11.

4 The controversy related to whether the commitment was to 'regular' or to a 'weekly' celebration (CT, loc. cit.).

5 There was still a good deal of suspicion of the charismatic movement and Stott had recently spoken against seeking 'the spiritual gifts' (see Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain*, Paternoster, Exeter 1986, p 118).

activists of unconventional views?'¹ Did it rather represent a future which the bulk of evangelicals wanted to embrace?

Between Keele and Nottingham

The next decade was to provide the answers. First, most evangelicals did seem to support the general direction of Keele. There was a commitment to being involved in the structures of the Church. Colin Buchanan had already been appointed to the Liturgical Commission,² but he could scarcely have persuaded so many evangelicals of the appropriateness of the radical new liturgical directions if they had not taken on board the Keele determination to change. They heeded too the call of Keele, and of non-evangelical sympathisers,³ to become involved in the life of the Church and it was widely acknowledged that this had happened by 1977.⁴ Professor Norman Anderson was Chairman of the House of Laity for most of the period (1970-79) and others, such as Jill Dann, Peter Dawes and Colin Craston, began to play a key role in the life of the General Synod.

Secondly, and as significantly, 'Keele made it possible for non-evangelicals to be on the same wavelength as evangelicals'.⁵ So, as early as 1969, David Edwards was, in the words of a leader in the *Church Times*, lavishing 'eloquent praise' on evangelicals.⁶ Keele was the key to evangelicals ending, he declared, 'the fantasy that this movement could afford to ignore the Church of England as a whole or the world as a whole'. What it said was less important than the fact that it demonstrated that evangelicals wanted to be 'outward-looking'. His highest hopes were however pinned on the spirituality of Evangelicalism. 'It is a reaction against the confusion of our time, but more it is a stirring of the hunger for God'. It recalled 'the enthusiasm of the early Christians'. It might, consequently, have an impact comparable to that of the Oxford Movement which had roused 'the great Victorian Church after the Age of Elegance, a time of confusion and vice remarkably like our own'.⁷

Thirdly, the new directions opened up deep fissures within Evangelicalism. The divisions were of three kinds. First, amongst those fully committed to Keele, there was a sharp difference as to whether or not the Anglican-Methodist Unity Scheme should be accepted. Those who argued that it should probably represented the more pragmatic and pastoral wing of Evangelicalism (Maurice Wood, Michael Green, Herbert Craig, Tom

1 D. N. Samuel, ed., *The Evangelical Succession in the Church of England*, James Clarke, London 1979, p 105.

2 Colin Buchanan, *Evangelical Anglicans and Liturgy*, Grove Books, Bramcote 1984, p 9.

3 *CT*, 13 June 1969, p 10.

4 *Ibid.*, 15 April 1977, p 10.

5 Hastings, *op. cit.*, p 554.

6 *CT*, 13 June 1969, p 10.

7 *Ibid.*, pp 11 and 13.

Anscombe, Bishop Hugh Gough and Frank Colquhoun).¹ Those who were opposed were led by Jim Packer and Colin Buchanan and represented the more theological and cerebral wing of the movement. Secondly, there was a great deal of tension between the old evangelical establishment and the new young budding leaders. This sometimes surfaced in battles over the role of the traditional evangelical societies and caused considerable bitterness,² and little effective action. Thirdly, and overlapping with this last feature, there were the traditional evangelicals who felt 'bewilderment and distress' over the new directions and the compromises involved – for example the willingness to look positively at the proposals to change the sort of assent given the the Thirty-Nine Articles.³ Deep suspicions began to be formed. In the opinion of John King, 'Evangelicals, having lost the reliable old shibboleths, no longer trust each other'.⁴

Fourthly, issues of spirituality moved to the forefront once again. Much of the Keele programme had been concerned with the rejection of Pietism.⁵ The new concerns with Church structures and with social action might have undermined traditional evangelical spirituality, but, if they did, they were effectively restated in a reformed shape in Jim Packer's very influential *Knowing God*,⁶ and, in a revived pietistic shape, through the charismatic movement becoming an increasing force within evangelicalism. At Keele it had been regarded as a divisive element.⁷ This continued after Keele but there was considerable wisdom and tolerance on both sides. This culminated in a meeting of leading evangelicals, both charismatic and non-charismatic, which led to a theological statement *Gospel and Spirit*⁸ which indicated a remarkable coming together.

This *rapprochement* facilitated the acceptance of Evangelicalism within wider Anglicanism. This was because charismatics had been, to a considerable degree, accepted by the Church at large, despite fears roused in the mid-seventies because of much publicized activities of some of its least stable elements in relation to exorcism.⁹ The movement reflected an age much concerned with experience and thus it had a feeling of in-

1 Ibid., 1 August 1969, p 11.

2 See John King in a number of *CT* articles (22 August 1969, p 9; 4 February 1972, p 2; 5 May 1972, p 11).

3 *CT*, 14 March 1969, p 3.

4 *CT*, 5 May 1972, p 11.

5 A rejection of a concentration on the development of the interior spiritual life to the exclusion of any real concern for the wider Church or world.

6 Hodder and Stoughton, London 1973.

7 See John Stott's comments in *CT*, 28 January 1977, p 11.

8 *Churchman* 91, 1977, pp 102-13.

9 Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England, 1945-1980*, OUP, Oxford 1984, pp 246-8.

touchness.¹ It even earned the accolade of a highly appreciative article from David Edwards which argued that 'the current charismatic movement is the best ever since the Acts of the Apostles because it is the most charitable ever'.² The bonding of moderate post-Keele non-charismatic and charismatic evangelicals made it easier, rather than harder, for the Church at large to get over its fears about Evangelicalism. Evangelical spirituality might, as a consequence, have appeared to be more tinged with unpredictable enthusiasm, but the gain was that its theology seemed less doctrinaire and was open, in a new way, to aspects of Anglo- and Roman Catholicism.

Fifthly, there was a working out of the commitment of Keele to ecumenism. Though evangelicals became deeply unpopular because of their role in destroying the unity proposals,³ they did seriously engage with Anglo-Catholics and produced the significant *Growing into Union*⁴ which brought an unexpected degree of agreement between the four theologians involved (Packer, Buchanan, the Revd Eric Mascall and Bishop Graham Leonard). Dialogue with Roman Catholics was also begun. Relations, however, with the evangelical Free Churches became more difficult. They found the whole Keele theology and ecclesiology very problematic and indeed some of them, notably Martyn Lloyd-Jones, attacked it openly.⁵

Sixthly, the concern for the world expressed in the Keele statement was much in evidence. At some time after the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966 (perhaps at Keele itself!) John Stott had been persuaded of the fact that 'not only the consequences of the Commission but the actual Commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus'.⁶ This was expressed in a number of ways, perhaps most notably in the setting up of TEAR Fund, the work of evangelicals such as David Sheppard and Pat Dearnley in deprived areas and the support of the Shaftesbury Project (established in 1969).

- 1 Since writing the main draft of this article, I have had the opportunity of reading in manuscript form the chapters on the twentieth century from David Bebbington's forthcoming *Evangelical Religion in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Unwin Hyman). He explores very helpfully the relationship of the charismatic movement to the prevailing culture, and has some fascinating points to make about its pre-history outside of Pentecostalism. It will be published towards the end of the year.
- 2 *CT*, 11 October 1974, p 13.
- 3 See for example *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, OUP, 1969-70, pp viii-ix: 1971-72, p viii and 1973-74, p xiv.
- 4 Colin Buchanan et al., SPCK, London 1970.
- 5 Manwaring, op. cit., p 185. The breach between Lloyd-Jones and evangelical Anglicans had of course begun earlier, in the autumn of 1966 (see footnote 2 on p 55 above).
- 6 John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Falcon, London, 1975, p 23. He was of course speaking of the Great Commission.

Finally the concern for mission and the communication of the Gospel continued to be central, particularly in a host of imaginative developments which blossomed in these years. It was an era of experimentation and of creativity in which the laity were involved in a new way in worship and mission. This expressed itself in music (*Youth Praise* etc.), in drama and in dance.¹

The post-Keele years then saw a strengthening of the Keele directions but also divisions within Evangelicalism and a separation from its traditional Free Church allies. By the mid-seventies evangelicals could claim with justice that they were no longer a 'despised minority'.² They were stronger than they had been: in 1969 about thirty per cent of ordinands were evangelicals;³ certainly the figure was well over forty per cent by 1977.⁴ Yet its strength can be exaggerated. Though evangelicals were respected in a new way, there is not much evidence, from the reporting of the period, that overmuch notice was taken of their opinions. By 1976 they had only two diocesan bishops, no suffragan bishops and very few in any high positions within the Church.⁵ They were a force to be reckoned with; they had yet to stamp any clear influence on the Church.

Nottingham 1977

The social, political and intellectual context was very different from that of Keele. Gone was the confident, challenging, heady days of the sixties. Inflation was rampant. Britain was widely perceived to be in perhaps terminal decline. The Butskellite⁶ consensus was breaking up. Many felt that new solutions were needed. Few were agreed as to what they should be. In this rather depressed environment, Evangelicalism had the strength, vision and energy to mount a Congress for two thousand people in April 1977 and to produce three volumes of papers,⁷ which were reported to have sold forty thousand copies.⁸

- 1 Churches like All Souls, Langham Place, Holy Trinity, Cambridge, St Ebbe's Oxford and Christ Church, Clifton continued to provide a model in the adaptations they made to meet the needs of the age. However, more definitely charismatic churches such as St Michael-le-Belfry, York, St Nicholas, Durham (see George Carey, *The Church in the Market Place*, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne 1984), St Aldate's, Oxford supplied an influential moderate charismatic model.
- 2 John Stott, *CT*, 12 December 1975, p 15.
- 3 Saward, *op. cit.*, p 34. Contemporaries, perhaps because they defined evangelical colleges rather differently, seemed to see the percentage as somewhat lower. King suggested about 25% (*CT*, 6 August 1971, p 9), though a few months later this had become 35% (*CT*, 5 May 1972, p 11).
- 4 Saward, *op. cit.*, p 34.
- 5 See Michael Smout in *CT*, 26 March 1976, p 11. Though the two archbishops (Coggan and Blanch) had an evangelical background and were greatly valued by evangelicals, they had had their own 'Keele experiences' long before Keele and were still probably regarded as 'Liberal Evangelicals' by most.
- 6 A term derived from combining the names of Butler (Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Gaitskell (Labour Leader). It indicated the continuity between Conservative and Labour economic policy.
- 7 John Stott, ed., *Obedying Christ in a Changing World*, 3 vols., Collins, Glasgow 1977.
- 8 *CT*, 22 April 1977, p 15.

There were many signs at Nottingham that the commitment to *perestroika* continued. The objectives were not so clear cut as at Keele – to look back at what Keele had achieved and to look forward to the new challenges.¹ There were three main themes – Christ, Church and Society. Scripture remained basic. However, with Keele-like humility, it was declared that ‘no infallibility’ was attributed to ‘our evangelical traditions’ and with post-Keele-like confidence, there was a determination ‘to re-examine them radically’. The writers were sure about ‘the truthfulness of Scripture but sometimes less than sure in our understanding of how to apply it to complex contemporary questions’. Given that freedom, it is not surprising to hear that they would demonstrate ‘an unusual combination of the conservative and the radical, the dogmatic and the agnostic, the fixed and the free.’²

If Nottingham revealed a new sureness and confidence amongst evangelicals, it also indicated, fairly publicly, the degree of its divisions. There were probably three which surfaced most obviously. First, Tony Thiselton’s masterly paper on hermeneutics with his warning that evangelicals could, as much as any other group in the Church, tame and domesticate the Bible by bringing to it ‘a pre-packaged theology’,³ and with its honest facing of the difficulties of reinterpreting ancient text in a modern context⁴ – the problem of the horizons of the writer and the horizons of the modern listener⁵ – brought a good deal of controversy.⁶ It opened up the possibility of a challenge to the ‘working theological beliefs’⁷ of Evangelicalism.

Secondly, John Gladwin’s paper ‘Power in Our Democracy’⁸ with its questioning of many aspects of capitalism and its sympathy with elements of Marxism – the concept of alienation for example – also divided.⁹ Finally David Watson, in a Bible Reading, brought ‘an audible murmur of protest’ by suggesting that ‘the Reformation was one of the greatest tragedies to hit the Church’, and a further murmur when he recounted that his experience of fellowship with Roman Catholic charismatics had made him realize that his previous attitudes towards them, and to others with whom he disagreed, had been wrong.¹⁰ What seemed to be apparent was that many within Evangelicalism were extremely alert to the problems of the day and open in their approach but that this very alertness and openness was potentially deeply divisive.

1 Sir Norman Anderson, *CT*, 1 April 1977, p 13.

2 Stott, *Obedying*, i, p 1.

3 *Ibid.*, p 97.

4 *Ibid.*, p 100.

5 *Ibid.*, p 102.

6 *CT*, 22 April 1977, p 15.

7 Stott, *Obedying*, i, p 97.

8 *Ibid.*, ii, pp 17-40.

9 *CT*, 22 April 1977, p 15.

10 *Ibid.*

A Statement was issued.¹ It was long, though it did have short 'Declarations of Intent' which helpfully encapsulated the spirit of the Congress – again, as at Keele, repentant of many things from the evangelical handling of Scripture to its 'ill will towards Roman Catholics'.² The Statement was criticized by some for concentrating on matters of application rather than on 'evangelical essentials'.³ That implies an agenda which was not that of Nottingham. It did meet the theological question of the hour – the Incarnation – and was, as would be expected, unambiguous (*Statement*, section B). The overwhelming impression is of a sane and practical document which shows Evangelicalism as committed to 'shared leadership' in each Parish (J2), the ordination of women (at any rate to the non-stipendiary ministry) (J3) and to visible unity of the Church (L). It accepted that Roman Catholics were 'fellow Christians' and sought for full communion (M3) but asked, rather unrealistically, for 'some official denials of past claims' (M2). It seemed to be more enthusiastic in its advocacy of episcopacy than Keele had been (J7). Its remaining sections largely referred to questions of application to different areas of life (education, marriage etc.) and are probably more important because they show evangelicals engaging with the issues than because of their profundity. In that sense it got evangelical Anglicanism about right – it had many able people committed to working within the Church and serving the world. Precisely because that did not allow for easy solutions, precisely because it was, in any case divided (like any other cross section of society), the more political the questions became, the fewer the certainties were. The Statement assured any who needed reassurance that Evangelicalism had advanced from Keele and that it attracted a great deal of support. At the same time, it revealed, to anyone who was prepared to dig deeper, that it had, as Jim Packer said, much less sense of 'common purpose' than at Keele.⁴ It was, said John Stott quoting Colin Craston, 'more a coalition than a party'.⁵ That analysis was soon to prove itself more than accurate.

From Nottingham to NEAC3

Nottingham had hardly finished before there was talk of an 'identity problem' – or indeed an 'identity crisis' within Evangelicalism. The causes were manifold. There is a sense in which the whole nation was imbued with a sense of crisis in the late seventies. Kavanagh, in his recent book, draws attention to the way the political agenda moved in the seventies in a more rightward direction than could have been conceived in the sixties. There was a growing perception that the problems (inflation, strikes etc.)

1 NEAC, *The Nottingham Statement*, London 1977.

2 *Ibid.*, p 77.

3 Roger Beckwith in Samuel, *op. cit.*, p 108.

4 J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis*, Latimer House, Oxford 1978, p 30.

5 *CT*, 28 January 1977, p 11.

demanded radically different policies.¹ This produced a crisis within the old order which had been established in the sixties in all the political parties. Commenting on the period 1970-85, Hastings observed that there was 'throughout the community, the loss of an underlying ideology to which people could together turn in confidence'.² Evangelicals felt this rootlessness as much as anyone else and, when they looked at their own roots, some were easily persuaded that these had been undervalued in the recent past.

The more immediate reason for an identity problem was, in Packer's words, that 'the past generation has seen more change in the Church of England than at any time since the Reformation'.³ Not only had the familiar landmarks gone, but there was also a doctrinal uncertainty. 'The rumbling hiccups and fumbling pickups on doctrinal points which were sometimes noticeable at Nottingham confirmed suspicions that, whatever else evangelical clergy had been doing since Keele, they had not been spending their strength drilling folk in basic evangelical principles as their fathers used to do.'⁴

All that was exacerbated by two things. First, the Church of England in the later seventies seemed to have accepted as normative an almost limitless comprehensiveness.⁵ It was a matter of concern not only to those closely involved in evangelical Anglicanism.⁶ Second, the most conservative reformed elements within Evangelicalism were reorganizing themselves. Their arguments were simple enough. Keele, urged David Samuel, had led to 'a steady decline in the distinctive doctrinal position of Evangelical Anglicanism'.⁷ *Growing Into Union* had revealed the spectacle of 'Anglican Evangelicals standing on their heads and receiving applause from many of their own constituency for doing so'.⁸ It had reduced the supremacy of Scripture and departed from the Reformers' teaching on justification and the sacraments.⁹ Thus Jim Packer reminded David Samuel of a driver making all the correct signals to turn right 'but at the last moment he disappears round a corner to the left - and I am amazed'.¹⁰ The success of this group was in the effective taking over of the prestigious Church Society

1 Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus*, OUP, Oxford 1987, pp 17-22.

2 Op. cit., p 600.

3 Packer, *Identity Problem*, p 11.

4 Ibid., p 13.

5 The Doctrine Commission Report (*Christian Believing*, SPCK, London 1976) was happy to accept doctrinal polarities as reflections of 'different conceptions of the nature of religious truth' (p 38).

6 See for example S. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, Mowbrays, London 1978, p 42.

7 David N. Samuel, *The New Evangelicalism in the Church of England*, PRS, Barnet nd, Introduction.

8 Ibid., p 28.

9 Ibid., pp 28-9.

10 Ibid., p 46.

which many evangelicals had hoped would be united with CEEC.¹ In 1983 David Samuel became Director of Church Society. Earlier in the same year the whole editorial board of *Churchman* was dismissed by Church Society – immediately for being too open in publishing (without any dissenting editorial comment) material which challenged evangelical orthodoxy on Scripture. It was a gesture revealing the deep unease that some elements within Evangelicalism felt at the consequences of the new openness. In the following year the journal which you are now reading was established.

Oddly enough, I would argue that this process helped to alleviate the identity problem within Evangelicalism. I wrote in the middle of the controversy that there was no disagreement about what Jim Packer had defined as evangelical fundamentals – the supremacy of Scripture, the majesty of Jesus Christ, the lordship of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of conversion, the priority of evangelism and the importance of fellowship. Rather the disagreement came because of the variety of interpretations and practices possible in relation to these fundamentals. Such variety was not new. Evangelicalism had always contained ‘disparate and sometimes warring traditions’ but this had been forgotten because the immediate twentieth century background had been ‘a period of prolonged defensiveness in which evangelicalism was, of necessity, atypically monochrome’.² What, arguably, the eighties brought, slowly and painfully, was a recognition of plurality within Evangelicalism. As it was gradually accepted that one could be reformed, or charismatic, or a strong Church of England man, or a combination of some or all of these, and still work and have fellowship with other evangelicals, the problem of identity receded.³

Another characteristic is the emergence of a more theologically and morally conservative spirit at grass roots. Nobody doubts the eighties have seen a resurgence of conservatism and that in every sphere of life, including theology. The decline of English Modernism has recently been charted.⁴ The new radicalism of Dennis Nineham and Maurice Wiles, which succeeded it in the sixties and seventies, seemed itself to be in retreat by the early eighties. Bishop David Jenkins’s remarks on the Virgin Birth and the physical resurrection would scarcely have caused such a stir in the seventies even allowing for Jenkins’s evangelical capacity to attract attention by presenting any idea with verve and excitement. Evangelicals would of course have objected but they had long since come to terms with the need to show ‘conscientious goodwill to a good deal of experimental theology’.⁵ The

1 Manwaring, *op. cit.*, p 208. This desire had perhaps been sharpened in the seventies by the considerable wealth the Church Society was rumoured to have (see King in *CT*, 4 February 1972, p 2).

2 *Churchman* 94, 1979, pp 103–4.

3 *Anvil* 4, 1987, p 2. It has to be said that others are less optimistic and see only an increase in tension (see Seward, *op. cit.*, p 68).

4 Alan G. Stephenson, *The Rise and Decline of English Modernism*, SPCK, London 1984.

5 J. I. Packer, *A Kind of Noah’s Ark? The Anglican Commitment to Comprehensiveness*, Latimer House, Oxford 1981, p 30.

fierce and protracted reaction (not by any means confined to evangelicals) was a sign both that the evangelical constituency had more new members, unschooled in the tolerance of the sixties and seventies, and that society at large, searching for its own answers, was not going to take kindly to a Christianity which did not appear to believe its own formularies. Miracles, in any case, no longer presented the sort of problems that they had once done in the Church.¹ Evangelicals played their full part in the ensuing controversy and it seems very likely that evangelical bishops had a major role in the comparatively conservative document which the bishops produced in reaction.²

What the debate showed was that evangelicals could actually expect to influence the Church of England, not just because they were stronger, but because there were a great many people, both in the Church and outside, who agreed with them. The same phenomenon is evident in the recent debate over homosexuality. It was widely believed that some Selection Conferences recommended candidates for training whom they knew to be practising homosexuals, that these practices were not strongly discouraged in some theological colleges nor, after ordination, in some dioceses.³ There was little attempt in the late seventies and early eighties to bring this matter to a head. Many assumed that this reflected the mind of the Church. I remember writing what I considered to be a rather fierce editorial against the Gloucester Report in 1980.⁴ At that time, and for some time afterwards, such reasoning seemed to belong to the obscurantist right. There were signs, even within Evangelicalism, of the case for tolerating practising homosexuals being pressed, and attracting some support. Tony Higton's campaign, for all its black-and-whiteness, has changed all that. It has forced the ecclesiastical establishment onto the defensive. The populist methods adopted have secured more media coverage than any evangelical cause since General Synod was established in 1970. They have also made the traditional evangelical leadership uncomfortable – hence perhaps its part in

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- 1 See Review Article by Peter Forster in *Anvil* 4, 1987, pp 59-60.
 - 2 House of Bishops, General Synod, *The Nature of Christian Belief*, CHP, London 1986. The very fact that they thought it necessary to produce anything was a mark of the impact of the new conservatism.
 - 3 These beliefs were certainly not without justification (see Andrew Brown, 'Voices from the Wilderness', *The Independent*, 22 February 1988 p 19; Jeremy Younger, 'The Freedom to Love', *New Statesman* 115, 26 February 1988, pp 14-15).
 - 4 *Churchman* 94, 1980, pp 4-6. The Gloucester Report (Church of England, General Synod, Board for Social Responsibility, *Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion*, CIO, London 1979) rejected what it acknowledged to be biblical and traditional Christian teaching about homosexuality.

putting the alternative and less condemnatory motion.¹ Are we seeing a beginning of a challenge to that leadership, now as firmly part of the Church of England establishment as of the evangelical establishment, comparable to the one it mounted twenty-one and more years ago? Probably not, but what we may be seeing is a signal that there are forces abroad impatient with the pragmatism necessary for effectiveness in the seventies, and sometimes with a commitment to the total validity of their understanding of truth every bit as defensive and rigid as that of the caricature of pre-Keele evangelicals. They are often charismatic, but very different in their emphasis from the moderate and eirenic David Watson.² They represent yet another aspect of that coalition which makes up Evangelicalism.

The Prospect: NEAC3 and Afterwards

A Christian historian's judgment about the future has little more claim to be right than anyone else's. What he can say is that the future is in God's hands and God's ways are certainly beyond precise understanding or prediction. Nonetheless there are several pointers.

Leadership

It is arguable that Evangelicalism is stronger to-day than at any time since 1836.³ Triumphalism, however, is not in order. Jim Packer has warned

- 1 At the November 1987 General Synod the Revd Tony Higton put forward a motion which was regarded as a hardline reaffirmation of traditional sexual morality. The evangelical Bishop of Chester (the Rt Revd Michael Baughen) successfully carried what was generally regarded as a more moderate statement of biblical and traditional standards (though very considerably stronger than anything which had been said for some years). The motion said that homosexual acts 'fall short' (rather than being 'sins against' - the phrase which the motion used when referring to 'fornication' and 'adultery') of these ideals and called for repentance 'and the exercise of compassion'. A motion to insist on discipline against clergy in cases of sexual immorality was not passed, though, significantly for the case I am making, the House of Laity did accept it by a fairly large majority (*CT*, 13 November 1987, pp 1 & 5).
- 2 The winding up of the Fountain Trust in 1980 may have been an act of premature self-confidence. It might have had a sobering effect on what many considered to be some of the dangerous emphases of 'signs and wonders' which have dominated the charismatic movement in recent years (for the theological reaction to John Wimber see Lewis B. Smedes, ed., *Ministry and the Miraculous: A Case Study at Fuller Theological Seminary*, Fuller Theological College, Pasadena, 1987).
- 3 Its current strength in the structures of the C of E is growing (1987; 7 diocesan bishops; 60 clergy in the House of Clergy; 110 in the House of Laity; almost half the elected members of the Synod's Standing Committee and a similar percentage of trustees of the Church Urban Fund; members on all the main Boards of the Synod and charring 2 [Saward, op. cit., pp 40-1]). In October 1986 52.58% of sponsored candidates training in residential colleges in England were attending the 6 evangelical colleges (Church of England, General Synod, GS 766, *Annual Report for 1986*, General Synod, London 1987, p 13).

that a mood of success 'is regularly the mother of fragmentation, wherever it is found'.¹ The danger signals are there, not only in the divisions we have charted, but in the consequences of David Watson's death (1984) and John Stott's stepping down from some of the key roles he occupied within Evangelicalism. Watson's spirituality provided links across all sorts of barriers and ensured that the charismatics were kept in touch with the mainstream. The study of recent Evangelicalism reveals how far, at almost every twist and turn of the story of the last thirty years, Stott has engaged with the issues on a very broad front,² been prepared to change,³ to commend change and yet to command the respect and love of all. Anybody well read in Victorian ecclesiastical history knows the difficulties Evangelicalism, strong though it was numerically and close though it had become to the emerging Victorian mores, experienced after the departure of William Wilberforce and Charles Simeon. A similar danger may exist to-day. Evangelicalism must strive to avoid a leadership vacuum though it is good to remember David Edwards's stirring declaration that Evangelicalism is 'not a fashion depending on great personalities; nor is it a party depending on bureaucracy or on jobs for the boys. It is an emotional reality.' It is an experience of God.⁴ If that has been true of periods in the past, history demonstrates that there is no guarantee that it will automatically be true of the movement which goes under the name Evangelical in the future.

Spirituality

Four years ago, Colin Buchanan sounded a warning about Evangelicalism. 'All is not well. There is no properly tested tradition of spirituality with any vigour today'.⁵ Perhaps, even in the four years since, the position has improved. Spirituality is now a major emphasis amongst ordinands. They are critical of the evangelical activism of the sixties. They admire the Catholic tradition of quiet and listening prayer. Corporate worship is central to them in a way that it was not ten years ago - persuading ordinands that regular chapel worship is important is no longer difficult. If NEAC3 drives us back to spiritual roots and reinforces these in the parish, it will have achieved something very important.

1 *Identity Problem*, p 30.

2 It is not always appreciated what a role he has played in Evangelicalism on an international scale. Hastings sees him as providing the intellectual support which has helped other leaders, notably the more 'flamboyant' Billy Graham, to guide Evangelicalism worldwide 'into new, less simplistic vistas' (op. cit., p 617).

3 To take but one further example, it is fascinating to see how this acknowledged master preacher has adapted his method in the light of what he learned of hermeneutics. Thus he explains that he now gives far more attention to the application of the message in the modern world, while once he was content to demonstrate the meaning of Scripture in its original context (see John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, H & S, London 1982, pp 140-1).

4 *CT*, 13 June 1969, p 11.

5 *Anvil* 1, 1984, p 15.

Yet great dangers lurk. The burgeoning of the charismatic movement has brought with it what Peter Adam calls a 'new Pietism'.¹ There is, as a result, a danger that there will be a concentration on interior spiritual growth to the exclusion of any sense of the demands of Church and world. It was this sort of pietism which was so vigorously opposed at Keele and Nottingham.² There is a danger furthermore that the emphasis will move entirely to experience, to the search for happiness, well-being and instant miraculous solutions (often to minor ailments while the major are unaffected). The central message of the Cross is surely very different – God's grace meeting us in our helplessness and then enabling us to grow in holiness, though sin, pain and suffering are never eradicated and though there remain many signs of the imperfection which has shaped us, alongside the foretaste of the glory which is to come in the renewal and strength which he daily gives to us. This message, traced through Paul, Augustine, Luther and Calvin, must be close to any spirituality for today which is remotely connected to our evangelical heritage.³ It is too often obscured and forgotten.

Renewal

Renewal is a word on the lips of many evangelicals today. Regrettably it is generally used as a synonym for charismatic. It is surely no such thing. The vision of the Church being renewed should be basic to all Christians. It carries however, particularly in the form it is commonly understood, high risks – of division because the renewed folk demand that all other Christians experience what they have experienced and that worship be expressed in the form they have found most relevant to themselves. Renewal will only become a positive and uniting force if it gives the sort of love which transcends charismatic, denominational and even doctrinal boundaries in the way David Watson described so honestly at Nottingham ten years ago.⁴ Otherwise there is the real risk that charismatic renewal, particularly as it draws in increasing numbers those who know nothing of the Church in any other shape, may become remote both from Evangelical Anglicanism and from Anglicanism generally.

Theology

The tendency to be relatively unconcerned with intellectual matters has often evidenced itself within Evangelicalism. Thus Victorian Evangelicalism became first of all unattractive to its more cerebral followers and then

1 Peter Adam, *Roots of Contemporary Evangelical Spirituality*, Grove Books, Bramcote 1988, p 19.

2 See Stott in *CT*, 28 January 1977, p 11 and in *Obedying*, i, p 11.

3 This 'Augustinian' emphasis is described in many places. See, for example, J. I. Packer, *Keep in Touch with the Spirit*, IVP, Leicester 1984, pp 122-32; Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross*, DLT, London 1979, chs. 4 and 7.

4 *CT*, 22 April 1977, p 15.

narrow and defensive towards the Oxford Movement (where many of them found refuge) in part because it had few men of intellectual calibre. One of the great achievements of post-war Evangelicalism has been to reassert the importance of the mind in theology. There are many indications that this conviction is in retreat before the search for experience and the cry for relevance. Certainly any good theology must be related to experience and must be relevant to the world. It will not therefore necessarily be quickly acquired or capable of being expressed in its profundity in two syllable words. Doctrine, based on biblical principles, is necessary to understand, explain and, sometimes, to reject experience. It cannot be shunted off the stage as an irrelevance without tragedy quickly ensuing. Evangelical theologians believe their work is important. They are not always persuaded that the evangelical constituency shares their conviction. Perhaps ways need to be found of alerting theologians to the needs of the constituency and the constituency to the work of theologians. If there had been more planning, we might not, for example, find ourselves in the situation of today when it is difficult to think of any evangelical theologian expert in the crucially important area of education.¹

Arguably the role of theological colleges is even more important than it was ten years ago as theology faculties in universities are squeezed – often out of existence.² This again needs to be recognized without in any way prejudging the precise shape of the colleges of the future.

Mission and Social Outworking

Probably Mission England gave the greatest single fillip to evangelical Anglicanism in the eighties. Evangelicals have perhaps a greater talent for evangelism than for most other forms of ministry. That must be optimised, for if evangelicals are measurably stronger in the Church than they were twenty years ago, their influence in the nation at large has not increased on the same scale. They have not been immune to the contraction in the Church's influence. They must also beware that they do not forget the advances which have been made in the area of social responsibility in the way that Victorian evangelicals seemed to ignore the models handed to them by the Clapham Sect.

Ecumenism

The evangelical commitment to organic union is too well documented to be denied. The lingering doubt remains that many evangelicals prefer working with their own and have yet to be enthused by the ecumenical

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- 1 This particular deficiency is strange because in 1971 John King claimed that there were 'so many well-qualified Evangelicals at work' in religious education that it was 'embarrassing to choose from among them' (*CT*, 6 August 1971 p 9).
 - 2 *The Nottingham Statement* urged that 'the need for larger, competent theological colleges is greater than ever before in the light of current and projected trends in university faculties of theology.' (J5).

vision. That is to say no more than that evangelicals are rather like other Christians but it remains nonetheless a challenge. Ecumenical developments may hold many surprises for the future.¹

The Church of England

Evangelicals will need to learn to accept the consequences of their leaders assuming key roles in the wider Church. They will have broader responsibilities, different priorities and divided loyalties. Like the leaders of any minority group which attains power, they will have more complex choices than in the simple days when all their friends and colleagues shared a similar outlook. The leaders will need prayer the better to fulfil their new roles, the constituency will need imagination to accept that an evangelical diocesan does not mean an overnight change – indeed that such a change would be quite wrong and should only come if and when it is the wish of the clergy and people of the diocese concerned – and, perhaps above all, Evangelicalism needs an ecclesiology which will make sense of the theological pluralism which actually exists (and is no new twentieth century phenomenon) because many people love and serve the Lord who are not evangelicals.

In the end we can do no better than quote the admiring summary of a non-evangelical observer and use it as a means of alerting us to face the prospect of God's future, encouraged that such positive observations can be made, but challenged because we know that often it has been far from the truth and that, as it becomes true it will have exactly the consequences predicted:

The religion of the Evangelicals feeds the souls of men and women because all the time it draws very directly on the inexhaustible power of the risen Christ. It is aware of the problems but is itself a part of the answer. The end-product is not all worry or doubt or confusion; it is not even discipline or duty. It is joy and peace in believing.²

The Revd Dr C. Peter Williams is Vice-Principal of Trinity College, Bristol.

1 For example, Hastings speculates that Evangelicalism may be faced with a choice 'between an intellectually archaic and fundamentalist sectarianism' and 'a Conservative and biblically conscious wing within an ecumenical Catholicism' (op. cit., p 618).

2 *CT Leader*, 15 April 1977 p 10.