

Review Article by Andrew Goddard on Andrew Atherstone & John Maiden (eds), *Evangelicalism and the Church of England in the Twentieth Century* (The Boydell Press, 2014). [ISBN - 978-1843839118, £60]

Evangelicals in the Church of England are often remarkably confused and ignorant about their recent evangelical past and the wider church knows even less about who we are and where we come from as evangelicals despite our growing significance at every level of the church. Often as evangelicals we tell each other a story which fits our particular form of evangelicalism and fails to recognize the complexity and diversity. This volume, the fruit of a conference at Wycliffe Hall, is a wonderful (if sadly expensive) resource which ably rectifies such failings. After a fascinating introductory essay by the editors it presents ten papers from scholarly experts who both distil their previous work and offer new insights and material.

Evangelicalism and the Church of England: Identities and Contexts

In the book's opening chapter Atherstone and Maiden offer a masterclass overview of Anglican Evangelicalism in the last century and the different maps and taxonomies by which it has been understood in scholarship and popular thinking. They note an offering from 1915 which distinguished Traditional, Protestant, Evangelistic and Liberal evangelicals. The latter had four further sub-divisions (Ritualistic, Philosophic, Social Reforming and Student Movement) but was itself swiftly rejected as genuinely evangelical by others. This sort of complex delineation was widely simplified into conservative vs liberal as a basic division for understanding at least the two decades either side of the war (Oliver Barclay's account being the classic example). It then became more complex again from the late 1970s with proposals of Protestant, Keswick, Eclectic and Charismatic (Gavin Reid) or Pietist, Parochial, Puritan, Protestant and Powers-that-Be (Michael Saward) only to often be reduced again to conservative, liberal and charismatic. Interestingly, while most of these "57 varieties" found in history are no longer commonly used designations and identities, there is no discussion in the chapter of the origins of the "open" designation (was this also Gavin Reid and if so when?) and – perhaps connected? - although Stott's famous "Bible people" and "Gospel people" definition is noted (along with the acknowledgment that despite his pre-eminence "he was not able to settle the question" (9)) there is no mention of Tom Wright's addition of "Church people" (in his Latimer study, [recently republished](#) alongside a similar study by Packer). What is incontrovertible though is that "throughout the century, the concept of Anglican evangelicalism was widely contested, demonstrating something close to an obsession with self-definition" (7).

The editors note that these debates occur during a period of great change in church and society and instead of a new taxonomy of evangelicalism suggest "three broad tendencies displayed by evangelicals in response to their ecclesiastical and social contexts: *resistance*, *reform* and *renewal*" (10) with the choice between the first two being "a long-standing dilemma for many evangelicals" (10). This is a potentially illuminating approach as is shown by its development here. The three tendencies are traced in relation to a number of phenomena (Anglo-Catholicism, theological liberalism, religious 'decline', and social and political change) to offer a reading of evangelicals in church and society. The definition and distinction between the three categories is however not always clear. It can also produce some

interesting assignments – Fulcrum is probably best labelled “reform”, a designation usually used for a different type of evangelical Anglican! There are also dangers that all the terms seem to be describing reactive mindsets and responses to something understood as negative and/or threatening rather than affirming of what is happening in church and society or offering a substantive alternative vision to them.

The reading of these three evangelical approaches concludes with the assessment that evangelicals “seemed to have responded with reasonable success to the ecclesiastical and social challenges of the century” (27) but the editors are insistent that this should not be simplified into “a trajectory of growing dominance” or a stark division into pre-Keele and post-Keele phases. The remainder of their introductory chapter provides readers with an invaluable and unparalleled survey of scholarship on evangelicals in the CofE. It begins with a focus on biographies and histories (such as Manwaring, Hylson-Smith and Steer) before demonstrating the need to question elements of common wisdom in relation to five themes prominent in the book as a whole: evangelical diversity and its caricatures, neo-evangelicalisms (not I felt a particularly clear or helpful term), the role of the laity, nation and national identity, and globalization and the Anglican Communion. Rather than explore each of these what follows offers a short sketch and assessment of each of the chapters as they move from intra-evangelical life through to evangelical relations with the wider Church of England and English society to the world beyond England.

Evangelical Networks: Islington, AEGM, Keswick & Cheltenham and Oxford Conferences

The book opens with studies of four evangelical networks and meetings, beginning with a masterful survey of The Islington Conference by the *doyen* of evangelical historians, David Bebbington, supplemented by an appendix to the book by Andrew Atherstone tracing the subjects and speakers from 1856 (though it began in 1827) to 1982. Bebbington highlights the divisions and shifts of interests over time (for example responding to the Oxford Movement and Catholics, premillennialism, Keswick holiness teaching, hell and social issues and in its later years addressing justification, hermeneutics and the role of women). It is easy to forget what issues were once so contested – in 1949 “the most radical suggestion of the conference” (63) was for communion not from the traditional evangelical “north end” or the Anglo-Catholic “eastward” position but the “westward” position of facing the people!

One of the conferences great strengths was its commitment to keep meeting despite sometimes deep differences, even at times enabling different sides to present alternative views and frank debate on papers presented. Though often associated with more conservative evangelicals it was much more eclectic and had periods when it significantly broadened out. In Bebbington’s words, it

clearly displayed the predominant opinion of Anglican evangelicals for over a century and a half....Islington was one of the institutions that...ensured a continuing measure of cooperation between the conservative and liberal wings....For many decades the conference had constituted a teaching authority. Islington wielded a defining power that was not unlike the Roman Catholic magisterium. (67)

While it is often said that the fissiparousness of Anglican evangelicals in recent decades was due to there being no successor to Stott (from whom, despite its London base and his involvement from the 1950s,

Islington kept a distinct identity) it is perhaps much more the case that, “one of the reasons for the fragmentation of Anglican evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century was the disappearance of Islington” (67). Although not explored here or elsewhere in the book in any detail it would be interesting to relate its demise and its effects on unity to the birth in 1982 of the Anglican Evangelical Assembly (itself now part of distant history).

There follow chapters on the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement – the main “liberal evangelical” body which lasted from 1923 until the late 1960s (when it was overtaken and overshadowed by the rise of NEAC) – by Martin Wellings and on early twentieth century Anglican Evangelical tensions in relation to the Keswick Convention by Ian Randall, the historian of the Convention. Although not addressing it directly, Wellings’ chapter provides material to help evaluate claims that “open evangelicals” are the heirs of the earlier “liberal evangelicals” of AEGM. Randall, like Wellings, introduces once influential figures now rarely spoken of such as H.W. Webb-Peploe (of the still famous St Paul’s, Onslow Square) and John Stuart Holden. Holden in the 1910s was speaking of the motherly love of God (97-8) and in a sermon gave the still very apposite warning against those who “defend the truth in ways that deny the truth” (107). His final sentence on Holden also highlights a recurring tension among evangelicals in the CofE – although he sought to get the Keswick constituency to address wider questions while focused on Christ, “ultimately his hope that the conservative evangelicals of his time would embrace and unite around a broader vision was not fulfilled” (108).

For me one of the most interesting discoveries on attending the original conference was the subject of Atherstone’s chapter about which I knew nothing – The Cheltenham and Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen. This met annually for 3 days to consider theology and policy and seen by some as “an Evangelical Parliament” (Appendix 2 lists the themes and speakers from 1916 to 1968 and the final two in 1975 and 1976). Its origins arose from questions still asked today – “Is it not high time that something definite was done to unite members of the Evangelical school of thought in the Church of England on a common platform and policy?” (1916 letter to *The Record*, quoted 110) – and in 1925 another familiar theme was voiced by Henry Wilson of Cheltenham: “We have the numbers, we have a policy and an objective, we have a message to thrill and inspire the heart and to meet human needs. There is only one essential which we lack at the moment – unity” (123). A flavor of the range and sometimes radical nature of the gatherings is seen in the fact that as early as the 1933 Oxford Conference Guy Rogers “used his lecture in honour of the Clapham Sect to appeal for Anglican evangelicals to overthrow the ban on women’s ordination just as they had overthrown slavery” (127). One reason this major evangelical forum is now forgotten is that it was “outflanked by the new Anglican evangelical networks beginning to flourish under the oversight of John Stott” (133). In contrast to Islington, Stott never read a paper at the Oxford Conference which was effectively killed off by the 1967 NEAC. As Atherstone’s conclusion hints we need to rethink the common story here of evangelical ghettos and disengagement until Keele as the virtues usually attributed to Stott and NEAC “were frequently displayed over the previous half century at the Conference of Evangelical Churchmen” (135). A further important question raised by this and other chapters is whether Stott’s energy and entrepreneurship (for example in CEEC, EFAC, NEAC, AEA and Eclectics) aligned with the revival of non-denominational evangelicalism post-war through other bodies such as UCCF and Tyndale House helped

kill off other important evangelical Anglican networks after the late 1960s only for his initiatives to fizzle out (and/or become the battleground between different groupings) once he was no longer as active or dominant and thus leaving a much less connected sense of belonging together as evangelicals in the Church of England.

Evangelicals and Other Anglicans

The next two chapters explore evangelicals in relation to Anglo-Catholics. John Maiden, building on his [doctoral work on the Prayer Book controversy](#), explores the relationships between these two traditions from that time (1928) to 1983 (the 150th anniversary of Newman's Assize Sermon) through four phases: continuing inter-war conflict, increasing flux, growing rapprochement from the 1960s and then charismatic influences with some Reformed resistance. It is easy to forget how marginal some evangelicals felt in the post-war years with little episcopal presence or input on church commissions (John Wenham's memoir recalls, "there are sins of commission and sins of omission, and there appear to be sins of omissions from commissions" (quoted, 144, though challenged in the next chapter by Webster's analysis, 176-8)). The challenge for many evangelicals was how to relate to the wider church, particularly Anglo-Catholics, with Maurice Wood as vicar of Islington (later Bishop of Norwich) writing to Archbishop Fisher in 1957 that evangelicals should recognize "that other people hold opinions as strongly and conscientiously as we do and that our ultimate aim must always be the good of the whole Church and not simply victory at any price for a party viewpoint" (147). Again some battles and methods seem very strange today such as 1960s appeals to Parliament against experimental liturgical alternatives to the BCP with Packer arguing that "the voice of Parliament, as a representative body, can still be the voice of the Church of England as a whole" (148). In a [fascinating article](#) with the next chapter's author, Maiden has explored how "the death knell for nearly a century of evangelical parliamentary strategy came in 1964, with the House of Common vote on vestments" (148). In 1963 Stott, Motyer and Stibbs through CPAS were still vigorously defending the North Side Position "arguing the westward position did not adequately symbolize a proper doctrine of communion" (150) and it was only in 1966 that CPAS stopped requiring clergy to practise this in their ministry to receive grants. Here we see the significance of the 1967 Keele commitment:

Polemics at long range have at times in the past led us into negative and impoverishing "anti" attitudes (anti-sacramental, anti-intellectual, etc) from which we now desire to shake free. We recognize that in dialogue we may learn truths from others to which we have hitherto been blind, as well as to impart to others truths held by us and overlooked by them (quoted 151)

The challenges this shift presented were nicely captured by Stott in a 1979 address to another body I was unaware of – The Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions:

The major loss we fell in the post Keele era is that tightly knit security that there used to be of a recognizable party with a recognizable membership symbol, such as the North side position or the 1662 prayer book. We have not yet succeeded in replacing the old security with another and better, and I think I would say, maturer kind of solidarity (quoted 157).

Just how different things were at that time is captured by the to me astonishing fact that in a 1980 survey of *younger* evangelical clergy involved in Eclectics while most of the 81 respondents did not by then celebrate north side (49) an even larger number (51) still refused to use candles.

Maiden's chapter offers an important critique of a simplistic evangelical vs Anglo-Catholic story and shows how evangelicals were influenced by ecumenism and accepted the loss of national Protestantism while Anglo-Catholicism also changed during this period. It is though surprising that the liturgical challenges from the East End Five (one of them also a leader in NFOL discussed below), and their theological rationale, are not covered as they need to be integrated into any account. He ends by noting Anglo-Catholic involvement in GAFCON and certainly the period after 1985 itself merits further study in terms of ongoing dialogue and rapprochement through the *Stepping Stones* dialogue volume of 1987, the launch of *New Directions* involving both Anglo-Catholic and evangelical opponents of women's ordination, and the influence of North America where the traditional liturgical and other demarcators between these two traditions are less important among orthodox Episcopalians. It would also be fascinating to consider whether the different responses of evangelicals - and their development over time - can also be traced in more recent times in relation to evangelical responses not to liturgical reform and traditional Anglo-Catholics but to liberal Catholics and the changes in the Church of England sought by them.

Peter Webster focusses on the varied evangelical responses to Michael Ramsey, on whose archepiscopate [he has recently published a significant study](#). One of his most interesting arguments is to challenge "a common conservative evangelical self-image, of a remnant in a hostile church which sought systematically to exclude them, with little alternative than to contend vigorously for truth". He does so on the basis that the evidence in the Ramsey Papers "cannot be made to support any hypothesis of deliberate or even subconscious exclusion of evangelical voices from the process of decision-making. If Anglican evangelicals were not successful in halting or overturning policies to which they objected, this was in the main simply because they were a minority in a diverse church" (182). Here of course a central question is who gets included as evangelical and Webster's account again shows themes still very live today. In 1968 Stott wrote to Ramsey saying he could see no representative of the conservative constituency on the bench (174), a criticism Ramsey had rebutted earlier in 1962, and it seems Ramsey did not immediately see Keele in 1967 as a significant change – Stott felt the need to say, "we are neither idiots nor mischief makers nor stubborn obscurantists" (181). For the Archbishop – as he wrote to Prime Minister Wilson of Cyril Bowles whom he saw as "a very broad-minded Evangelical" – it was crucial that a bishop could "get on with and gain the confidence of churchmen of different kinds of outlook" (175). His skepticism about evangelicals is captured by the fact that when in 1971 Maurice Wood was appointed and Michael Seward relayed evangelical gratitude, Ramsey replied, "Yes, and how long will it be before they repudiate him?" (175). In reading this chapter it was impossible not to think of what had changed and what was similar roughly forty years later in evangelical responses to an Archbishop very similar to Ramsey - Rowan Williams - and what lessons we still need to learn as evangelicals in relation to non-evangelical bishops and archbishops.

Evangelicals in Society and Parish

Matthew Grimley provides a fascinating study of Anglican Evangelical responses to permissiveness as expressed through Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge's Nationwide Festival of Light (precursor of CARE) between 1971 and 1983. He explores what this reveals about evangelical engagement with culture and politics although conclusions here must be tentative as although many prominent NFOL leaders were evangelical, they were always a minority of evangelicals. Following on from the previous two chapters this one raises the question as to whether among some evangelicals the enemy moved during the 1970s and 1980s from issues of papist practices associated with Anglo-Catholicism to issues of sexuality including homosexuality. Grimley, author of important articles on the Church of England and homosexual law reform, highlights NFOL's opposition to the Gloucester Report of 1979 on homosexual relationships (at which time Caroline Welby worked for a short period for NFOL during her engagement). However, while rightly noting evangelical opposition to it on the Board for Social Responsibility, he fails to acknowledge that other non-evangelicals (notably the Chair, Graham Leonard) were also very unhappy and he rather exaggerates in claiming that the report "had effectively been suppressed" (196). The importance of Mary Whitehouse in NFOL draws attention to another interesting potential area of research – the significance of powerful, often campaigning, evangelical lay women in the Church of England and once again light is perhaps able to be shed on Anglican evangelicalism today – although not drawn out here – in relation to high profile campaigning organisations engaging wider society and social change. Today with groups like Christian Concern we still see divisions among evangelicals over how to relate to wider culture with some (as with NFOL) having much sympathy with campaigning bodies' concerns but keeping a distance due to a dislike of tone and style and often in return being criticized for lack of commitment. Here the resistance, reform and renewal categories may be particularly helpful.

"The story of Anglican parish ministry in the twentieth century has yet to be told" (206) writes Mark Smith and his chapter shows what a loss this is and what fascinating insights can be gained about evangelicalism by careful study not of personalities and movements and major events but of the lived reality of the local congregations. He looks at Christ Church, Chadderton in Lancashire (a continuous conservative evangelical tradition) and St Andrew's, Oxford with a more diverse pattern of evangelicalism from its founding in 1906. Smith notes the contrast between a conversionist evangelical approach – "the parish as a theatre of conversion" – and those who in previous centuries "construed their parishioners as a company of baptized Christians" (207). Again we find ourselves in a different world from today in some ways – Christ Church had 730 children on its Sunday School roll in 1931 – but also continuities: "Evangelical parishes like Christ Church, Chadderton....were extraordinarily active and busy communities" (211). It was encouraging too to see that even the solidly conservative Christ Church maintained a holistic view of mission in the inter-war years with its parish magazine clear that "The religion of Jesus...is a Way of Life which embraces life in all its phases, and the social implications of the Faith are no less important than the salvation of the individual" (212). Less encouraging was how the 1945 report, *Towards the Conversion of England* ("one of the most remarkable documents ever produced by the Church of England. Its call for the priority of mission was prophetic" (214)) had little impact on the ground as even in evangelical parishes "the innovations of the 1950s tended to represent

extensions of Victorian and interwar practice rather than new departures” (217). Similarly clericalism remained strong until the influence of a combination of the charismatic movement and the rise of significant lay leaders trained through UCCF and it was at Nottingham in 1977 rather than Keele in 1967 that, in terms of changes on the ground in evangelical parish life, “there were straws in the wind of something new” (225).

Beyond England

The books final two chapters look beyond England though with a strong connection to England, particularly the ministry of John Stott. David Ceri Jones gives an account of evangelical resurgence in the predominantly Anglo-Catholic Church in Wales in the mid 20th century, something which sadly many evangelicals in the CofE know little about. The stumbling origins of this in the early 1960s revealed the recurring problem of defining the breadth of evangelical Anglicanism with some rejecting others as “fundamentalists” and other, more conservative evangelicals, worrying any group “would not really merit the title of evangelical and would only lead to even more misunderstanding of the true evangelical position” (231). It was Stott – with his house in Wales – who proved crucial not least through building personal relationships with non-evangelical leaders such as Glyn Simon, archbishop from 1968. Interestingly a key factor here was Stott’s concern about All Souls members who “lapsed to a non-episcopal church” when they moved to Cardiff (237). In correspondence he showed his commitment to Anglicanism expressing disappointment that evangelicals would leave for any reason other than that the church “has officially denied the apostolic faith of the New Testament” (238). An early fruit of these conversations was greater awareness of evangelical concerns about authorizing prayers for the dead so they read “grant us with them everlasting life and peace” not “grant them”. By the 1970s, through Stuart Bell and others, evangelicals in Wales experienced charismatic renewal and by the 1980s there were nearly 60 clergy identifying as evangelicals, some of whom would take on senior leadership. On the whole Wales resisted the polarization among evangelicals that occurred in much of the Church of England in subsequent decades (though the article does not really explore how and why this happened or why debates over women’s ordination divided evangelicals less) although Jones concludes that, despite their growth, differences in approach meant “the Welsh Anglican evangelical trumpet all too often blew an uncertain sound” and evangelicals failed to exert “the kind of influence within the church that their numbers sometimes suggested could be within reach” (247).

Finally, Alister Chapman, author of *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement*, traces how, how much and from whom English Anglican Evangelicals learned in relation to the wider world between 1945 and 2000. It maps a period of reluctance, moving in the 1960s into growing openness and then in the final decade to much greater willingness. Particularly important in this were the ministry of John Stott and the rise of the charismatic and Pentecostal movement. Chapman concludes however with four caveats to this evolution: the change was slow and gradual, “Americans were acceptable in the end, and so were Australians, but it seems that African, Asian and Latin American leaders were less influential...until at least the mid-1990s” (264), there remained a sense that English Christians gave rather than received, and, finally, putting lessons into practice was often hard. This basically convincing thesis raises a host of interesting questions such as what would have been different

in the Church of England if, for example, we'd learned sooner from East Africa or others "who looked and sounded" (265) different from us.

Evangelicalism and the Church of England: Conclusion

This well-produced book, though covering an enormous amount (helpfully there is an excellent index though sadly no bibliography to supplement the introduction's outstanding historiographic survey), inevitably has gaps. These include relations with non-Anglicans including other evangelicals beyond the Church of England (for example UCCF, Tyndale House, Banner of Truth, Billy Graham crusades) and so it never really addresses the question of what was distinctively *Anglican* about 20th century evangelicals in the CofE and how that changed through the century. Its focus is generally more on movements and people with little on evangelical doctrine, activism (eg camps) and mission or on some of the recent divisions notably over gender. Although Keele looms large through many of the essays – which cumulatively raise a number of important questions about how it and its significance are often interpreted – other NEACs get little attention.

A constant theme is the diversity and sometimes consequent divisions and tensions among self-identified evangelicals revealing a history where "the ability of evangelicals to co-exist should not be overstated, but neither should it be overlooked" (38). Its various accounts raise the question as to whether we need to escape the myth of a golden age where we were all in broad agreement with one another (with the supposedly crucial role of John Stott in securing this consensus) and instead learn the importance of recognizing that last century there were a number of leading evangelical figures (most of them now forgotten to us) and various places of meeting across different groupings that now need to be re-created in order to share in fellowship, discussion and discernment. We will undoubtedly face the future better as evangelicals in the Church of England if we know our past – including our recent past – better and so overcome ignorance and misleading, sometimes polemical and self-justifying, narratives. This collection of papers is an indispensable guide which enables us to do just that.