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# Evangelical Trends, 1959-2009

**Anvil first appeared in 1984. In this article, David Bebbington, a leading historian of evangelicalism, demonstrates how the half-century around that date witnessed a variety of changes within the Evangelical movement in Britain. Although the most typical characteristics of Evangelicals survived, there was a decline in anti-Catholicism, Keswick teaching, premillennial eschatology, traditional missionary-mindedness and internal unity. On the other hand there was a rise in the proportion of Evangelicals in their denominations, a broadening of their views and fresh ecumenical engagement. Reformed and charismatic sectors grew, black-led churches arose, gender issues became controversial, socio-political involvement increased and relative prosperity had major consequences. By the end of the period the movement was much more diverse than at its beginning.**

## Introduction

The foundation of *Anvil* in 1984 was the midway point in a process of drastic transformation within the Evangelical movement in Britain. By no means all the novelties appeared in the quarter-century after that event; many of them took place in the earlier part of the period. The aim of this paper is to review the developments over the whole half-century. In 1959 change was afoot in the world at large. The first section of the M1 motorway was opened, General de Gaulle was declared president of the Fifth French Republic and Pope John XXIII announced the convening of the Second Vatican Council. Innovation was also touching the sphere of Evangelicals. In the same year there was an outbreak of speaking in tongues, then nearly unknown outside Pentecostalism, at a Methodist church in Congleton, Cheshire;<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, the pioneering Brethren scholar, took up the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester;<sup>2</sup> and Maurice Wood, the Vicar of St Mary's, Islington, told the annual Islington Conference of Anglican Evangelicals that there was a 'new evangelical revival' in the church.<sup>3</sup> An editorial in *The Church of England Newspaper* applauded the spirit of modern Evangelicals. 'By and large', it declared, 'they are less inclined to be backward-looking (1662 and all that) and more ready to face current needs; less controversial and more positive in outlook; less narrow-minded and more tolerant towards those of other views; less afflicted by an inferiority complex and more aware of a sense of mission.'<sup>4</sup> Some were aware of stirrings in the evangelical camp.

1 Hocken 1986: 64 n31.

2 Bruce 1980: 204.

3 *Church of England Newspaper* [hereafter *CEN*], 19 January 1959: 6.

4 *CEN*, 19 January 1959: 6.

Yet the older temper – backward-looking, controversial, narrow-minded and, in the opinion of *The Church of England Newspaper*, suffering from an inferiority complex – was by no means consigned to history. In November 1959 there was issued 'A Memorial addressed to Leaders of the Church of England in a Time of Crisis and Opportunity' signed by seventy-eight prominent laypeople and about five hundred clergy, all of them evangelical. The crisis was the process of canon law revision being pushed through by Geoffrey Fisher, the tidy-minded former public school headmaster who was Archbishop of Canterbury, giving greater licence to Anglo-Catholic practices within the Church of England. The urgent requests of the signatories were that the use of vestments should cease and that canon law revision should not raise unnecessary issues within the Church. The opportunity was for the Bible again to be 'established in fact, as well as in theory, as the final and supreme authority in all matters of faith and doctrine'. That would entail 'a return to that simplicity of worship and Scriptural doctrine which has been characteristic of our Church since the Reformation', which meant Prayer Book services of morning and evening prayer. The result would be a remedy for falling church attendance and 'weakened moral fibre' among the people of England. There was talk of 'the British character' and 'a firm foundation for national life'.<sup>5</sup> Church and nation were closely identified in an outburst of Protestant patriotism. The whole episode seemed a minor re-run of the Prayer Book controversy of 1927-28, when an attempt to revise the basis of Anglican worship so as to permit greater latitude to Anglo-Catholics had been voted down in Parliament after an upsurge of national concern led by Evangelicals. As though to confirm the link with the earlier affair, one of the honorary treasurers of the fund promoting the memorial was Viscount Brentford, the son of the Home Secretary who in 1927-28 had played a large part in the defeat of Prayer Book revision. As in the earlier case, the protest was endorsed by non-Anglican Evangelicals, this time including Sir John Laing, a Brethren building magnate, and Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough, a Baptist ex-cabinet minister. It also secured the support of men who were later to lead an alteration in the public face of Anglican Evangelicalism such as John Stott, Rector of All Souls', Langham Place, and Norman Anderson, Director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in the University of London and Stott's close friend. In 1959, therefore, the evangelical movement in Britain was still steeped in the past.

Nor did everything about Evangelicals change during the succeeding half-century. The characteristics that had long marked adherents of the movement persisted down the years. The appeal to the authority of the Bible evident in the memorial of 1959 was part of a respect for the importance of Scripture that never ceased to be a feature of Evangelicalism. At the 1967 Keele National Evangelical Anglican Congress, a milestone in the journey towards fresh attitudes in many fields, the place of the Bible was reaffirmed: 'the Scriptures', according to the Congress statement, 'are the wholly trustworthy oracles of God'.<sup>6</sup> Again, the doctrinal centrality of the atonement was asserted in a series of books including Stott's *The Cross of Christ* (1986) and Steve Holmes' *The Wondrous Cross* (2007).<sup>7</sup> Even though controversy surged around both Scripture and atonement, the fundamental allegiance to these priorities was a consistent attribute of the movement over time.

5 'A Memorial addressed to Leaders of the Church of England in a Time of Crisis and Opportunity', November 1959.

6 Crowe 1967: 20.

7 Stott 1986; Holmes 2007.

The insistence on the need for conversion was another continuing hallmark of Evangelicals. Billy Graham, with his unashamed calls for conversion, was a welcome figure in Britain on several occasions during the period. Notwithstanding his potentially off-putting Americanness, when a *Church of England Newspaper* questionnaire in 1965 asked its readers whether they approved of his methods of evangelism, a resounding 587 answered 'yes' and a mere 47 said 'no'.<sup>8</sup> Evangelicals also remained eager to be up and doing, taking evangelism as their focus but extending their mission to many other spheres. Thus in 1973 John Stott called for churches not to monopolise the weekday evenings of their members. The object was not to give Christians an easier time, for he urged that they should experience a 'busy Sunday' with prayer, Bible study and business meetings supplementing regular worship. Rather the aim was to enable believers to engage in such weeknight activities as badminton where they could be witnesses.<sup>9</sup> So the typical Evangelical stance, involving emphasis upon Bible, cross, conversion and activism, endured throughout the period. The degree of weight attached to the four priorities varied from time to time and from group to group, but, despite occasional charges to the contrary, none of the four traits faded from view in any quarter. Like other fundamental characteristics shared with other Christians, this quartet remained in place down to 2009.

### Characteristics in decline

Nevertheless there were major modifications in the movement, and they form the substance of this article. Certain inherited qualities fell into decay.

In the first place, the anti-Catholicism of which the resistance to ecclesiastical vestments was a symptom went into decline. Rome was the enemy that Protestants had resisted, politically as well as spiritually, ever since the Reformation, and deep-seated fears surrounding the threat to national identity from that quarter were very much alive at the opening of the period. The memorial of 1959, for example, fulminated against 'Roman practices'.<sup>10</sup> In the following year, when Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle-upon-Tyne moved from a liberal evangelical position that had accepted some features of High Church innovation to a conservative evangelical stance, it dropped the seasonal changing of frontals on the holy table, flowers were kept in place during Lent and the clergyman ceased to raise his hand in giving the blessing.<sup>11</sup> Only occasionally would the chasm between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics be bridged during the 1960s. On one occasion Maurice Wood, by now principal of Oak Hill College, invited the Catholic prior of Cockfosters to dinner, but the consequence, as he remembered, was 'an enormous turmoil in the college'.<sup>12</sup> The palpable revolution in the Roman Catholic Church arising from the Second Vatican Council, however, transformed relations. Already Keele in 1967 rejoiced at the 'signs of biblical reformation' in the Roman communion,<sup>13</sup> the Anglican Evangelical Assembly of 1983 resolved to 'welcome' the final report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,<sup>14</sup> and, famously, David Watson spoke in 1977 of the Reformation as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Church.<sup>15</sup> The appearance of a section of Roman Catholic opinion

**8** *CEN*, 1 October 1965: 6.

**9** *CEN*, 2 February 1973: 16.

**10** 'Memorial'.

**11** Munden 2006: 204.

**12** Heinze and Wheaton 2002: 118.

**13** Crowe 1967: 39.

**14** Atherstone 2008: 11.

**15** *CEN*, 22 April 1977: 8.

willing to endorse the Lausanne Covenant, an international statement of evangelical faith and practice, and even in 1990 to form a body called 'Evangelical Catholics', largely drawn from charismatics, strengthened the general rapprochement.<sup>16</sup> There were Evangelicals, especially in the ranks of the Protestant Reformation Society, who looked askance at the trend and at times their voices were raised. Yet the publication of the *Alternative Service Book* (1980) put an end to the liturgical wars that had lasted for over a century in the Church of England. With its acceptance by Evangelicals, the chief *casus belli* with Anglo-Catholics disappeared. So there was a definite decline in anti-Catholicism during the period.

A second feature that weakened during the period was Keswick teaching. The annual convention at the Lake District town and its satellite gatherings had sustained the predominant style of evangelical spirituality since the opening of the twentieth century. Keswick taught holiness by faith: there was to be a stage beyond conversion when a believer received a distinct form of sanctification that could be maintained through moment-by-moment trust. In any circumstances, through passive reliance on the Almighty, a Christian could enjoy the 'victory'.<sup>17</sup> The resulting tendency was to withdraw from anything tainted with wrongdoing, or even doubtful, such as the cinema. In 1955, J. I. Packer, then a stern critic of the traditions of the fathers, had condemned Keswick doctrine as a Pelagian denial of the doctrines of grace.<sup>18</sup> Keswick platform speakers themselves began to broaden, by 1960 allowing that there was a fight of faith as well as a rest of faith.<sup>19</sup> Soon Norman Anderson began to see the message as unhelpful because of its world-denying implications, wanting instead to emphasise the world-affirming dimensions of the faith.<sup>20</sup> The specific Keswick teaching did not immediately shrivel, and some of the branches of the convention maintained their witness long after the 1960s. Oak Hill College, for example, continued to be the venue for a North London Keswick Convention down to 1981.<sup>21</sup> But by the 1990s the distinctive Keswick paradigm for spirituality had shattered. Even at the main convention itself its former teaching was presented by 1996 as just one option among a range of several perspectives on sanctification.<sup>22</sup> The consequence was that the chief supposed biblical sanction against participation in many activities was relaxed. Film-going became normal among Evangelicals, with reviews of movies forming a staple feature of magazines and even sermons. Worldliness seemed far less of a snare in the early twenty-first century than it had half a century before.

An associated decline took place in the field of eschatology. Evangelicals had commonly asserted a premillennial belief in the imminent return of Jesus to the earth, holding that the advent would take place before the millennium. The schematic version of premillennialism known as dispensationalism that was embodied in the notes of the Scofield Bible and championed by the Brethren exerted a remarkably pervasive influence in Britain as well as America as late as the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> In 1977, however, the InterVarsity Press in the United States published a volume called *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, which set out expositions of other options alongside the dispensationalist teaching.<sup>24</sup> Postmillennialism, the

**16** *What is an Evangelical Catholic?*

**17** Price and Randall 2000.

**18** Packer 1955.

**19** *CEN*, 29 July 1960: 2.

**20** Anderson 1985: chapter 9.

**21** Heinze and Wheaton 2002: 113.

**22** Personal observation.

**23** Weber 1979.

**24** Clouse 1977.

belief that before the second advent the world would be transformed into a millennium of peace and plenty through the spread of the gospel, found new advocates. Iain Murray, representing the rising Reformed body of opinion within Evangelicalism, pointed out in *The Puritan Hope* (1971) that this expectation had once been normal in Britain, and some of the more radical charismatics embraced a similar confidence in *Restoration* magazine.<sup>25</sup> Others, without discarding their belief in the personal return of Jesus, adopted more generalised views about the future. Thus in his booklet of 1977 on *What is an Evangelical?*, John Stott explained simply that Christ was coming back and that there would be a new world.<sup>26</sup> Many fell back on a more or less conscious dismissal of the whole notion of a future millennium. Hence the American series of Left Behind novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins postulating a scenario within the dispensationalist scheme, which attained over the seven years down to 2002 the astonishing sales of 32 million copies, achieved only a small circulation in Britain.<sup>27</sup> Even the more progressive Brethren cut adrift from their inherited views on prophetic matters. By 2008 Spring Harvest, the annual holiday camps for Bible teaching associated with the Evangelical Alliance, issued a handbook on eschatology that had little time for traditional debates between postmillennialists and premillennialists, seeing the 'promised end' as a time 'when Jesus shall return and bring in his kingdom of justice and joy'.<sup>28</sup> The normative evangelical eschatology had crumbled.

The missionary impulse, at least in the form it had taken in earlier years, was also sapped during these years. The typical Evangelical around 1959 was 'missionary-minded'.<sup>29</sup> The final evening of the Keswick Convention was always devoted to overseas missions. 'Consider', a typical chairman on that evening might have asked in the early 1960s, 'the thin red line of missionaries, in contrast with the millions living and dying without Christ'.<sup>30</sup> But with the end of empire, the attention of younger Britons was diverted away from many overseas mission fields. A life of evangelistic service in Africa seemed a less natural vocation. There were alternatives nearer home. In 1981, for example, the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission was inaugurated, providing new opportunities for radical discipleship amongst the deprived within Britain.<sup>31</sup> The faith missions such as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly the China Inland Mission) that had once channelled much evangelical enthusiasm abroad found it harder to recruit personnel or to raise money for their support. They even abandoned their traditional conviction that the Lord would supply all the needs of their missionaries, requiring them instead to raise sufficient funds to cover their support in advance. With the expansion of air travel, short-term visits overseas became possible and popular, but the effect was to diminish the number of those who possessed a sense of vocation to a lifetime of service. There were still long-term missionaries, but when, for example, in the late 1990s the Baptist Missionary Society had an increase in recruitment, most were volunteers and short-term workers.<sup>32</sup> Many missionary societies engaged in a flurry of rebranding in order to enhance their appeal: the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship became Interserve, the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society became

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**25** Murray 1971; Walker 1985: 126-29.

**26** Stott 1977: 12.

**27** Gribben 2009: 130.

**28** Holmes 2008: 8.

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**29** *CEN*, 11 February 1977: 6.

**30** Pollock 1964: 178.

**31** Randall 2005: 458.

**32** Randall 2005: 531.

Crosslinks and even the venerable Church Missionary Society became the Church Mission Society. The last of these alterations helped to signal a major shift of thinking away from a pattern of missionaries going from a sending country to a receiving country to a more multilateral model of mission. Traditional missionary approaches were transformed.

Another casualty of change was Evangelical unity. There had never been a time when Evangelicals as a whole had been without their divisions, and the era down to 1959 was no exception. Conservative Evangelicals in most denominations were at odds with their more liberal brethren. Within the conservative Evangelical community there was nevertheless a strong bond of common purpose, cemented during the 1950s by support for Billy Graham. The same unity found expression in the calling of two National Assemblies of Evangelicals in 1965 and 1966. At the second, however, there was an awkward stand-off between Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the doughty minister of Westminster Chapel, and John Stott. Lloyd-Jones called for a united evangelical body that would entail the withdrawal of Evangelicals from their existing denominations, a pattern he had previously inaugurated through the Evangelical Movement of Wales. Already Stott saw the future as giving Evangelicals a powerful say in the Church of England and so, from the chair, expressed his dissent from Lloyd-Jones's view.<sup>33</sup> The divergence became permanent, with Lloyd-Jones drawing more people into the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and Anglicans under Stott's leadership turning towards fuller participation in Anglican counsels. Likewise Baptists underwent a serious schism in the early 1970s over an address to the Baptist Union Assembly that called in question the divinity of Christ, with many of the most conservative leaving the denomination.<sup>34</sup> The Evangelical Alliance, revitalised under Clive Calver during the 1980s, did a good deal to reverse the trend against unity, but the process proved inexorable. The main polarisation was now between those who saw doctrinal fidelity as the primary responsibility of Evangelicals and those who, in their vigorous quest for conversions, were less insistent on vocal defence of orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup> The line of fission therefore ran within rather than between denominational groups, particularly in the Church of England. On the one hand stood Reform, an organisation established in 1993 to advance the gospel through strict adherence to biblical teaching; on the other, the open Evangelicals who in 2003 formed a body called Fulcrum. But the bifurcation was felt throughout the evangelical world. Steve Chalke, the enterprising mastermind behind Oasis, a church grouping based in south London that grappled with inner-city deprivation, was denounced in 2003 for apparently dismissing the doctrine of penal substitution in the atonement. For the conservative stalwarts Chalke was a heretic, but for many others he remained a hero.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the period, Evangelicals were moving in different directions.

## New developments

If there was a decline in various features of evangelical life, there were many aspects in which there were fresh developments. At a time when other sectors of church life weakened or collapsed, Evangelicals held their own much better. Taking the figures for England alone produced by MARC Europe/Christian Research, in 1989 9.9 per cent of the population went to church on a given Sunday, but by 1998

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**33** Bebbington 1989: 267.

**34** Randall 2005: 365-82.

**35** Warner 2007.

**36** Holmes 2007: 127-29.

the figure was down to 7.5 per cent.<sup>37</sup> The evangelical share of churchgoers, however, had increased from 30 to 37 per cent.<sup>38</sup> Although there had been a decline in absolute numbers of evangelical worshippers, they had become a larger proportion of the whole worshipping community. That was the main pattern throughout the period. Hence Evangelicals were thrust into greater prominence in ecclesiastical affairs. Already by 1986 a majority of residential ordinands of the Church of England were for the first time found in evangelical institutions. The future seemed to be theirs. Although in 1987 the complaint was heard that the party was represented by only seven diocesan bishops, overall they were receiving a fairer share of preferment in the church.<sup>39</sup> When the Queen appointed Maurice Wood to the see of Norwich in 1971, she noticed that he was described as 'conservative evangelical' and so enquired what that was.<sup>40</sup> In later years she would have had no need. Likewise in 1990 the general secretaryship of the Baptist Union fell to a minister, David Coffey, identified with the conservative strand in Evangelicalism to the extent of having heard a call to ministry at a Keswick meeting.<sup>41</sup> The denominations were emerging from a period in which Evangelicals had been marginal into an epoch when they were central to the life of their bodies.

The process of rising to prominence within the denominations was associated with a tendency towards broadening. The phrase 'conservative evangelical', a natural label for Wood in 1971, was soon dropped by most adherents of the movement in favour of the simpler 'evangelical'. Part of the explanation is that 'conservative' had been used to differentiate the more resolute Evangelicals in the Church of England from their liberal colleagues. The Anglican Evangelical Group Movement, a long-standing organisation for liberal Evangelicals, was still holding lively conferences during the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> But by the 1970s its adherents had been almost entirely absorbed into the central bloc of opinion within the Church. There was no longer a reason for conservatives to use that term. Many of those identified with the evangelical movement, furthermore, began to dislike the idea that they were conservative rather than in tune with the times. F. F. Bruce, for instance, declined the term since, as he explained, he held his views 'not because they are conservative – still less because I myself am conservative – but because I believe they are the positions to which the evidence leads'.<sup>43</sup> In the Church of England, as the proportion of evangelical clergy grew, many entered parishes where the liturgical patterns they inherited were much higher than those they would have preferred and, out of pastoral sensitivity, they retained some of them rather than sweeping them away. So they might adopt robes evangelicals had previously repudiated or allow a bell to be rung at the consecration of the elements during communion. There were even shifts in theology, so that, for example, the statement of the 1977 Nottingham Evangelical Anglican Congress, rather than insisting on the traditional substitutionary view of the cross, observed that Evangelicals gave different degrees of emphasis to 'the various biblical expressions of atonement'.<sup>44</sup> In 1989 and 1998 roughly half of the evangelical parishes surveyed reported that they were 'broad' rather than 'mainstream' or 'charismatic'.<sup>45</sup> Alarm at this

**37** Brierley 2000: 27.

**38** Brierley 1999: 12.3.

**39** Saward 1987: 34, 35.

**40** Chadwick 1990: 142.

**41** Randall 2005: 471-72.

**42** *CEN*, 3 May 1963: 3; 17 April 1964: 1, 16.

**43** Bruce 1980: 309.

**44** *CEN*, 22 April 1977: 10.

**45** Brierley 1991: 165; Brierley 2000: 146.

phenomenon helped prompt the creation of Reform, whose leaders were once more happy to call themselves 'conservative evangelical', but the general trend was undoubtedly in a broadening direction.

On ecumenical relations, there was also an opening up. The traditional view of Evangelicals was that true Christians were already spiritually one and so efforts for institutional unity were a superfluous diversion from gospel work. Ecumenical effort might even prove to be a sinister move towards reabsorption by Rome. Anglican Evangelicals were the firmest opponents of the scheme for Anglican-Methodist unity during the 1960s, not because of any aversion to Methodists but because they objected to the implication of the reconciliation service that the previous ministry of Methodists was invalid.<sup>46</sup> Truth was valued above unity. The first cracks in the standard suspicions of the existing ecumenical enterprise came when some began to urge that there were lessons to be learned from others. Letters to the *Church of England Newspaper* in the wake of the Keele Congress took up this theme.<sup>47</sup> Contacts at local levels increased. Candidates for the ministry of the United Reformed Church and the Baptists trained at the Anglican Oak Hill and members of many denominations, including several future leaders, rubbed shoulders at London Bible College.<sup>48</sup> Local Ecumenical Projects (later Partnerships) sprang up, merging denominational traditions. Joint events such as Spring Harvest brought Evangelicals of various stripes into close fellowship. Denominational loyalties faded as families sought congregations with the best facilities, especially for their children. At the same time as institutional plans for church unity foundered, the divisions between Christians healed in various informal ways. Except in the most conservative circles, Evangelicals ceased to be defined in terms of hostility to other Christian bodies.

### **Theological trends: Calvinism and charismatic renewal**

There were several new developments in theological opinion. A Reformed movement gradually gathered force during the period. Scottish Presbyterians had never wholly forgotten their Calvinistic roots. The Free Church of Scotland, possessing a college staffed by able scholars, maintained a firm allegiance to the Westminster Confession, and in the Church of Scotland a group of Evangelical ministers led by William Still of Aberdeen, mostly Calvinists, gathered annually in the Crieff Brotherhood. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the central figure in the revival of Reformed theology in Wales and England, sponsoring the annual Puritan Conferences, which by 1962 attracted some 350 attendees.<sup>49</sup> At first they attracted distrust in the evangelical establishment, Maurice Wood referring two years earlier at Islington to the strain caused by 'ultra-Calvinists'.<sup>50</sup> The publications of the Banner of Truth Trust, however, were to disseminate their message widely, and J. I. Packer, the co-promoter of the Puritan Conferences, was to turn Calvinism in a mild form into the normative Evangelical theology of the world. Agencies emerged that were more or less committed to a distinctively Reformed theology. Chief among them were the Evangelical Ministry Assembly, founded in 1984 by Dick Lucas, Rector of St Helen's, Bishopsgate, in the heart of London, which by 2009

<sup>46</sup> Packer 1965.

<sup>47</sup> *CEN*, 19 May 1967: 6.

<sup>48</sup> Heinze and Wheaton 2002: 206; Randall 2000.

<sup>49</sup> *CEN*, 4 January 1963: 3.

<sup>50</sup> *CEN*, 15 January 1960: 3.



attracted nearly a thousand to its gatherings, and the associated Proclamation Trust, established in 1986 to foster expository preaching.<sup>51</sup> The choice of 'Reform' as the title of the conservative evangelical organisation reflected its theology as well as its purpose. Calvinism had enjoyed a resurgence.

In parallel there was an upsurge of charismatic renewal. Classic Pentecostalism, though it had created three substantial denominations by the 1920s, had never achieved the triumphs in Britain that it had managed in many other lands. From the 1960s, however, its distinctive practice of speaking in tongues, assisted by the expressive temper of the decade, poured out into other denominations.<sup>52</sup> The Fountain Trust, set up in 1964, helped both to spread charismatic renewal and to direct the flow of the new movement into denominational channels. By the time of the Nottingham Congress in 1977 renewal had become indigenised in the Church of England, by no means exclusively but certainly predominantly in evangelical parishes. By that year a consultation on 'Gospel and Spirit' between the Church of England Evangelical Council and the Fountain Trust had managed to reach a lengthy agreed statement that demonstrated the acceptability of renewal.<sup>53</sup> Among the Free Churches, the Baptists were most affected. When, in 1975, the minister of Durrington Free Church (Baptist) in Sussex urged the congregation to embrace a new experience of the Spirit, nineteen members left but eight years later there were over 500 members.<sup>54</sup> The largest congregation in the country by the early 1990s was Kensington Temple, a Pentecostal church whose ethos had been transformed by renewal. New charismatic churches sprang up, at first in houses but later in cinemas and other large buildings, some co-operating closely with other Evangelicals but others, particularly in the Covenant Ministries, adopting a sternly isolationist approach.<sup>55</sup> A succession of growing pains afflicted the charismatic world: over 'heavy shepherding' in the 1970s, over John Wimber's Signs and Wonders in the 1980s and over the Toronto Blessing in the 1990s. The epicentre in Britain of the Toronto Blessing, a form of intense spirituality marked, among other phenomena, by animal noises, was Holy Trinity, Brompton, which also pioneered the Alpha movement, a remarkably effective form of low-key evangelism based on meetings to discuss the faith after a meal. Charismatic renewal, a novelty of the period, had particular appeal for the young, and among their number were many fresh converts.

## Social changes: Black-majority churches and gender issues

A further development on the evangelical landscape was the emergence of the black-majority churches. Immigrants from many New Commonwealth countries brought their faith with them, and though some were absorbed into predominantly white congregations, a sector of churches providing specifically for black residents grew up. Most at first belonged to Pentecostal denominations from the Caribbean such as the New Testament Church of God. An African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance began in 1984 as the West Indian Evangelical Alliance, already catering for a constituency of some 1,500 congregations. Its General Secretary, Joel Edwards, a Jamaica-born pastor, went on in 1997 to become General Director of the whole Evangelical Alliance.<sup>56</sup> Some black-majority churches enjoyed

51 [www.proctrust.org.uk](http://www.proctrust.org.uk), accessed 7 March 2009.

52 Bebbington 1989: chapter 7.

53 'Gospel and Spirit'.

54 Kane 1983: 71-72, 76.

55 Walker 1985.

56 Randall and Hilborn 2001: 288, 345-46.

extraordinary growth. The Calvary-Charismatic Baptist Church at Plaistow in east London, a largely Ghanaian congregation launched in 1994 by Francis Sarpong, drew in as many as 800 members during only its first six years. On 31 December 1999 it held a baptismal service where there were seventy-nine candidates.<sup>57</sup> By 1998 over 7 per cent of Christian worshippers in England were black, with approximately 4 per cent of Asian origin.<sup>58</sup> In the Church of England, where there was a significant black presence in many multi-ethnic areas, its most visible sign was the rise of John Sentamu, a man of Ugandan background, to become Bishop of Stepney, then Bishop of Birmingham and finally, in 2005, Archbishop of York. Like almost all the black church leaders of his day, he was evangelical by conviction.

In an era of adjustment in the relations between the sexes, gender issues inevitably came to the fore during the period. At its opening, women formed a large majority in the pews but were rarely found in the pulpits. An informal poll of evangelical clergy in 1966 showed them to be divided over the legitimacy of female ordination.<sup>59</sup> It was noticed that there were still no women speakers at the Nottingham Congress eleven years later, but female students were starting to be admitted to evangelical colleges: Oak Hill took the step in 1984.<sup>60</sup> The first female president of the Baptist Union was appointed in 1978 and some radical charismatic churches regarded themselves as agents of women's emancipation.<sup>61</sup> As the impetus for women's ordination gathered pace in the Church of England, opinion stiffened within the evangelical ranks in both directions, leading to two 'convulsive' years in 1993, just after the decision in favour was taken, and 1994, when the first women took priest's orders.<sup>62</sup> One of the reasons for the launch of Reform was to oppose female ordination, though its churches, such as Jesmond, insisted that there was a place for women in pastoral work, but not in preaching ministry.<sup>63</sup> Evangelical women flocked into full-time service. In 1998, 44 per cent of entrants to London Bible College were female.<sup>64</sup> By this point another gender issue, homosexuality, was raising its head. Evangelical refusal to countenance homosexual practice, combined with sympathy for the plight of those with gay inclinations, had been reinforced by *The Church and Homosexuality* (1980).<sup>65</sup> Although a few Evangelicals were prepared to countenance faithful same-sex unions, the main division on this question was on how vocal to be in resisting liberalisation of church policy. Wallace Benn, Bishop of Lewes, saw the subject as a vital test of loyalty to the Bible; others, such as Christina Rees, were averse to 'elevating the issue into a Christian orthodoxy'.<sup>66</sup> The proposal in 2003 to consecrate Jeffrey John, a champion of same-sex relationships in the Church, to the suffragan see of Reading united almost all Evangelicals in opposition, leading to a volte-face by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but how to respond to ruptures in the worldwide Anglican Communion on the question again split their ranks in the months around the 2008 Lambeth Conference. The two gender controversies proved to be the most divisive questions of the period.

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<sup>57</sup> *Baptist Times*, 16 March 2000: 8.

<sup>58</sup> Brierley 1999: 12.3.

<sup>59</sup> *CEN*, 23 November 1966: 1.

<sup>60</sup> *CEN*, 22 April 1977: 1; Heinze and Wheaton 2002: 197.

<sup>61</sup> Randall 2005: 412; Walker 1985: 177.

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<sup>62</sup> *CEN*, 13 January 1995: 7.

<sup>63</sup> Munden 2007: 229.

<sup>64</sup> Randall 2000: 287.

<sup>65</sup> Green, Holloway and Watson 1980.

<sup>66</sup> Bates 2005: 20-21, 25.

## Social concern and relative prosperity

Social concern was also a controversial domain. In the middle years of the twentieth century evangelical involvement in such areas had fallen under a cloud because of its association with the social gospel, an apparent diversion from the spiritual gospel. The older tradition of social activism had never died out among Evangelicals, being institutionally maintained by the Salvation Army and practically by many an evangelical parish. Yet at the National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966, for example, 'some members were suspicious of a return to "the social gospel" and called for more direct "witness"'.<sup>67</sup> Norman Anderson led the way in the recovery of social engagement with his *Into the World* (1968).<sup>68</sup> The Shaftesbury Project, designed to explore social questions on a pan-evangelical basis, and TEAR Fund, aiming to channel giving through evangelical churches in the Third World, soon followed. John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1984; 4th edn, 2006) supplied a compendium of wisdom that became received opinion in the field. Concern for the welfare of society could spill over into the political sphere.<sup>69</sup> The former quietist tendencies of Evangelicalism were overturned by the fundamental shift in moral values of the 1960s. The 'permissive society' became a target for Evangelical critique, at first in the largely spontaneous Festival of Light of 1971 and then in its more structured successor, CARE. Something of the initial defensive stance of the Nationwide Festival of Light is suggested by the comment that its first full-time director, Raymond Johnston, was appointed to 'stand up to left-wing academics'.<sup>70</sup> The most successful venture of Evangelicals into public life was the Keep Sunday Special campaign of 1986, which contrived to defeat the proposals of Margaret Thatcher's government, then at the height of its power, for the relaxation of restrictions on Sunday trading. The triumph was to be reversed under John Major, and, as Clive Calver ruefully remarked, this campaign was 'the only clear illustration of what could eventually be achieved'.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Calver's Evangelical Alliance saw itself under his successor as turning into a 'Movement for Change' so as to achieve social transformation.<sup>72</sup> The shift towards engagement with socio-political issues, though less favoured in some more conservative circles, had gone a long way during the years since 1959.<sup>73</sup>

A fundamental feature of British society during the later twentieth century was increasing prosperity. Some might disdain it: a young man attending a conference at St John's College, Nottingham, in 1976, 'gloried in being so detached from filthy lucre that he never reconciled his bank statements'.<sup>74</sup> Yet the possession of a bank account by this evangelical hippy was itself a sign that he, and the youth culture that he represented, were the fruit of the affluent society. Church income could hugely increase. St Paul's, Hainault, a charismatic congregation, raised its weekly offerings in the early 1970s from £12 to £100 over only three years.<sup>75</sup> With more resources, churches could increase their personnel. Instead of the traditional single minister, perhaps assisted by a curate and a part-time secretary, large urban congregations could employ over a dozen staff. Church leadership became a

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**67** *CEN*, 28 October 1966: 14.

**68** Anderson 1968.

**69** Stott 1984.

**70** *CEN*, 22 February 1974: 1.

**71** Calver 1995: 208.

**72** Hilborn 2004: xii-xiv.

**73** Chester 1993; Bebbington 1995.

**74** *CEN*, 6 February 1976: 4.

**75** *CEN*, 28 June 1974: 7.

specialist skill, possessing its own journal of that name. Money could be lavished on previously undreamt-of equipment. A microphone, noticed in a report of 1974 as a curious oddity in church, became an essential tool of a speaker.<sup>76</sup> Technology transformed worship, even in some smaller churches. At a Preston Baptist church with a congregation of only fifteen in 2004, taped music was a crucial reinforcement of the singing.<sup>77</sup> Enterprising evangelical groups could enter the media. Attractive magazines catered for specific sections of the population, with *Buzz* making a big impact on teenagers in the late 1970s and *Third Way* engaging with cultural issues down the decades. Capital Radio was set up in 1995 as a Christian broadcasting service for London, and five years later its successor Premier Radio was able to sponsor a range of local radio stations that secured temporary licences for a month around Pentecost.<sup>78</sup> A rich society, furthermore, could afford to provide extended education for its citizens. The cohort of young people entering higher education mushroomed. Christian Unions followed suit, expanding from 190 in 1958 to 554 in 1978.<sup>79</sup> The result was a steady stream of able candidates for the ministry and a growing body of educated laypeople in the pews. Bible colleges, once designed to produce evangelists with rudimentary skills, gained the power to grant degrees. Evangelicals, rooted in their society, were shaped by it at least as much as they moulded it.

## Conclusion

The half-century around the foundation of *Anvil* was therefore an eventful time. Although the evangelical community persistently adhered to its inherited priorities of Bible, cross, conversion and activism, in 2009 it no longer worried about the preoccupations of 1959 such as the wearing of vestments in church. The older ethos, wary of Rome, worldliness, and the signs of the times but strongly committed to the evangelisation of the world, had faded away. The newer developments were numerous: they included greater prominence in the denominations, more ecumenical contacts, a fresh sector of black-majority churches, enhanced social concern and the consequences of prosperity. Many of the novelties, however, induced a fracturing of the movement, most visible in the Church of England. A broadening of views led to the emergence of a large section of opinion willing to call itself 'open'; the Reformed theological revival stiffened a more conservative grouping; and renewal created a novel sector of vibrant charismatic congregations.<sup>80</sup> Although many parishes mingled people of different allegiances, the divergent tendencies were clear. By the twenty-first century the issues that divided Evangelicals most sharply surrounded issues of gender relations, but there were many other contrasts. Open Evangelicals were generally much happier with contemporary approaches to biblical hermeneutics than members of Reform; charismatic churches were more likely to run Alpha courses while Reform favoured Christianity Explored; there was normally a much more structured liturgy in an open than in a charismatic congregation; and so on. Underlying the differences, it may be suggested, was a more fundamental cultural orientation. Reform promoted a logo-centric modernity, stressing accurate teaching, efficient ecclesiastical structures and resistance to contemporary fashions for the sake of the gospel.

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<sup>76</sup> *CEN*, 28 June 1974: 7.

<sup>77</sup> Personal observation. On worship, see Bebbington 2007.

<sup>78</sup> *Baptist Times*, 17 February 2000: 2.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson 1979: 338.

<sup>80</sup> Kings 2003.

Charismatics embraced a postmodern delight in variety, authenticity and relevance to felt needs. The open grouping welcomed insights from the modern and the postmodern, being deliberately eclectic. Attitudes to cultural change fostered markedly contrasting stances. The former unity of Evangelicalism had been broken.

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MICHAEL NAZIR-ALI

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# Britain Today: How we came to be here and what we can do about it

**In this challenging survey of the state of Britain today, Michael Nazir-Ali describes and explains our current situation, focussing on the state of the family, the rise of home-made spiritualities and the phenomenon of scientific reductionism. In response he sets out a vision for how the church can serve the nation by reversing our amnesia about our Christian heritage (especially in education), bringing Christian values and virtues into the public sphere and the marketplace, making our worship visible, and renewing our commitment to mission and evangelism rooted in friendship and witness.**

## Visiting Britain today

What will a visitor to Britain today see? She will notice a well-maintained physical infrastructure with (generally) good roads and a reasonable system of public transport (even if Britons complain about it). She will also quickly become aware of a social security net which aims to prevent people falling into serious poverty and which provides a comprehensive 'cradle to the grave' health service. Even with the advent of the financial crisis, there is work available for people and the majority enjoy a decent standard of living. In spite of threats from violent extremists, the security situation is also stable.

Closer examination, however, of the society in which she finds herself will reveal other aspects of life which will cause her concern: the constant reliance on alcohol, or other stimulants, by all sections of the population, to keep going at home or work or play will be one such. The social dysfunction of the High Street or of 'clubland' at night, especially over weekends, will be characterised by excessive consumption of alcohol, street violence and crime, large numbers of young girls out on their own and young people attempting to forge relationships with very loud noise as the background and very thin social fabric to sustain them. Our visitor may well ask herself how a literate society, with a proud history and significant material and social culture, has allowed such a state of affairs to emerge and to continue.

## The state of the family

One feature of the social scene which will surely strike our visitor is the state of the family. There are all the figures, of course, which she will, no doubt, come

across. For the first time since records began, by 2011, there will be more unmarried than married people of marriageable age. As the humanist philosopher, Brenda Almond, points out, whilst some relationships of cohabitation undoubtedly last for many years, on the whole they are more unstable than marriage. This is partly because, in many cases, the intention is to avoid the commitment that marriage requires. Her claim is backed up by figures: the median length for cohabitation is only two years. After that, there is either marriage or a breaking up of the relationship. Of those that do not result in marriage, most break up within ten years.

Where there is a child involved, more than half cohabiting relationships break up within five years of the birth of the child. This contrasts with only 8% of married couples parting during this period.<sup>1</sup> Even more worryingly, even of those who marry after cohabitation, a much higher proportion are likely to divorce than among married people who have not cohabited. This, of course, undermines one of the main reasons given for cohabitation; that it is a preparation for marriage. Almond also refers to research which shows that, except for the most extreme cases, divorce is harmful for children, even where there is significant conflict in the marriage. Once again, this contradicts the new wisdom that divorce, in situations of conflict, is good for children. This is a somewhat convenient doctrine which allows parents to get what they want and absolves them of any guilt.<sup>2</sup> Both divorce and cohabiting relationships with children which break down result in lone-parenthood and contribute to child poverty; material, social, psychological and spiritual.

Figures and facts, such as the ones above, are produced regularly in any discussion of the malaise affecting the family. What is *not* said so often is that this state of affairs is not merely an accident, a concatenation of otherwise discrete events. In fact, it is, at least partly, the result of a well-resourced social and intellectual movement, which emerged in the 1960s and is still very much in the ascendant. As I have pointed out elsewhere, Marxist philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse, believed that the fundamental structures of society needed to be infiltrated and undermined. Marriage and family were key targets in the cause of producing non-repressive societies which would then be ripe for revolution.<sup>3</sup> They have had their expositors in this country and elsewhere in the West. People like Anthony Giddens have argued that the separation of sexuality from reproduction (through artificial contraception) and of reproduction from sexuality (through assisted reproduction techniques), have made sex chiefly a means to self-expression and self-fulfilment. This, in turn, has led to 'pure relationships' which are entirely subjective and do not depend on any social or legal constraints, especially in terms of how long they last. That is determined by each partner feeling that the relationship's continuance is beneficial to them.<sup>4</sup> This is some of the background also to Rowan Williams' criticism, in his 1989 lecture *The Body's Grace*, of those who regard heterosexual marriage as 'absolute, exclusive and ideal'.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst Gramsci and Marcuse saw the undermining of vital social institutions as a prelude to political revolution, more recent critics have seen it rather as the evolution of society away from patriarchal, heterosexual norms. This has led in

1 Almond 2006; Berthoud and Gershuny 2000.  
 2 Almond 2006: 142f  
 3 Nazir-Ali 2008a. Online at [www.standpointmag.co.uk/breaking-faith-with-britain-june](http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/breaking-faith-with-britain-june)

4 Giddens 1992  
 5 Williams 2002:6f, online at [www.igreens.org.uk/bodys\\_grace.htm](http://www.igreens.org.uk/bodys_grace.htm). For a forceful critique see Taylor 2008: 102f.



this country, for example, to an end to any public doctrine of marriage and certainly to the demise of a Christian one. All relationships will increasingly be on an equal footing and no one form of the family will be privileged.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1990s, Cambridge University's Group for the History of Population and Social Structure and its Centre for Family Research were still presenting mounting evidence for the ubiquity and longevity of the traditional structure of the family. By 2007 this had changed to assertions that male role-models were not necessary for children and to claims that research showed that children in homosexual households were in no way disadvantaged.<sup>7</sup> More and more research is showing, however, that children of both sexes need healthy relationships with male and female parents for a well-rounded upbringing. Boys, for example, relate to fathers in a quite particular way. They need fathers for the development of their identity, especially in terms of appropriate patterns of masculinity. This leads to a proper self-esteem and to being able to forge good relationships with people of the same and of the opposite gender. This is in no way to neglect or to minimise the recognition due to lone-parents who bring up children on their own. To *find* oneself a lone-parent is one thing but to *plan* for and to *legislate* for situations where a child will not ever have a father is quite another. Yet this is exactly what the trend of recent legislation and policy has been.<sup>8</sup>

The results of this 'liberation' can be seen everywhere: broken families with an absent parent (usually the father), the psychological trauma of fractured relationships, children without crucial bonding with one parent (often the father) and, for boys particularly, the lack of a role-model at important stages in their growing up. For children, both boys and girls, there is a vital ingredient missing which is needed in the maturing of their identities. The CIVITAS study *How Do Fathers Fit In?* shows the impact which fathers have on their children's educational progress.<sup>9</sup> The Newsweek article 'The Trouble with Boys' points out that the most reliable indicator of how a boy will perform in school is whether he has a father at home.<sup>10</sup>

Because of our misguided and misleading 'gurus', a large number of boys are growing up without fathers. Is it any surprise then that they are lagging behind in school and are more and more exposed to the dangers of substance abuse and of being tempted into crime and street violence.<sup>11</sup> Dysfunctional family situations are leading to children experiencing difficulties in communication, especially across the generations, and being lonely from an early age. This itself has consequences for mental, social and spiritual well-being.

## Home-made spiritualities

Alongside this rampant 'constructivism' (or perhaps we should say deconstruction?) regarding the family, there is also the increasing tendency for a home-made

6 Morgan 2002: 27f.

7 Hunt 2000; Richards 2000; Thompson 2007 (online at [www.foundation.cam.ac.uk/uploads/File/CAMArticles/cam%2050/cambridge%20present.pdf](http://www.foundation.cam.ac.uk/uploads/File/CAMArticles/cam%2050/cambridge%20present.pdf))

8 Byrd 2005 (online at [www.narth.com/docs/GenderComplementarityByrd.pdf](http://www.narth.com/docs/GenderComplementarityByrd.pdf)); Herzog 2001; Parke 1996.

9 See [www.civitas.org.uk/hwu/fathers.php](http://www.civitas.org.uk/hwu/fathers.php).

10 See [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10965522/site/newsweek/page/4/print/1/displaymode/1098/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10965522/site/newsweek/page/4/print/1/displaymode/1098/).

11 O'Neill 2002 (online at [www.civitas.org.uk/pubs/experiments.php](http://www.civitas.org.uk/pubs/experiments.php)).

spirituality. It was thought important that Christianity and the churches should be submitted to a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' so that their social role in providing stability for society could be questioned and weakened. In its place we have, however, either what Newman called 'the dreary hopeless irreligion'<sup>12</sup> or, on the other hand, a credulous *smorgasbord* of pick 'n' mix DIY which generally goes under the label of New Age spirituality.

Whatever its justification, the privatisation of religion since the Peace of Westphalia (1648) has had the twin effects of firstly removing the grounding for the very values – such as inalienable dignity, equality and liberty – which the Enlightenment wanted to uphold and, secondly, of encouraging an unbridled pluralism: if people's beliefs were confined to the private sphere, they could believe whatever they liked. It did not matter to the body politic. When this became allied to the nineteenth century *penchant* for Absolute Idealism and to a certain understanding of the *philosophia perennis*, as well as exposure to religions of Indian origin, it gave rise to movements like Theosophy. This last claims to embody truths basic to all religions but is inspired by fundamental Hindu ideas, especially as they relate to claims that all religions teach the same truths and are all paths to the one reality.<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that, as a movement, it is hostile to Christian claims of possessing a unique revelation.

The emergence of highly individualised spiritualities, which characterise our society today, has to be understood against this background. On the one hand, I am free to construct my own spiritual meaning and, on the other, all spiritualities are at base the same and are leading to the same goal. This is also the background to talk of 'faith communities' and the like as if 'faith' was an undifferentiated something or other which manifested itself in different religious traditions. There is much confusion between the faculty for believing and the content of what is believed, between *fides qua* and *fides quae creditur*. Naturally, in such a scheme of things it is very hard to accommodate a faith which makes universal claims (based on events which can, at least to some extent, be investigated historically) and which demands not only intellectual assent but also complete trust and a moral working out of its implications.<sup>14</sup>

Some years ago, the BBC screened a series of programmes on the spiritual situation in Britain called the *Soul of Britain*.<sup>15</sup> My participation in the programme showed me that the eclipse of Christianity in this culture does not mean the demise of spirituality which is alive and well. It does mean, though, that people are willing to believe the most outlandish and bizarre superstitions so long as they do not affect the life-style and choices they have made for themselves. This is very far from the teaching of the Church that faith is not contrary to reason but affirms and completes it.

Both the 'long withdrawing roar' caused by the process of secularisation over three centuries and the sudden loss of Christian discourse in the 1960s have brought about a spiritual and moral vacuum in society.<sup>16</sup> New Age and individualised spiritualities, syncretism, both overt and covert, and other phenomena have

<sup>12</sup> Newman 1959.

<sup>13</sup> Parrinder 1957: 58; Copley 1997: 184ff.

<sup>14</sup> See Church of England Mission Theological Advisory Group. 1996: 74ff.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.facingthechallenge.org/soul1.php](http://www.facingthechallenge.org/soul1.php).

<sup>16</sup> On secularisation see Chadwick 1975 and on the 'sudden' loss of Christian discourse in public life see Brown 2001.

attempted to fill this vacuum but not very successfully in the sense of providing a basis for society and working for the common good. This can mean that social and political decisions are made either on the basis of crude utilitarianism, which endangers personal dignity and liberty, or on the basis of counting heads, of determining the so-called 'yuk' factor in terms of what the public will accept.

Whilst Marxism, as an ideology, is a spent force, there is another ideology which is also comprehensive in scope, purporting to prescribe for every aspect of human life, social, economic and political, on the horizon. Like Marxism, Islamism is not monochrome and has a number of versions of itself but the question is whether Britain, or the West generally, has the spiritual and moral resources to face yet another series of ideological battles.

### 'Nothing-But-ery'

As we have seen, there are some who want a thousand spiritualities to bloom. There are others, however, who are determinedly reductionist. They want to reduce everything to physical and chemical processes. The Apostle of such reductionism is, of course, Richard Dawkins.

Dawkins criticises past Christian arguments for the existence of God, such as the Argument from Design, as mechanistic. He claims that what appears to be design is, in fact, nothing more than natural selection acting on the random mutation of germ-line genes so that changes in the organism can be passed on to offspring and, if such changes are cumulatively advantageous in the environment, fit them better for survival, thus ensuring, of course, the perpetuation of the changes themselves. For Dawkins, God is an unnecessary hypothesis. His explanation for the survival of religion is either that it is a 'virus', which infects the mind and spreads throughout the population, or that it is a 'meme', which on analogy with the gene, replicates itself in human cultures, leaping from brain to brain.<sup>17</sup>

Alister and Joanna C. McGrath have pointed out that, apart from other objections to virus or meme-theory, there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of such entities.<sup>18</sup> As far as natural selection by random mutation is concerned, much turns on what is meant by 'random'. As the Cambridge palaeontologist, Simon Conway Morris, has pointed out, not everything is possible. The course of evolution is constrained not least by its physical and environmental context. That is why we see convergence in the development of organs, such as arms, legs, teeth, etc that are similar in different species and, indeed, in like species which are widely separated.<sup>19</sup>

There is also the phenomenon of complexification, noted by the great Jesuit palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin: at both macro and micro-level we are faced with great complexity in organisms. One of the great challenges of our day is to account for the irreducible complexity of micro-organisms, such as the cell.<sup>20</sup> Although Charles Darwin was much interested in the conflict found in nature and the struggle for survival, it is important also to note the co-operation that exists within and between species. The phenomenon of symbiosis has often been noted, where plants and animals co-operate to feed, camouflage and protect one another.

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17 Dawkins 1986, 1989, 2006.

18 McGrath and McGrath 2007: 40ff.

19 Conway Morris 1998: 13ff.

20 On Teilhard's thought see Zaehner 1971a&b.  
For the idea of 'irreducible complexity' see Behe 1998

It is even believed that this can happen at the micro-level and may account for the structure of cells.<sup>21</sup>

A broadside, perhaps even more reductionist than Dawkins', has been delivered by Professor Colin Blakemore who claims that our intentions and experiences are simply an illusory commentary on what our brains have already decided to do. This is the abolition of any belief in human agency or freedom and, in the end, of any meaning to terms like 'moral'.<sup>22</sup> Behind this 'nothing-but-ery' is the refusal to admit that different kinds of explanation may be appropriate at different levels of being or of social existence. The living then cannot be accounted for simply in terms of the material, nor can humanity be explained in terms only of the biological. The search for truth, feelings of reverence, the desire to worship or to pray, moral and spiritual values cannot just be reduced to description in terms of animal behaviour or of physico-chemical processes.

In this connection, it is perhaps interesting to note the lively correspondence between Charles Darwin and Emma, before and after their marriage. Whilst Emma acknowledged that Charles' search for truth was itself significant, she pointed out that there were other kinds of truth than just those established by scientific method and other ways to truth than just that method.<sup>23</sup>

## Reversing the amnesia

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin used to say that one of the great differences between his life in India and his return to Britain was that in India there was always hope. No matter how dire the circumstances, how widespread the poverty or how endemic the disease, people could always form associations and committees to struggle against whatever was holding them back. Here he found a lack of hope that people could change their situation.<sup>24</sup>

As a well-known psychiatrist said recently, he could prescribe Prozac for people's depression but he could not give them a sense of meaning and of direction for their lives. Intellectual reductionism of the sort we have just been discussing, moral relativism combined with a desire for instant gratification, the undermining and breakdown of social structures such as families, kinship groups and natural communities have all contributed to a disenchanting winterland. People desperately long to be freed from this so that they can live as rounded beings with friends and relatives around them in the context of a supportive community. Is there a way out or must we continue our progress towards a Hades of transient relationships, fatherless children, socially impoverished communities and a featureless flatland devoid of purpose and direction?

One of the basic tasks confronting us has to do with reversing the amnesia about our own origins and story which is so prevalent in British society today. As a teacher said to me, pupils are not taught their own history and certainly not what have been called its 'virtuous pages'. They have not been told that our systems of governance, the rule of law and trust in public and commercial life are all rooted in a Christian doctrine of God the Holy Trinity (where there is both a mutuality of

<sup>21</sup> Mann 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Blakemore 2009, online at [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/22/genetics-religion](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/22/genetics-religion)

<sup>23</sup> Keynes 2001: 59ff.

<sup>24</sup> See further, Wainwright 2000: 256f.

love and an ordered relationship), in the Pauline doctrine of the godly magistrate, and in the Decalogue (as well as Our Lord's summary of it). It is these, as Joan O'Donovan has pointed out, which led to notions of God's right or God's justice. These, in turn, produced a network of divine, human and natural law as the basis for a just ordering of society and of mutual obligation.<sup>25</sup>

Nor, on the whole, have people been shown that respect for the human person has arisen from, on the one hand, a Christian reading of Aristotle and, on the other, a reading of the Bible in the light of Aristotle. From the thirteenth century, the human person begins to be seen more and more as an agent but a *moral* agent. This leads to recognition of freedom (and the gradual disappearance of slavery and serfdom until the re-emergence of the former after the discovery of the 'New World'). If people are free, they can no longer be regarded merely as subjects, even in a divinely-constituted order. They must be seen, more and more, as citizens whose conscience is respected and whose consent is required in the business of government.<sup>26</sup>

The Reformation also emphasised the significance of the human person and of personal freedom – 'how is a person accounted righteous in the sight of God and how can we live in holiness according to God's purposes?' – and what accountability to the Supreme Being has to do with our day-to-day behaviour. The freedom to read God's Word for themselves, and in their own language, was an aspect of such teaching. It was from this matrix of Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation thought that the language of 'natural rights' first emerged, interestingly in the context of the 'New World' where these were being threatened by European colonialists bent on exploiting and enslaving the local populations (and, later on, importing slaves from Africa). The missionary Dominican bishop, Bartolomé de Las Casas, held that authentic mission meant that people should be free to respond to the Gospel and this meant that the natural rights of 'Indian' peoples and communities had to be recognised. In doing this, Las Casas was drawing on what was happening in the University of Salamanca and particularly on the Aquinas-inspired teaching of fellow-Dominican, Francisco de Vitoria who held that indigenous people had natural rights of ownership and self-government. From Vitoria to Locke, natural rights discourse was developed by Christian thinkers who belonged to the 'natural freedom tradition' (it has to be admitted that there were also eminent Christians who held to Aristotle's 'natural slavery' position).<sup>27</sup>

It is important then to recognise that the language of human rights has its origins in Christian discourse but also that it has to be held alongside Christian ideas of mutual social obligation and of a just ordering of society such that it leads to the common good. Against this, the draft of the abortive Constitution for Europe is glad to acknowledge Europe's debt to the classical civilisations of Greece and Rome but not to Christianity, to vastly unequal societies in which women and slaves were excluded from public life and where gratuitous cruelty was part of the 'bread and circuses' provided to keep the proletariat happy. As Professor E A Judge has shown, it was early Christianity which challenged the most fundamental divisions of ancient society: between men and women, slave and free, and Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:28).

25 O'Donovan 1997.

26 On all this see further Cowling 1980; Witte and Alexander 2008.

27 On all of this see Hill 2002, especially chapter 2 by Roger Ruston ('Theologians, Humanists and Natural Rights').

As later reflection shows, for instance in the Household Codes in Ephesians, Colossians and elsewhere, this does not mean that such divisions do not exist but that they do not matter in an egalitarian community.<sup>28</sup>

### **The public sphere and Christian values**

Vigorous participation in public life must be a *sine qua non* for Christians if this collective amnesia about national origins is to be addressed. This would not just be about making an effective Christian contribution to the difficult moral issues of the day. It must also be about reminding the nation of the basis of its social and political organisation and the basic assumptions which underlie, or should underlie, moral thought and moral decision-making. The public square cannot be left to secularity. Secularity is certainly not neutral and has its own assumptions which need to be brought out into the open and subjected to the same intense scrutiny as Christian assumptions have been. A distinctively Christian contribution will remind the nation of its commitment, for example, to inalienable human dignity because all human beings are made in God's image. Such thinking will inform decisions made about the very beginnings of the person as well as about the end of a person's life on earth. It will be about the dignity of those who have lost mental capacity to one extent or another and also about the treatment of those with learning difficulties.

The commitment to equality will also be seen as grounded in the biblical teaching about the unity of the human race (e.g. Acts 17:26). The commitment to liberty is because of Christian tradition regarding the natural freedom which is the birthright of all, however different they may be from us. Contrary to Grotius' hypothesis that natural law would exist even if God did not, we have seen that fundamental values have arisen from a biblical world-view rooted in belief in divine providence. Separated from such a world-view and its nurture, it is unlikely that they will continue to flourish. They may, in fact, be replaced by authoritarian utilitarianism, on the one hand, or, on the other, by public ethics based on public opinion determined by polls, focus groups and the like.<sup>29</sup>

### **The market and Christian virtues**

Even in a market where the so-called 'amoral' forces of supply and demand, scarcity and surplus are at work, we cannot forget that we are moral agents and, therefore, responsible for our actions. The best of British business was often characterised by the values of responsibility, honesty, trust (my word is my bond) and hard work. These arose from a Christian vision of accountability before God, the sacred nature of work, however humble, and a sense of mutual obligation among all sections of society. Such values were accompanied by the promotion of both the 'natural' virtues of justice, moderation, prudence and courage and of the specifically theological virtues of faith, hope and love. It is not difficult to see how the abandonment of such values and virtues has led to the present financial crisis in which we find ourselves. Once again, the chief culprit is a highly individualistic 'me' culture in which instant self-gratification is the leading value. This leads us to

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<sup>28</sup> Judge 1984 at [www.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull\\_1984\\_35\\_01\\_Judge\\_CulturalConformityPaul.pdf](http://www.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull_1984_35_01_Judge_CulturalConformityPaul.pdf).

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<sup>29</sup> See further Nazir-Ali 2008b.

treat others, in our professional as well as our personal lives, as simply the means to our ends which must be achieved. To a greater or lesser extent, we are all culpable. What is needed here is an acknowledgement of our culpability, a reaffirmation of the other as a person of intrinsic value and of the common good. It is this which will lead to a recreation of social capital based on trust.

Such social capital is necessary for the rebuilding and the renewal of the financial system. This must be based on a strong moral framework which is derived from the values and virtues mentioned above. This is not to deny that people of other faiths and of none can make their own contribution to such a framework. What we must never have again is a moral vacuum which allows the worst aspects of human nature to dominate. Our duty to love our neighbour must take principled form in our life together, social, economic and political.

### **Persuasion not coercion**

The reader will have noted by now that we are *not* advocating theocracy. There is no question at all of religion having any coercive force in the public realm. Its influence is at least twofold. Firstly, it stands to remind actors in the public sphere of the formative influence and continuing importance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the history of this country. Secondly, it seeks to persuade, by the quality of its argument, that it is still best to ground public debate and policy in that tradition. Having said that, there must be respect for the autonomy of public authority and of public law. Religious communities, of all kinds, must be free to order their lives according to their tenets and to teach individuals, within them, also to do so. This does not mean that the religious law of any community should be recognised as part of public law. Nor does it mean that individuals and groups within any community should not have direct access to the courts for the redress of any grievances they may have.

At the same time, it is very important that legislation should have regard for conscience. This country has a fine history of respect for conscientious objection in relation to participation in armed conflict. It would be a tragedy if the conscience of religious people does not continue to be respected, particularly in areas concerning human dignity, the structure and purpose of the family and the proper use of religious premises.<sup>30</sup> Churches and Christian organisations must give priority to the strengthening of marriage and the family in terms of advocacy for due recognition in public policy but also in their own programmes for marriage preparation and parenting. Indeed, there is much opportunity here for synergy between public authorities and the churches and, indeed, other faith communities.

### **Education and the transmission of tradition**

In an important sense, the reversing of the historical amnesia which we have identified must begin in schools and other educational institutions. This will happen not only in the teaching of history itself but in how the transmission of tradition is approached as a whole. Church schools, naturally, have a vital role to play in showing how education on Christian principles can be genuinely open both to new knowledge and to the wider community. Such schools are certainly faith schools

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<sup>30</sup> Nazir-Ali 2008a.

in the sense that their vocation and inspiration is Christian but they are not faith schools in the sense that they are open to the widest possible outreach. But, of course, the agenda is too important to be left simply to church schools and other church-related institutions. Churches and Christians must bring their influence to bear wherever this is possible, whether in making suitable materials available for assemblies, in volunteers to help with assemblies and in tackling important moral issues or through Christian teachers who are called to teach in the non-church state sector. Every opportunity must be gratefully accepted. It is perhaps worth saying, at this point, that organisations of Christian teachers should be supported, in every way, as they seek to equip their members to exercise their vocation in sometimes difficult settings.

### **The visibility of worship**

Although there are thousands of churches in this land, some of them with a high iconic value, Christian worship is curiously invisible. To some extent, this is a function of the weather but there is also a mentality to shut the doors as we gather for worship. Somehow, worship should be made more visible for outsiders whether this is by having open doors or glass doors or worshipping out of doors. It seems there is less and less Christian worship in the media. Surely, there should be strong advocacy for more Christian worship to be shown on television and aired on the radio. It is important also, in this digital age, for Christian churches and organisations to have their own arrangements for transmission and broadcasting.<sup>31</sup>

### **Salt or light?**

There is a long tradition of the Church working 'with the grain' of society. This may be shown in its role in civic life, in chaplaincy or in the 'hatching, matching and dispatching' rites of passage. At times of celebration or of sorrow people turn to the Church so that their feelings may be expressed through its rituals. All of this is to be welcomed because, if it is carried out with integrity, there is always an opportunity for people to hear, see or touch something of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In an increasingly secularising situation, however, where there can be not only indifference but hostility to the Christian faith, the Church will also have to learn how to work 'against the grain', that is, in a prophetic and not merely pastoral mode. This means that the leading metaphor changes from salt to light: instead of being the salt that seasons the whole of society, but invisibly, churches will have to be a light that cannot be hid and which draws people to itself. If churches are to move from modelling their ministries on the salt metaphor to the light metaphor, there will have to be an emphasis on teaching and on the formation of moral and spiritual character so that churches can, indeed, be strong spiritual and moral communities in a dark age that may already be upon us.<sup>32</sup>

One of the ways in which the gospel comes alive for people is through an experience of healing. From the very beginning the work of healing with prayer and anointing with oil has been an aspect of Christian mission (Mark 6:7-13, Luke 10:9, cf. Jas. 5:13-16). Basing themselves on the eucharistic teaching of St John's Gospel (for example, John 6), many Christian traditions have followed St Ignatius

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<sup>31</sup> Further on this see Nazir-Ali 1995: 31ff.

<sup>32</sup> See MacIntyre 1981: 263.



of Antioch in believing that the Holy Communion is a medicine of immortality (*pharmakon athanasias*) and a means of healing for body, soul and spirit. Much work of 'healing souls' goes on in the pastor's study. It is important here to benefit from the different ways of understanding therapeutic work which exist today but this should always be within the framework of a robustly biblical anthropology. Whether healing is physical, psychological, or in terms of relationships (sometimes it can be all three), it brings that wholeness to people which is God's will for them, opening them to the divine life and making them channels of God's love and grace.

## Friendship and witness

Christians should always be willing to give an account of the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15). We have seen how God has raised apologists in our midst, for example, to tackle the presuppositions of contemporary cultures and to show how the gospel can be communicated in such contexts. Others have taken on the exaggerated claims of 'scientism' which go well beyond what science can claim for itself. Yet others have shown us how the spiritual dimension remains important for people, even if they have no connection with organised religion. No apology for the faith, no reaching out, no 'fresh expressions' of the Church, however, will be effective unless accompanied by genuine friendship. Bishop Azariah of Dornakal's cry at Edinburgh 1910 – 'give us friends' – can still be heard in our households and communities. More than mission or ministry, people want friends and it is often through friendship that Christians can introduce others to the one who called his followers 'friends' (John 15:15).<sup>33</sup>

One of the main reasons why courses like Alpha, Christianity Explored, Emmaus, and Credo have been so successful is that they are often held in the context of hospitality, around a meal where people can genuinely become friends. A warm welcome to church services and events, ease in following what is going on, and getting to know those who come all remain crucially important whether in a 'traditional' or 'fresh' expression of church. Routine visiting of people in their homes by pastoral teams, prayer-visiting and visiting people to prepare them for sacraments or the pastoral offices is also effective precisely because the interaction takes place in a personal or family context.

In thinking about the mission of the church, we have constantly to keep in mind both the aspect of *hospitality* and that of *embassy*. 'My house', said Jesus, referring to Isa. 56:7 'will be called a house of prayer for all nations'. We have to make sure that, as people come to our churches, for whatever reason, they are made to feel at home.

## Mission and evangelism

Mission, of course, has also to do with going out with the good news of Jesus. That means making a difference in people's lives: the poor should find resources for living in and through our 'gospel' in the community, the excluded should be reached by our work of mercy, marriages and families should be strengthened,

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<sup>33</sup> Harper 2000: 209.

and broken and damaged lives should find spiritual, mental and physical healing (Isa. 6:1-2, Luke 4:18-19).<sup>34</sup>

As long ago as 1989, I outlined, in an *Anvil* article, some of the important ways in which the Church engages in mission.<sup>35</sup> I noted, for example, the commitment of those from an Anglican tradition, to *presence*. This comes from both an instinctive sympathy for 'the religion of incarnation' and from the history of the parochial system which shows how the Church has been present in 'natural' communities for centuries. One question that arises now is how such presence is to work in 'new' kinds of communities whether of professional or leisure networks or, indeed, among 'natural' people-groups where the gospel has not reached. The missionary tendency here has been that of *identification*, that is, of seeking to learn the language, customs and world-view of people so that the gospel can intelligibly be shared with them. The missionary anthropologist, Charles Kraft, tells us that God speaks to particular groups of people in distinctive ways, attuned to their language and cultural forms, and, in Christ, he identifies completely with the human condition. Such 'receptor-oriented revelation' should also be a paradigm for our own mission.<sup>36</sup>

This is good as far as it goes as long as the danger of any culture setting the agenda for Christian mission is avoided and so long as the Church does not simply capitulate to culture. Such an approach has also been criticised for being at ease with the *status quo* and of not equipping people to be prophetic within their culture and context.<sup>37</sup>

If presence is to be effective, and if true inculturation is to take place, there must be *dialogue* between the Church and the people amongst whom it finds itself. Such dialogue must, of course, be based on God's universal purposes as they have been disclosed to us in the Bible but also on what has been revealed of the very nature of God the Holy Trinity. We recognise that each person is the bearer of God's image, that the Eternal Word, incarnate in Jesus Christ, illuminates the hearts and minds of all (John 1:9, however it is punctuated) and the Holy Spirit is the one convincing us all of God's justice, our shortcomings and how God makes us right with him through Jesus Christ (John 16:9-11, Rom. 8:14-17). This kind of dialogue then involves the Church as a community that bears the Good News of Jesus seeking the fulfilment of God's purposes for the culture in which it finds itself, affirming all that is God-given and life-giving and questioning (and even rejecting) what is not according to God's purposes for his world as these have been revealed in Jesus Christ. Dialogue is certainly about careful listening and learning but it is also about bearing witness, gently, graciously and boldly.<sup>38</sup>

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**34** See further 'Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue: Christians and People of Other Faiths' in Lambeth Conference 1999: 305ff and online at [www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-3.pdf](http://www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-3.pdf). See also Nazir-Ali 1998: 115ff.

**35** Nazir-Ali 1989: 127ff.

**36** Kraft 1979: 169f, 345f.

**37** Radner and Turner 2006: 2ff.

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**38** On the nature of dialogue see Pope Benedict's Regensburg Address (Pope Benedict XVI 2006) which is online at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html) and Ratzinger 1995, his earlier 1993 lecture to the Presidents of the Asian Bishops' Conference which is online at [www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZHONG.HTM](http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZHONG.HTM). See also Nazir-Ali 1995, 1998: 132ff.

Whilst the Church is to be attentive in dialogue and assiduous in rendering the gospel in the idiom of the people, it must ever be on its guard against simply capitulating to the surrounding cultural values and even becoming a mouthpiece for contemporary culture.<sup>39</sup> This is why the *prophetic* aspect of mission will remain important. From time to time, the Church will need to state clearly how it understands God's will for his world, whether that is in the exercise of a proper stewardship of the gifts of creation or in calling attention to the dignity of persons, at all stages of life, or on matters of human relationships. Such prophetic activity will not be popular but it is necessary, if the Church is to be faithful to the whole of its mission.

Sometimes it is necessary not simply to say something but to do something: in the early church the manumission of slaves was widely regarded as an act of mercy. The movement for the abolition of the slave-trade and, later, of slavery itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also directly influenced by Christian beliefs. Today the work of apostolic figures like Caroline Cox in freeing enslaved boys and girls in the Sudan is not only an act of mercy but it is also taking on the principalities and powers responsible for their slavery. Work to free bonded labour from their debt to their employer (so that they can be free to work and to live wherever they like and so that their children are no longer condemned to the same lives as themselves) is an exercise of Christian compassion, but it is also a political act which can have costly consequences for those engaged in it.<sup>40</sup>

Each of these aspects of mission has to be kept in mind when we think of our own situation. Evangelism, or if you prefer evangelisation (suggesting a process rather than an event), is the lynch-pin or, to change the metaphor, the cornerstone of all mission. Without it the other aspects of mission would be lame but evangelisation too needs these other aspects if it is to be credible in its concern for the whole person. Indeed, some of these other mission engagements provide our opportunity for a sensitive but clear sharing of the gospel with people.

Evangelism *reminds* people of who they are and how much they have fallen short of all that God has called them to be. In Jesus, who is the image (*eikôn*), of God (Col.1:15) and his very character (Heb. 1:3), we can see how our sin has distorted and obscured God's image in us but also how God wants to bring us to the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13). The proclamation of Jesus shows us how far short we have fallen of God's design for us and this leads to *repentance*, to a turning away from our wants and desires and a turning to God who has made us, loves us and wants to restore us to fellowship and friendship with him. Of course, the sharing of the gospel shows people what they need to give up if they are to be disciples of Christ. In our culture, we have seen that the root idolatry is self-worship which leads to greed, promiscuity, exploitation of those weaker than ourselves and a host of other evils. When we come to Christ these have to be given up. But coming to Christ is not just about 'giving up', it is also a celebration of all that is God-given and authentic in our lives. In particular, Christ *recapitulates* or fulfils in himself all our deepest spiritual aspirations. No doubt these have to be sifted and purified but their true nature is revealed and completed in

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39 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1978, at [www.lausanne.org/de/willowbank-1978/lop-2.html](http://www.lausanne.org/de/willowbank-1978/lop-2.html).

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40 On the early church's involvement in showing compassion see Murphy 1986; Phan 1984: 20ff.

Christ (Eph. 1:10). When we put our trust in what Christ has done in opening the way for friendship with God and reconciliation with the very source of our being, we are *reassured* about our own safety and destiny (John 6:35-40, Rom. 8:35-39). This is not about religious observance of good works but because we have put our trust in Christ's work for us. Of course, as the First Letter of John teaches, such inward assurance leads naturally to right belief, love of our brothers and sisters and right conduct. No wonder, evangelism or evangelisation is sometimes called the crown of Christian mission.

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