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DAVID BEBBINGTON

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;¹ F. F. Bruce, the pioneering Brethren scholar, took up the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester;² 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.³ 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.'⁴ 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'.⁵ 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'.⁶ 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).⁷ 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'.⁸ 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.⁹ 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'.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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'.¹² 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,¹³ the Anglican Evangelical Assembly of 1983 resolved to 'welcome' the final report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,¹⁴ and, famously, David Watson spoke in 1977 of the Reformation as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Church.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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'.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Keswick platform speakers themselves began to broaden, by 1960 allowing that there was a fight of faith as well as a rest of faith.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 1981.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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'.²⁸ 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'.²⁹ 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'.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² 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

25 Murray 1971; Walker 1985: 126-29.

26 Stott 1977: 12.

27 Gribben 2009: 130.

28 Holmes 2008: 8.

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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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

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.³⁷ The evangelical share of churchgoers, however, had increased from 30 to 37 per cent.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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'.⁴³ 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'.⁴⁴ In 1989 and 1998 roughly half of the evangelical parishes surveyed reported that they were 'broad' rather than 'mainstream' or 'charismatic'.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ At first they attracted distrust in the evangelical establishment, Maurice Wood referring two years earlier at Islington to the strain caused by 'ultra-Calvinists'.⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁶ Packer 1965.

⁴⁷ *CEN*, 19 May 1967: 6.

⁴⁸ Heinze and Wheaton 2002: 206; Randall 2000.

⁴⁹ *CEN*, 4 January 1963: 3.

⁵⁰ *CEN*, 15 January 1960: 3.

attracted nearly a thousand to its gatherings, and the associated Proclamation Trust, established in 1986 to foster expository preaching.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ Some black-majority churches enjoyed

51 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.⁵⁷ By 1998 over 7 per cent of Christian worshippers in England were black, with approximately 4 per cent of Asian origin.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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 1984.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³ Evangelical women flocked into full-time service. In 1998, 44 per cent of entrants to London Bible College were female.⁶⁴ 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).⁶⁵ 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'.⁶⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ *Baptist Times*, 16 March 2000: 8.

⁵⁸ Brierley 1999: 12.3.

⁵⁹ *CEN*, 23 November 1966: 1.

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

⁶¹ Randall 2005: 412; Walker 1985: 177.

⁶² *CEN*, 13 January 1995: 7.

⁶³ Munden 2007: 229.

⁶⁴ Randall 2000: 287.

⁶⁵ Green, Holloway and Watson 1980.

⁶⁶ 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"'.⁶⁷ Norman Anderson led the way in the recovery of social engagement with his *Into the World* (1968).⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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'.⁷⁰ 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'.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Calver's Evangelical Alliance saw itself under his successor as turning into a 'Movement for Change' so as to achieve social transformation.⁷² 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 1959.⁷³

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'.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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

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.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ 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 1978.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.

⁷⁶ *CEN*, 28 June 1974: 7.

⁷⁷ Personal observation. On worship, see Bebbington 2007.

⁷⁸ *Baptist Times*, 17 February 2000: 2.

⁷⁹ Johnson 1979: 338.

⁸⁰ 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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