Call to your mind the picture of a deserted harbour on a silted estuary. Over the years the sea has ebbed away from it. Now only the mouldering buildings and forsaken quays remain as a witness to vanished life, prosperity and influence.

This was the metaphor chosen by The Times,¹ one hundred years ago this month, to depict what it conceived to be the ebbing fortunes and diminished influence of the evangelicals. The occasion of this leading article was the death of Hugh McNeile, Dean of Ripon; a brilliant, impetuous Irishman of overwhelming eloquence who before his appointment to Ripon had taken Liverpool by storm. The Times declared: ‘The death of Dean McNeile removes a striking figure from the fast-dwindling band of men who still represent the old “Evan­gelical” tradition of our church, in the midst of a generation which has sought other faiths than theirs.’

Does it make us think, I wonder, of Talbot Mohan, whose home-call is so fresh in our minds?² To many people he represents ‘the old evangelical tradition of our church’—and I yield to none in my respect and affection for him. Perhaps as much as any of my generation (I do not speak of his older friends) I see what we evangelicals of today owe to him, and what a giant he was. I thank God upon every remembrance of him; his photograph stands on my study shelves, and visitors often take him for my father.

But was The Times leader-writer correct to make McNeile’s death significant of an evangelical crisis? Are our church papers correct today when they speak (in words Dr Packer did not use)³ of an evangelical identity crisis in our church? I think not. The growing pains of any movement represent a process, not a crisis. And it was an honorary canon of Norwich Cathedral who replied to that ‘leader’ of January 1879 in a letter published a week later: Canon John Charles Ryle. He made four factual points about the growth and increase of the evangelicalism which was said to be declining: he spoke of evangelical doctrines, pulpits, and societies; and then of annual conferences for evangelical clergy. ‘Fifty years ago they did not exist, with the single exception of the venerable Islington meeting which met comfortably in a private house’—and which in Ryle’s day mustered about
300 in attendance. I think, too, that Ryle placed his finger on a vital point when he declared in that letter: 'We have no longer any monopoly of evangelical truth, and I am not ashamed to say I thank God for it.'

Of course the influence of evangelicals and evangelical truth has not been constantly on the increase. Of course there have been periods when our tide has been dangerously on the ebb. But many tides ebb, only to return. Since the word 'evangelical' was first coined as a name (and Sir Thomas More was using it in 1531) the ebb and flow have been constantly recurring. Indeed, since the period following the Wesleys, when the word was reintroduced in a sense recognizably continuous with its use today, there have been many peaks and troughs. Perhaps the first lesson that yesterday can offer tomorrow is that neither evangelical resurgence, nor evangelical declension, is necessarily here to stay.

I propose to marshal what I have to say under the following headings: evangelical 'enthusiasm', evangelical attributes and evangelical essentials. This may not be the best, and is certainly not the only, method of approaching my subject. But it allows me to select—in the light of the space available—some particular issues from which I believe we may learn.

Evangelical enthusiasm

a) A scandal to the church

We should, I think, reckon with the fact that evangelicalism has very seldom been popular, or even respectable, in the church. Individual evangelicals may have been respected, but that is another matter.

Stephen Neill, in his book on Anglicanism, speaks of us in earlier days as 'a disliked and derided sect'. It was said of John Henry Newman that he could hardly bring himself to use the word, taking refuge in the algebraic \( x \), or the phrase 'the peculiars'. We know the celebrated story of how Hannah More, staying at Fulham Palace as a guest of the Bishop of London, wished to visit John Venn at Clapham; and how Bishop Porteous' coachman had strict instructions to take her only as far as the Plough Inn, as his lordship's carriage must not be seen outside the gate of so notorious an evangelical.

By the kindness of the archivist of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, I saw recently their catalogue of publications for 1804. It is divided into sections: section 9 is 'against Common Vices', section 11 'against Popery', section 12 'against Enthusiasm' (my italics). Within that section appears the rare pamphlet noted by W.E. Gladstone in his essay on the Evangelical Movement, collected in Vol. VII of his Gleanings of Past Years and published—incidentally, once again—exactly a century ago. This pamphlet by Thomas Sikes, Vicar of Guilsborough, is called A dialogue between a Minister of the Church and his parishioners concerning those who are called Gospel
Preachers or Evangelical Ministers. It was published in 1803 or 1804, and was still reprinting twenty years later. In this tract, the simple-minded parishioner, John Twilight, has his eyes easily opened by his friendly neighbourhood parish priest to the iniquities of these gospel preachers or evangelicals, followers of the famous Mr Whitefield or the well-known Wesley, with their disgusting journals: 'books that are stuffed with more profane and shocking things, John, than I ever saw in the worst of infidel books.'

'It cannot be necessary', added Mr Gladstone, 'to go beyond this citation'. Nor should we be surprised to find that it is in this period—1824, at the height of his Cambridge influence—that Charles Simeon was blackballed when seeking membership of the SPCK. Handley Moule tells us that his own father, going up to St John's Cambridge in 1817, was warned not to enter Trinity Church because of the bad personal character of its fanatical minister.

And we? We who took to see evangelicalism accepted in the church into the position which we believe her nature and formularies require—we do well to remember that while the gospel is unchanging, the church changes; that there is in the gospel a scandal or stumbling block which has often alienated our church in past days from expressions of New Testament Christianity, and that there is no reason to suppose we may not live to see it happen yet again.

b) A lesser faith?

How then does evangelical doctrine differ from the definitive teachings of our church? Here is Stephen Neill again, quoting the influential Sir James Stephen, who as colonial under-secretary prepared the bill of 1833 to abolish slavery, and who as professor of modern history at Cambridge published in 1849 his Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography:

What in point of fact were the special doctrines held by the Evangelicals? . . . the answer is that then as now they had no special doctrines. They were simply men who took seriously what they read in the Bible and Prayer Book. Sir James Stephen summarized their character by defining 'an orthodox clergyman as one who held in dull and barren formality the very same doctrines which the Evangelical clergymen held in cordial and prolific vitality; only saying that they differed from each other as solemn triflers differ from the profoundly serious.'

But shall we always be able to say this? The gospel is unchanging: churches change. Here is Henry Venn writing 200 years ago:

On Saturday I dined with our bishop [John Green, Bishop of Lincoln]. I find he has no objection to a revisal and alteration of the liturgy. This change will one day, I fear, take place, and then the measure of our iniquities will be full, when we have cast the doctrine of Christ out of the public worship.

Ours is in part the day that Venn foresaw. The revision and alteration
of the liturgy rests upon our generation. Yesterday would say to us now: Pray hard for those who represent us in the synods of the church.

I have called this section 'A lesser faith?' because that is how evangelicalism was made to appear to many in the wake of the Tractarian additions to the worship and doctrine of the church. A notable example of this attitude of mind can be found in John Reynolds’ monumental biography of Canon Christopher of St Aldate’s Oxford. Appendix 2 contains a prolonged exchange of letters between Canon Christopher and the influential H.P. Liddon of Christ Church, which repays study. Liddon’s doctrinal position would now be thought old-fashioned, orthodox conservative anglicanism; yet he writes of how he looks forward, in the life to come, to seeing 'the surprise of all my Low Church brethren at finding out what the Gospel of our Divine Redeemer is in its unmitigated grandeur.'

Have we in our day not heard similar statements? How are we right in what we affirm and wrong in what we deny? How in a comprehensive church we are 'one of the wings' who, in return for tolerance shown, must show tolerance of, for example, a sacramentalism repudiated by the English Reformers? And can we put our hands upon our hearts and say that we have never given cause to others to believe we hold 'a lesser faith', by our theological weakness, our biblical ineptitude, our readiness to diminish and encapsulate the gospel of grace in a manner that can seem sometimes less than fully human, let alone divine?

c) The defence of the gospel

Charles Simeon was said to be the last pre-Tractarian evangelical before the Oxford Movement made them low church controversialists. Certainly no one can look with satisfaction on the record of evangelical controversy in the last century—and especially in the 60s and 70s, the years of ritual prosecutions. They lend colour to Lord Annan’s description of our movement as 'notorious for its virulence and bigotry'. It is with something like relief that we find the Islington Conference of 1883 denouncing ‘the disastrous policy of attempting to stay error by prosecutions and imprisonments.’

We need to learn the bitter lesson of what such controversy does to people—and to their causes. But it cannot be a simplistic lesson. What else could our forefathers, as trustees of their church and gospel, honestly do? History does not let us divide them into gospel-preaching evangelicals and prosecuting low churchmen. Liddon, in one of the letters to Canon Christopher already mentioned, says how pained he is that 'a man like yourself—whom I have always hitherto associated with the devotional and Christian, rather than with the fierce and merely controversial, section of the Low Church party—should be in any way mixed up with them.'

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It is a painful and distasteful episode; but one of which we cannot wash our hands. Only last year the Church of England Evangelical Council in their booklet *Truth, Error and Discipline in the Church* was wrestling with not dissimilar problems. They urge—we urge—upon the bishops their special duty as defenders of the faith, and yet doubt whether recourse to law is the best way forward. But if it is not, then a whole host of arduous duties descends upon us, as that booklet makes clear in its conclusion.

We see from the pages of the New Testament that the defence of the gospel is a costly business. Owen Chadwick cites the damage done, however unfairly, to the evangelical party by the prosecution of saintly Bishop King of Lincoln in the 1890s—in the lifetime of men now living. I think tomorrow must not expect that the defence of truth, by whatever means integrity requires, will come more easily or at less cost than in the past.

**Evangelical attributes**

I have in mind those aspects that we find in the vital evangelicalism of the last century, and which have a meaning for today and tomorrow. My headings are: unity and organization, culture and scholarship, leadership and vision.

a) **Unity and organization**

The problem of evangelical identity is nothing new. John Wesley in 1769 made his famous prediction: 'They are a rope of sand, as such they will continue.' It is certainly true that, even before the rise of a self-consciously identifiable 'liberal evangelical' stream, evangelicals composed the stricter and the less strict, in doctrine, in morals, in attitudes to both church and society. The word 'neo-evangelical', expressing a dislike of new views within traditional evangelicalism, does not owe its origin to the aftermath of the Keele Congress of 1967 but to those (J.C. Ryle among them) who a century before had urged evangelicals to make their voices heard in the church congresses of the time.

I believe it is more a strength than a weakness that Stephen Neill can twice describe us as 'having never been a party'. To be sure, he refers to the evangelical weakness of quarrelling over lesser matters. But he says:

Evangelicals in the Church of England have never been a party. They have always been obstinate individualists—this is their strength and in part their weakness. Like-minded men have found one another out and coalesced into groups: but the vigorous assertion of their own independence has always, and fortunately, made impossible the formation of a unified party organization.

Yet in the same book—his Pelican *Anglicanism*, published in 1958—he adds, forty pages later:
But it is a mistake to imagine that Evangelicalism is a form of religious
individualism . . . true evangelical religion always tends to intense and
intimate fellowship; and one of its characteristic manifestations is in the
formation of Societies.27

So, in our own day, David Edwards writing in the Church Times after
Keele, said:

Conservative Evangelicalism is not a fashion depending upon great
personalities, nor is it a party depending on a bureaucracy or jobs for the
boys. It is an emotional reality. It is a reaction against the confusion of
our time; it is a stirring of the hunger for God.28

What has this to say to us? I believe it may be saying that this
‘emotional reality’ (and evangelicalism is much more than that) far
exceeds in importance any quest for too tight, let alone too partisan,
an organizational unity; provided—and it is a big proviso—that we
are sufficiently convinced and agreed among ourselves to be able to
act.

That was the strength of our forefathers. ‘They acquired’, says
Charles Smyth, ‘a strategic centre (Battersea Rise, home of the
Clapham sect), an official organ (The Christian
Observer, founded
1802) and a platform in the metropolis (Exeter Hall, opened 1831).’
He goes on:

But from the historian’s standpoint, the most signal and, in fact, unique
achievement of the Evangelicals is that, although numerically a minority
and (until 1815) unrepresented on the episcopal Bench, yet within the
incredibly brief space of half a century they converted the Church of
England to Foreign Missions, effected the Abolition of the Slave Trade
and of Slavery throughout the British Empire, and initiated factory legis-
lation and humanitarian reform, healing the worst scars of the Industrial
Revolution. Has any Church in Christendom accomplished so much in so
short a time? 29

Part of this, under God, is due to the second pair of what I call evan-
gelical attributes:

b) Culture and scholarship
Here I can deal more briefly: there is less to say! The contrast is seen
most plainly, perhaps, in a book like David Newsome’s The Parting of
Friends. They were by any standard a remarkable generation.
Newsome quotes a letter written in 1845 by Sir James Stephen to his
wife:

Oh where are the people who are at once really religious, and really
cultivated in heart and in understanding? . . . the people with whom we
could associate as our fathers used to associate with each other. No
‘Clapham Sect’ nowadays . . .30

Or Rose Macaulay, writing in our own day:

Those old Evangelicals were such nice people—I mean the grand-
parents, who wrote about ‘walking with God’. Inge, of course, doesn’t
like that form of theology. I don’t know that I do very much myself but
look what fruit it bore . . .31
They were giants in those days: combining, of course, natural advantages with a strong sense of God’s grace in all creation, and the serious Victorian reverence for art and civilized culture, before these words became as debased and devalued as they are today.

It did not last long; but while it lasted it was a golden age. Perhaps its message for tomorrow is that evangelicalism can and must be world-affirming, in the sense of God’s world; even while it is world-denying, in the sense of fallen human society organized apart from God.

Owen Chadwick points out that the decline can be charted by Stanley’s Life of Arnold. At its first publication in 1844, Arnold was already accepted as a hero of the Victorians. Evangelicalism at that time was not thought a suitable subject for derision. But as it became more fashionable to say hard things about evangelicals, there appeared in later editions of the book—certainly by 1881—his definition of an evangelical: ‘A good Christian with a low understanding, a bad education, and ignorance of the world.’ If there has remained some truth in it ever since, it is also true (as 1 Corinthians 1:26 reminds us) that ‘from the human point of view, not many of us are wise or powerful or of high social standing.’ Was it not the Countess of Huntingdon who thanked God for the letter ‘m’, lest that verse should read—in the Authorised Version—not any wise, mighty, noble are called.

We are today recapturing, thank God, the true evangelical concern for scholarship. In the golden age I speak of, or soon after, evangelicals showed their concern for an informed clergy, by founding St John’s Highbury, now St John’s Nottingham, in 1863; Wycliffe Hall in 1877; Ridley Hall in 1881. May God give us, and may we nurture, the ‘thinkers and writers’ without whom evangelicalism in the past grew at times sterile and shallow. Surely Mr Gladstone was right, 100 years ago, when he wrote words whose prophetic content is not yet exhausted:

A devout and active clergy the Church of England happily possesses. But learning, within the clerical body, suffers heavily from a combination of different causes: one of them the increase and varied activity of pastoral duties, another, their numerous, nay, almost innumerable, administrative cares. Some of these partake largely of a secular character; and many are such as to call for an enlarged amount of lay assistance.

So, thirdly, among evangelical attributes:

c) Leadership and vision

David Newsome speaks of the power and influence in evangelical leadership of a small number of very remarkable men. God has given us today perhaps two or three remarkable leaders: but who else can stand beside these great early Victorians and their predecessors? They were laymen, for the most part. Wilberforce and Shaftesbury are their prototypes, but there were many more. ‘The Pope’,

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wrote Sydney Smith, had no such 'power over the minds of the Irish as Mr Wilberforce has over the mind of a young Methodist converted the previous quarter.' More to the point, Wilberforce had power for good over the House of Commons, power in Downing Street, power over the minds of his countrymen.

And from their leadership sprang their confidence and vision, typified by Wilberforce's quip to Thornton in Palace Yard on 23 February 1807 after the decisive vote for Abolition of the Slave Trade: 'Well, Henry, what shall we abolish next?' Would they had found time to follow up Thornton's serious suggestion that they attack the lottery.

What that vision—and the vision of their successors—achieved in many ways, both large and small, is a matter of history. Their influence moulded the Christian home, the integrity of the new professions, the stewardship of money, the use of what we today would call the media; besides the greater matters already mentioned, in overseas mission, the traffic in slaves, and reform and philanthropy of many kinds.

Through the Church Missionary Society (CMS) they reached out to all the globe. Through the Church Pastoral-Aid Society (CPAS) they gave the church a new vision of lay ministry—not yet exhausted—and expressed a concern for the spiritual welfare of the disadvantaged which transcended in its appeal the merely partisan: Pusey himself, until the vexed issue of lay agents dissuaded both him and Mr Gladstone and led to the founding of the Additional Curate's Society (ACS), had offered to subscribe £100 p.a. Parochial missions, the study of preaching, the founding of societies, a new appreciation of the Lord's Supper, hymnody and pastoral organization—the list is endless. May God increase in us a vision and give to us a leadership that tomorrow may build upon the beginnings that we see around us of just such a new evangelical enterprise.

Evangelical essentials
I use this term to comprise at once the most vital, and yet the briefest, part of what I have to say. Without these, there is no evangelicalism. Our only triumphs in the end are triumphs of the gospel. I select, from other possibilities, the search for holiness, the spread of the gospel, and the cross of Christ; underpinned, of course, in all true evangelicalism by the word of the Scriptures and the work of the Spirit.

a) The search for holiness
Simeon himself embodies all. 'To humble the sinner,' he wrote, 'to exalt the Saviour, to promote holiness.' No one can read the serious biographies, such as John Pollock's masterly study of Wilberforce, without seeing the note of self-examination by which our forefathers judged their daily lives. This was not content to be simply a lay
movement. Owen Chadwick in his study of the founding of Cuddesdon pays tribute to their inspiration:

The evangelicals were steadily raising the ideal expected of the Christian pastor. For many years they had been proclaiming standards which were slowly leavening the popular notion of the Christian minister.42

Here for the last time is Stephen Neill:

What they were primarily interested in was holiness. Often narrow in their theology and illiberal in their ideas, they kept always before their own eyes and the eyes of their hearers the ideal of the man of God, unspotted from the world, and in all his thoughts and actions serviceable to God and man.43

May we seek for tomorrow, not a world-denying cloistered sanctity but a serviceable holiness that takes us, as Sir Norman Anderson has expressed it, ‘into the world’.44

b) The spread of the gospel

Here is where evangelicalism finds its very name. The division between the evangelical and the low churchman is known most clearly by this touch-stone: the concern for mission and evangelism—the passion for souls, as we see it in Venn, in Simeon, in Daniel Wilson of Islington, and which David Newsome calls the ‘sine qua non of evangelicalism’.45

From Wilberforce onwards, with his prepared ‘openers’ for personal counselling and his influential book A Practical View, through CMS in 1799, CPAS in 1836, and many others, the concept of ‘mission’ became established until by 1885—on the death of Hannington—The Times itself began to take a new line upon missionary enterprise.46 The many other societies, the Cambridge Seven, the China Inland Mission—for this was no merely Anglican concern—all tell the same story. And as abroad, so at home; here is Gladstone’s verdict:

To bring back again the preaching of the Gospel was the aim and work of the evangelical reformers... Whether they preached Christ in the best manner may be another question; but of this there is now, and can be, little question that they preached Christ; they preached Christ largely and fervently where, as a rule, He was but little and but coldly preached before.47

David Edwards, ten years ago, spoke of finding in current evangelicalism ‘a burning and a shining sense of mission.’48 God keep it so. It is indeed an evangelical essential.

Finally, nearer the heart than even the search for holiness or the spread of the gospel, I put:

c) The cross of Christ

You remember the story of Lord Shaftesbury’s pocket watch. How it was given to him, he used to say, by the best friend he ever had, Maria Millis, his old nurse; and how from her he had learned these
three great lessons: the openness of God to prayer, the trustworthiness of the Bible, the comfort of the cross. Standish Meacham puts his finger on it from across the Atlantic: 'Evangelicalism was less a system than a remedy'—and that remedy was the cross.

It was this that unified the various elements that went to make up the evangelicals. Lesser matters might divide: they were at one, says George Russell, 'in this central and dominating conviction that the only hope for fallen humanity is the Propitiatory Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.' And here is Gladstone once again, from that essay in The British Quarterly Review for 1879:

The main characteristic of the evangelical school was of a higher order. It was a strong, systematic, outspoken and determined reaction against the prevailing standards both of life and preaching. It aimed at bringing back, on a large scale and by an aggressive movement, the Cross and all that the Cross essentially implies, both into the teaching of the clergy and into the lives as well of the clergy as of the laity.

'Christ has died' was their watchword, with all that means of redemption accomplished and achieved. 'Christ is alive' could then follow—but only then—with all that means of abiding communion and resurrection life. If this is our inheritance from the past, and the legacy we must bequeath to tomorrow and the day after, then we can sit more lightly in our minds to the comparison I have sought to draw between the great days of our forefathers and this day of smaller things: it is in the end not excellency of speech or wisdom that matters; nor weakness, fear and trembling. It is Jesus Christ and him crucified: the same yesterday, today and forever.

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NOTES

Apart from a small number of stylistic changes, this paper is reproduced in the form in which it was originally given.

2 Talbot Greaves Mohan, 1895-1979; Hon. Canon of Sydney Cathedral; Secretary of the Church Pastoral Aid Society 1942-65; died 10 January 1979.
4 The Times 6 February 1879.
7 T. Mozley, Reminiscences Chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement (Longmans Green : London, 1882) Vol. ii p 145. Mozley, 'an intimate friend' (DNB) and brother-in-law to Newman, says that 'Evangelical' was 'a word which I certainly never heard pass his lips.' Wilfred Ward, however, in his Life of Newman (Longmans Green 1912) quotes a letter of Newman's dated 24 February 1887 which refers to 'Evangelicalism', 'Evangelical Christians', and 'Evangelical teaching'.
Yesterday and Tomorrow

10 The copy I have seen is called 'a new edition', dated 1823, printed for C. & J. Rivington, Booksellers to the SPCK. The author's name is spelt as Sikes and Sykes on the title pages of editions issued in the same year.
11 Balleine, *op. cit.* p 181. This was in 1824.
12 H. C. G. Moule, *The Evangelical School in the Church of England* (James Nisbet : London, 1901) p 8. This was in 1817.
16 *ibid.* p 387.
22 cf. Chadwick, *op. cit.* ii.354. 'The evangelical party was more damaged by the case of Read v. The Bishop of Lincoln than by any other circumstance in the entire controversy over ritual, even the imprisonments of clergymen.'
23 Balleine, *op. cit.* p v, quoting from a paper read by Wesley to Conference, 1769.
24 *ibid.* p 272.
26 *ibid.* p 190.
27 *ibid.* pp 237, 8.
28 *Church Times*, 13 June 1969.
34 Gladstone, *op. cit.* p 240.
36 Furneaux, *op. cit.* p 43; quoting Sydney Smith, *Peter Plymley's Letters*, letter X.
38 Moule, *op. cit.* p 35.
41 See, for example, Pollock, *op. cit.* p 152.
45 Newsome, *op. cit.* p 10.
46 See Moule, *op. cit.* p 93.
47 Gladstone, *op. cit.* p 207.
48 *Church Times* 13 June 1969.


52 Gladstone, *op. cit.* p. 207. This is the essay, in the issue of July 1879, reprinted in Vol. vii of *Gleanings*.

53 1 Corinthians 2:1; cf. Hebrews 13.8.