
Evangelicals in the Anglican Church

Reg Burrows

Has Keele Failed?

Edited by Charles Yeats, Hodder & Stoughton, 218 pp., £8.99

The Anglican Evangelical Crisis

A radical agenda for a Bible based church

Edited by Melvin Tinker, Christian Focus. 222 pp., £7.99

In both these books Anglican evangelicals consider the issues they face in the national church. *Has Keele Failed?* looks back to the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele University in 1967, when, according to John Stott, evangelical Anglicans repented of their withdrawal from the visible Church into the parish, and from the secular world into their own pietistic circles. After Keele there certainly was a great increase in evangelical involvement in synodical government, diocesan structures and liturgical change. The book, while accepting that it is too soon for a final assessment on Keele, asserts that without it the Church of England today would be in a far worse state than it is. (*REFORM*, the evangelising and reforming network of “conservative” evangelical parishes that emerged after the passing in November 1992 of the legislation to ordain women presbyters, believes that Keele was a disaster.)

The book has three sections. The first is a chapter by Michael Saward, one of the main architects of Keele. He was involved with the pressure from the Eclectic Society of younger evangelical clergy to change the plan of the Congress from set-piece addresses to discussion sessions working to produce the Keele Statement. He describes the events leading up to Keele and takes a positive view of the development of the evangelical Anglican movement afterwards.

The second section is a debate between David Holloway, a leading member of *REFORM*, and Peter Baron. Holloway argues the case for reform. The nation is adrift spiritually and in need of evangelising. The Church of England is adrift doctrinally, morally and in terms of social significance. The things required for a human organisation to function well are not present in the Church of England. Centralism has taken over. Too many decisions are taken by diocesan officials and bureaucrats. Attempts by evangelicals since the war to reform the Church of England have failed. Keele was part of this failure. Holloway is a gospel man concerned about the spiritual state of Church and nation, although he sometimes uses sociological rather than scriptural analysis. He argues the case for reform (that is, for reformation), but I do not think he establishes the case for *REFORM*, with its particular objectives and methods. One short paragraph describes *REFORM*'s structure and objectives.

Baron writes against *REFORM*. He accepts a vague evangelicalism and writes “Broadly, an evangelical may be defined as someone who elevates the authority of Scripture, who believes in the conversion of individuals, and exalts the cross in doctrine and spirituality: I will leave the subtlety of definition there.” For him “evangelicalism

is much more a cultural phenomenon than we realise". For him, Keele was the (legitimate) birth of the "open" evangelical – someone who is not a liberal, but is willing to listen. This is contrasted with the "closed" evangelicalism of the supposed ghetto before Keele, which regarded itself as the true church within the Church of England. This closed evangelicalism, resurrected in *REFORM*, has three features that must be rejected – "dualism" (the idea that the Word of God is objective, entirely definite, and the same for everyone); "perspicuity" (which is unattainable) and dogmatism. The open evangelical follows Hooker, who "recognised that the mere Scriptures are not sufficient. We need the authority of the Church and the preacher to induce us to consider them favourably."

Baron has little time for reforming zeal. "The temptation within evangelicalism is to define the true Church as invisible, but then to argue that the moral life of the visible body should conform to it." It is wrong, he says, "to deny the catholic visible nature of the church and to confine it to one congregation (*ecclesia*)". The centre of the church is Christ (as in the Gospels), but the boundary is fuzzy. The church is inclusive, comprehensive and fallible. These marks are both Anglican and scriptural. For him, Keele did not fail. It gave evangelicals the courage to open themselves to different theological traditions. He sees *REFORM* as a reaction to modernity which will split evangelicals, send them back to the ghetto, and cause them to repudiate Keele and Nottingham. Baron regards a leading *REFORM* member who circulated the House of Bishops asking them to repent of listed sins, as demonstrating a lack of understanding of episcopacy as well as "an arrogance born of an over-confident approach to Scripture".

The third section is correctly entitled *Keele Evangelicals on Reform* on the contents page (rather than *Keele Evangelicals on REFORM* at the beginning of this part of the book). Most of the writers approve of the direction set by Keele and describe themselves as "Keele evangelicals". But with one notable exception, there is absolutely nothing evangelical about what they write. They are concerned almost entirely with methods, structures and procedures. These chapters could equally well have been written by liberals. They contain no gospel. They largely ignore Scripture. They do not face up to the other gospels, the heresy and the unbelief in the Church of England. If these are the descendants of Keele, then – by any scriptural test – we have here the answer to the book's title. Keele was a dismal failure.

Michael Turnbull, the evangelical Bishop of Durham, writes on "Paying for ministry", a description of how the Church Commissioners and the Church of England in general have an "option for the poor"; the system is geared to provide a ministry for areas and churches that cannot afford it themselves. John Pritchard, Warden of Cranmer Hall (an evangelical theological college in Durham), discusses how ministerial training can be improved when training in theological colleges is the most expensive and not necessarily the best method. David Day, Principal of St John's College (a university college in Durham linked with Cranmer Hall), discusses the ministry of the laity. Most of the chapter is a plea for lay presidency at the Lord's Supper. Margaret Masson, a lecturer in English Literature at St John's, writes on the ministry of women. She seems to be a slightly aggrieved feminist who sees in the three aspects of Christian tradition – "the Bible; the language, imagery and symbolism of the Christian tradition; and the structures and shape of the institutional Church itself" – no real hope of rapid moves forward to having women bishops. Ruth Etchells, former Principal of St John's, discusses

the ministry of bishops in very Anglican terms. John Arnold, the catholic Dean of Durham, deals with the ministry of cathedrals which – quoting Hooker – are to be regarded as temples of the living God.

The one ray of light in this spiritual gloom is the chapter by Michael Wilcock, Vicar of St Nicholas, Durham, writing on the ministry of the parish clergy. He takes us on a “flight of fancy”, imagining an ecclesiastical world in which all the traditional Anglican structures, buildings, investments, hierarchies have been swept away. Such a “‘stripped-down’ version of the Church would be not something lesser, but something greater than the complexities and pomp of any presently existing denomination, or even of all the modern ‘churches’ put together.” It would be a priestly church with direct access into God’s presence, and a prophetic church, sent out by God to speak to the world. The priestly and prophetic people of God are guided by “shepherds” – pastors who are presbyters, and who bishop. This is the real work of the parish clergy.

Overall, there is value in the first part of the book. Michael Seward’s chapter is a helpful summary of events with an insight into the inner workings of Keele. The second part is a useful introduction to the present debate among Anglican evangelicals. It is also useful to have the Keele Statement included as an appendix – it has been out of print for a number of years. The third part – except for Michael Wilcock’s chapter – has no value whatever as a programme for reformation. It only serves to illustrate the desperate spiritual condition of Anglican evangelicalism today.

The Anglican Evangelical Crisis – a radical agenda for a Bible based church is refreshingly different. It is partly a response to *Evangelical Anglicans*, a symposium published in 1993, whose writers were associated with Wycliffe Hall (an evangelical Anglican theological college in Oxford). *Evangelical Anglicans* maintained that the 39 Articles were not intended to be a confession of faith. It revealed that many evangelical scholars no longer accept the traditional authorship of New Testament books. It did not regard the historic evangelical gospel of the Reformers as the essential truth of God and the heart of true Anglicanism.

In his preface to *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis* the editor, Melvin Tinker, discerns a crisis of identity among Anglican evangelicals (with desperate attempts recently to hold together those who call themselves evangelicals), of theology (a movement being pragmatically, not theologically driven), and of purpose (not standing up to the Peters of today like Paul did). This book sees Evangelicalism as authentic Christianity.

Under the title *Semper Reformanda* David Holloway, Vicar of Jesmond in Newcastle upon Tyne, argues for reformation in the Church of England. For the Reformers the essence of Christianity was neither the church itself, nor its ministry, but its faith. He argues for a return to Prayer Book doctrine (not a general use of the 1662 Prayer Book) in a church where “the bishop is his Diocese” is now the defining mark of the Church. The church must retain the shape of biblical Christianity, the bishops must repudiate the validity of homosexual relationships, feminism must be rejected (although Holloway wants more women deacons – and preachers?). In addition, there must be a commitment to making new disciples, to removing bishops and clergy who deny fundamentals – and to reinstating the local congregation as the unit (see Article 19), with the right to withdraw its money from supporting work in gospel-denying parishes.

Mark Thompson, an Australian from Sydney diocese, writes on *Saving the Heart*

of Evangelicalism. He insists that evangelicalism can only be defined theologically and gives a heart-warming summary of historic, Reformation evangelical doctrine which would be of great help to any believer seeking instruction and encouragement. He declares that much contemporary evangelicalism has “surrendered to a caricature of itself as narrow-minded and negative, and obligingly transformed itself into an amorphous entity which stands for nothing and smiles benignly at the compromise of its most cherished beliefs. It has forgotten that genuine Christian unity is unity in the truth.”

Melvin Tinker writes on *Currents of change – Trends in Anglican Evangelical Theology Today*. He condemns the misuse of the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God, the idea that “wherever social justice and peace are promoted, there we are to see the Kingdom of God, even if Christ is not acknowledged or salvation experienced.” He writes helpfully on the relationship between doctrine and experience; an experience is only Christian if it comes from true biblical doctrine. It is a perverse hermeneutic that can lead us to say the exact opposite of what Paul is saying and at the same time claim that we are being faithful to him. There must be a new commitment to teach the Bible; it should shape the way we function. It is not just the content of teaching that matters, but the context – the “style of worship” also conveys a message. Are we being ruled by God’s Word or by denominational regulations?

In a brilliant historical survey Gerald Bray asks *Whatever happened to the authority of Scripture?* He sheds much light on problems with Bible interpretation today. Luther interpreted the Bible in the light of justification by faith. Later on covenant theology became the interpretative principle. John Wesley based his doctrine of perfectibility on one verse (Matthew 5:18) – and it has become a characteristic of much of the evangelical movement to “find a text to back up your inspiration/experience”. Evangelicals still affirm *sola Scriptura*, but without having the Reformation framework of systematic biblical theology. The problem today is *sola exegesis*, interpreting a passage using modern academic methods but with no systematic theology to help. The resulting sermon is an arid lecture, or the text becomes a launching-pad for the preacher’s own thoughts. We must have a coherent theology again. But it looks as though the present situation will get worse and worse.

Douglas Spanner, writing on *Men, Women and God*, does not offer a closely reasoned argument, but some helpful thoughts, which will both stimulate and reassure those who accept the traditional biblical position. It is a pity he does not tackle the “new orthodoxy” among conservative evangelicals that leaves the door open for women to preach (as long as they do so under the authority of a male elder). This is the position of John Stott and Jim Packer, in a recent statement from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and of the Danvers Statement by leading North-American evangelicals in 1988. It is also the view of many members of *REFORM*, who are in favour of women deacons. (Deacons in the Church of England are normally licensed to preach).

In *Towards an Evangelical view of the church* Melvin Tinker focuses on the church as the people God. He sees the local church – “the congregation of faithful men” of Article 19 – as the unit, an outcrop of heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24). Bishops are not hierarchical bishops in tactile succession, but the pastor-teachers of the local congregation. Where apostolic truth is rejected no unity exists. Denominations are para-church organisations supporting the work of local congregations. Ecumenism is not

bringing denominations together (for they are not churches), but fostering unity among evangelical congregations.

Jim Packer deals with comprehensiveness in the Church of England under the title, *Never mind the quality, feel the width*. He describes the traditional understanding of comprehensiveness as calculated inclusion, not a tight-rope between Rome and the Reformation, or between Rome and the Anabaptists, but a broad-based, definite Protestantism. He finds other interpretations “feeble and wet” by comparison. But he ends very limply with the hope of what Anglicanism may be tomorrow, “when (please God) it reapprehends its heritage and is renewed in doing so.”

Another Sydney Diocese evangelical, Peter Adam, writes encouragingly on *Preaching and Pastoral Ministry*. Evangelicals in the Church of England seem to have lost their way in the area of preaching. *The Nottingham Statement* did not include in its *Intentions* a commitment to preaching and teaching the Bible. He argues cogently for a ministry of the Word that is biblical, expository, applied and passionate. The challenge is to nurture and train such preachers. There are useful reminders for every preacher here.

John Woodhouse is also from Sydney Diocese. In *The Lay Administration of the Lord's Supper: A change to stay the same* he argues persuasively that to stay the same (that is, to remain true to Reformation and biblical principles) you have to change (namely allow lay administration of the Lord's Supper). The New Testament says nothing about who may administer the Lord's Supper in the local congregation. Lay administration undermines wrong sacramental theology, removes groundless taboos and helps people to understand the gospel better. (Interestingly, this is a much more realistic and biblical case than that of David Day in *Has Keele Failed?*)

In *The Word in an Age of Image. The Challenge to Evangelicals* Os Guinness describes the shift from word to image as the means of communicating in our society. He shows how this has happened and what the effects of the shift are. It should be compulsory reading for all preachers – and others – who have not read anything on this subject.

David Field writes on *Homosexual Relationships and the Bible*. He presents the essence of the biblical case in a refreshing and clear way, and is very good on encouraging the right attitude to homosexual people. It is a perhaps a pity that he does not touch on the problem of homosexuals who actively oppose God's standards and campaign to lead others into their practice.

An outstanding contribution is Rachel Tingle's chapter – *Evangelical Social Action Today: Road to Recovery or Road to Ruin?* – She traces the history of evangelical social action from the nineteenth century to today. It is a very perceptive analysis of what has happened, and of the dangers facing evangelicals today, not just Anglican evangelicals. The warning is clear: “Social action should not usurp the gospel, or be presented as if it were the gospel.” The debate is really about the meaning of the gospel.

The book ends with observations from a (non-Anglican) evangelical friend, Don Carson. In fact he compares this book with *Evangelical Anglicans*. There are some perceptive comments on the Anglican evangelical position. Why does this book make no reference to the 1966 call by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones? Carson knows of no mainline denomination where decline has not been accelerated by the decision to ordain women. The same hermeneutic is used to champion the ordination of homosexuals. We can already see this pressure building up in the Church of England.

What then of the book as a whole? Some of the chapters are outstanding introductions

or summaries of their topics – those by Mark Thompson, Melvin Tinker (on trends in theology), Gerald Bray, Peter Adam, Os Guinness, David Field and Rachel Tingle. The book can be recommended for the value of these chapters alone. Other chapters should encourage contending for the faith – those by David Holloway, Melvin Tinker (on the church) and John Woodhouse.

But there are weaknesses. There is no doubt that the contributors consider the evangelical gospel of the Reformation to be the essential truth of God. David Holloway writes approvingly of Hooker’s definition of the faith of the church as “credal orthodoxy”. But is that enough? Is not justification by faith alone the sign of a falling or standing church? In the General Synod battles of the 1980s is it not sad that a great stand was made for Christ’s resurrection and virginal conception and against homosexual practice, but comparatively no fuss was made about justification by faith, the heart of the gospel? Don Carson cannot see how Jim Packer finds the Articles to be so tolerant of Anglo-Catholicism. The mindset is still to embrace, as Ryle did, those who affirm the 39 Articles, and also those who embrace the Galatian heresy.

This book does much to stimulate right thinking and reforming action. But it lacks a sense of horror at the unbelief and heresy that permeates the central life and official pronouncements of the Church of England. The “both and” approach, seen in the bishops’ report affirming the biblical view of marriage and tolerating homosexual relations among lay members of the church, is not wise or kind. It is an expression of sheer unbelief.

I am encouraged by much in this book. I shall continue to pray for my Anglican brothers. But until they accept responsibility to reform the connexional church to which they belong rather than retreat to the parish as they do in this book, until they resolve to do something to drive Liberalism and Anglo-Catholicism out of the visible church of Christ, and until they aim for an evangelical Church of England and be willing to secede if, having mustered the troops, they fail to achieve it – only then will they have a truly radical agenda for Bible-based church. Only then will there be any hope for the Church of England. Only then will they themselves be safe from being corrupted by the rotten apples in the Anglican barrel.

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I am very grateful for the invitation to be an observer at Keele, partly because the British Council of Churches desires an understanding relationship with all Christian traditions and partly because I personally owe much to the evangelical tradition.

While I could not go the whole way with the Congress statement, there were three major emphases at Keele which I warmly welcome – the stress on theology, the desire to take a responsible part in the corporate and central life of the Church of England, and the recognition that Christians must show the implications of the gospel for the social, moral and international problems of our time.

An evangelicalism that can combine these wider concerns with personal devotion to Christ as Saviour and Lord, can, I believe, enrich the life of the Church of England, deepen the ecumenical dialogue, and strengthen the total Christian witness in our country in coming days.

*Bishop Kenneth Sansbury
General Secretary of the British Council of Churches 1967*
