

**OBSERVATIONS OF A FRIEND****D. A. Carson****Introduction**

Although I have lived in England for eight of the last twenty-three years, and although I have many friends and colleagues in the Anglican communion, I am neither English nor Anglican. But I am an evangelical, one who is close enough to many brothers and sisters within the Church of England who are going through the throes of recent tensions to agonize with them, yet far enough removed to attempt to offer the reflections of a little distance. I suppose that is why I have been invited to participate. In any case I am honoured, and I hope I have as many friends and colleagues in the Anglican communion when I have finished as I do now.

When the manuscript of this book arrived, I read it carefully, and then re-read with no less care a volume I had earlier skimmed, viz. the book edited by France and McGrath that analyses evangelical Anglicans from a somewhat different perspective.<sup>1</sup> The two books are so divergent that a complete outsider would find it hard to believe that they emerge from what is widely assumed to be more or less the same camp. Both claim to capture the best of the evangelical Anglican heritage, yet clearly they construe that heritage rather differently. So as not to prejudge the issue by appealing to labels some might find pejorative (e.g. 'moderates' vs. 'conservatives', or 'liberal evangelicals' vs. 'conservative evangelicals'), I shall refer to France/McGrath and to Tinker as names representative of the two books and the two constituencies they represent, whatever the overlap.

The Tinker volume is only occasionally a direct response to the France/McGrath volume (e.g. in Gerald Bray's comments on Scripture). Its primary purpose is to call English Anglicanism back to the

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1. R. T. France and Alister E. McGrath, eds, *Evangelical Anglicans: Their Role and Influence in the Church Today* (London: SPCK, 1993).

theology and discipline represented by the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Ordinal, and the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>2</sup> The open aim is to reform the Church and motivate it to evangelize the country. By contrast, the France/McGrath contributors, though doubtless they share such aims, seem more intent on justifying the validity of (their brand of) evangelicalism within the Church of England.

It may help to organize what follows into six points.

### A. Scripture, Truth, and Preaching

From the perspective of historic evangelicalism, from the perspective of the Bible itself, the Tinker group is much more serious about upholding what is not only the ancient position of the church on Scripture<sup>3</sup> but also the view set forth in the Church of England's foundational documents.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, although the contributors to the France/McGrath volume speak of the finality and authority of Scripture, at least some of them seem to be primarily intent on distancing themselves from the heritage from which they spring.<sup>5</sup> If the heritage is wrong, then of course it should be modified. But so long and stable is that tradition that only very powerful arguments and evidence should be allowed to overturn it. Their volume, however, is not the place where such arguments are marshalled. Indeed, it is somewhat disconcerting to be told that 'the methods [Christian scholars] adopt and the conclusions they reach in their studies . . . may even be justified theologically

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2. Or at least to their theology, if not necessarily to their form: see, for example, the comments of David Holloway on the Book of Common Prayer.

3. This point must be insisted upon against those who make a 'high' view of Scripture a fairly recent innovation. See especially the plethora of primary documentation treated by John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

4. See also the important work by Gerard Reedy, S.J., *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), not least Appendix I (pp. 145-155), which reprints a sermon of Bishop Stillingfleet responding to Spinoza and Richard Simon.

5. There is an unfortunate lapse in the quality of the argument when R. T. France writes, 'There was a time when the Pauline authorship of Hebrews would have been regarded as part of evangelical orthodoxy, but that time has long gone' ('Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship (2) The New Testament', in France and McGrath, eds., *Evangelical Anglicans*, p. 51). The late patristic period witnessed a division of opinion between the eastern and western branches on this issue, but one does not normally deploy the label 'evangelical orthodoxy' to refer to the convictions of the western church. I am unaware of any period in Anglican history when this statement would have applied.

by appeal to the idea of the Christian's freedom in Christ',<sup>6</sup> as if any of the 'freedom' passages in the Bible sanction any and every reading of Scripture, provided it is scholarly. When the same author casts around to find some sort of constraint on critical judgments that evangelicals might enjoy that their more liberal colleagues have abandoned, the best he can suggest is that 'evangelical biblical scholarship derives a certain sense of direction from its understanding of the Bible as the Word of God'.<sup>7</sup> That, surely, is no constraint at all, for it is individualistically interpreted<sup>8</sup> – even though, as McGrath and Wenham rightly point out elsewhere in the same volume, *sola Scriptura* was never meant to authorize an individualistic reading of Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

The Tinker volume keeps returning to the primacy of Scripture, not only in the classic categories of conservative/liberal debate (Gerald Bray, Melvin Tinker) but also in terms of the importance of words and truth in an age addicted to images (Os Guinness), and in the primacy of expository preaching (Peter Adam). On the other hand, there is little reflection, at least in this volume, of what the humanness of Scripture *does* mean – e.g. in terms of witness, historical method, and so forth. Nor is there any reflection (doubtless because it is not the primary focus of interest) on the way evangelical scholars *ought* to interact with others. Almost all the emphasis when this subject arises is on what the humanness of Scripture *does not* mean. That is understandable as a reaction, considering the emphasis on naturalism in the surrounding culture. But it is not enough.

### B. Hermeneutical Challenges

Both books sometimes display a regrettable lack of hermeneutical sophistication. Not without warrant, the Tinker group identifies hermeneutical abuses in the earlier volume. Thus Melvin Tinker rightly points out that 'kingdom of God' in the New Testament does not normally refer to the farthest reaches of God's sovereignty. His purpose, of course, is to confute the view that the overthrow of, say, political or economic

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6. Gordon McConville, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship (1) The Old Testament', in France and McGrath, *Evangelical Anglicans*, p. 39.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

8. 'The central tenets of Christian faith, furthermore, do not *directly* require a particular view of any part of the Old Testament. . . . The limits will be found in different places by different scholars.'

9. Alister E. McGrath and David Wenham, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Authority', in France and McGrath, *Evangelical Anglicans*, p. 29.

evil is 'kingdom' work in exactly the same sense that proclamation of 'the good news' is kingdom work. On the other hand, when David Holloway, in this volume, urges that what we need is 'common sense' exegesis (shades of Thomas Reid *redivivus*), while there is a certain pragmatic side of me that utters a loud 'Amen!', another side recognizes that in an age increasingly dominated by postmodernity something a little more rigorous will have to be advanced.

There is space for only three brief comments.

*First*, quite a number of arguments from the France/McGrath camp, not least those connected with women's ordination but certainly not only those, turn on perceived 'tensions' in Scripture that can be configured in different ways. Again, when Bishop Holloway (in the France/McGrath volume) blames evangelicals for making too much of the cross and of redemption, and too little of creation and incarnation, the assumption seems to be that these are more or less independent themes that can be juggled and configured in various ways, to the advantage of the particular confessional group.

What is lacking is the confidence that the Bible, however mediated by human authors, ultimately has one Mind behind it. It has a story line, a coherent plot. To interpret bits and pieces of that plot without reference to the entire plot is irresponsible, akin to reading *Romeo and Juliet* as a tract against suicide, or *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a book about the majesty of lions or the danger of the occult. If the Bible fits together – and one cannot abandon that conviction without ceasing to be an evangelical – then how does the story-line 'work'? What is the danger human beings face? How and why has God intervened? What has God disclosed of himself? How is he directing history, and where is that history taking us? What saves us? For what purpose? And who is rescued? How do Israel and the church relate to each other? How is this age tied to the next? Why do the four gospels drive toward the cross? What is the significance of the way the New Testament writers variously pick up themes like temple, sacrifice, priest, passover lamb, bread of God, exodus, and a host of others elaborated in the Old Testament, and tie them to Jesus and his work? Whether one agrees with every stroke in Spanner's essay, at least one admires his attempt to deal with 'the whole counsel of God' holistically. In the same way, Rachel Tingle is surely right to appeal to the Bible's central plot-line in order to constrain political discussion that appeals to the Scriptures.

*Second*, Gerald Bray has put his finger on a sore point when he insists that much (especially British) evangelical biblical scholarship is devoted to what he calls *sola exegesis* and not *sola Scriptura*. The endeavour becomes atomistic and arid, and turns out to be meaningless unless there is also a systematic theology. The problem can be put a slightly different way. One of the things that is needed is careful delineation of the relationships amongst exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Each of those terms cries out for definition, of course, a task I cannot undertake here. But even if one were to adopt some *ad hoc* definitions – e.g. biblical exegesis is the responsible reading of the biblical texts, biblical theology is an inductive discipline that attempts to synthesize the content of the biblical corpora while bearing in mind both their different literary genres and the sequential biblical plot-line, and systematic theology is the synthesis that results from asking atemporal questions of the text while remaining in full discussion with historical theology and contemporary culture – even, as I say, if one were to adopt some such *ad hoc* definitions, one would still be responsible to spell out how each of these disciplines ought (and ought not) to influence the others.

The problem is not exegesis over against Scripture/systematic theology, but bad exegesis. Exegesis that is in reality a devout and careful reading of the Word of God is surely entirely salutary. But in what ways should biblical and systematic theology exercise a restraining or guiding influence on exegesis? Conversely, how does exegesis properly inform and reform one's biblical and systematic theology? Some of these questions have recently been addressed by Kevin J. Vanhoozer;<sup>10</sup> there is a great deal more to be done. But because no exegesis is presuppositionless, our theology *does* constrain our exegesis. That is true of *all* exegesis. If much contemporary evangelical exegesis is atomistic, this reflects what those evangelical scholars think or do not think about Scripture. This does not mean that exegesis, which is one step closer to the actual text than the lofty syntheses theology constructs, should not itself reform theological syntheses. It means, rather, that if in exegesis after exegesis a reading is uncovered that no evangelical would have admitted three or four decades ago, then one's the-

10. 'From Canon to Concept': "Same" and "Other" in the Relation between Biblical and Systematic Theology', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (1994) 96-124. Cf. also D. A. Carson, 'Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (forthcoming).

ology has *already* changed, whether this is admitted or not.

Failure to recognize these realities lies, in part, behind France's response to James Barr. France has offered some of the most thoughtful interaction with the latter's (in)famous *Fundamentalism*.<sup>11</sup> But he seems to buy into Barr's association of 'fundamentalism' with those who hold to 'inerrancy, infallibility and the other accompanying features' he spells out, and who therefore seem unwilling to engage in critical study as Barr thinks of critical study. France writes:

The question remains, however, how much of current evangelical biblical scholarship does in fact fall within Professor Barr's definition of 'fundamentalism', however much we might dislike the term – or at any rate how much residual 'fundamentalism' there is within the work of those of us who think of ourselves as evangelicals operating within the mainstream of critical scholarship rather than against it. Or, to put it the other way, how real is our commitment to critical study? Are we in fact willing to follow standard critical method only so far as our evangelical tradition, and the expectations of the evangelical constituency, will allow? Are we really playing the game by the accepted rules? Can we justly expect to be received as *bona fide* members of the scholarly guild?<sup>12</sup>

This is very unsatisfactory. Suppose our study of Scripture leads us to the conclusion that the long-established 'high' view of Scripture is correct: should we abandon it to be acceptable to the guild? Doesn't Barr's understanding of critical method assume a human autonomy that is foundationally at odds with the biblical outlook? Must we accept his view of 'critical method' – apparently having more to do with buying into a certain epistemological construct than with providing reasons for one's views? I was always taught that properly 'critical' views were those that were ably defended in the broadest arena, not those that follow the party line whether well-defended or not. If the guild decides that belief in, say, substitutionary atonement is naive and 'uncritical' (and much of the guild adopts just that stance), are we thereby warranted to jettison substitutionary atonement in order to play 'the game by the accepted rules'? Did Luther play by 'the accepted rules' in his day? Or Whitefield and Wesley in theirs? And in any case,

isn't it fair to say that in the contemporary scholarly community, increasingly steeped in postmodernism, Barr's views on what can be achieved by critical method sound rather out of date anyway? Why must we be so easily intimidated? *Of course* my understanding of the nature of Scripture shapes the way I read it. The same is true of Barr, and his bluff should be called. But to tie his epistemological presuppositions to 'critical' and 'critical' to whatever is the opposite of 'fundamentalist' is not only a doubtful reading of the history of fundamentalism, but is theologically and epistemologically naive.

*Third*, by referring to postmodernism I have hinted a couple of times at our society's changing epistemology. The new hermeneutic, arising out of fundamental issues in interpretation, and radical hermeneutics, which traces its origin to developments in linguistics, have conceived and brought forth deconstruction. If no evangelical would like to buy into deconstruction's dogmatic insistence that the only heresy is that there is such a thing as heresy, many nevertheless want to face squarely the unvarnished fact that all expressions of truth, including this one, are framed by culture (not least owing to the fact that language itself, in this case the English language, is a cultural phenomenon). Many Western thinkers infer from this that all claims to objective, culture-transcending truth are chimerical: truth is tied to individuals or to an interpretive community or is a raw display of manipulative power (depending on whether one is reading Derrida, Rorty, or Foucault).

Elsewhere I have argued at some length that finite sinners can know truth truly even if not exhaustively or absolutely; that the existence of an omniscient God grounds the objectivity of knowledge; that all human knowing is necessarily culturally constrained, but that does not inhibit the possibility of communicating it to other human beings; that various models – the hermeneutical spiral, the fusion of horizons, the asymptotic approach – show the reasonableness of such a stance; that hard experience confutes the strongest forms of postmodernism (Have you ever met a deconstructionist who is pleased when his or her book is misunderstood by a reviewer? Isn't the deconstructionist thereby pragmatically committed to the primacy of authorial intent?). When I engage in university evangelism, I find the climate very different from what it was a quarter of a century ago. But I do not always sense that all the authors in this book have picked up on the changes. Thus, when in his second essay Melvin Tinker refers to Calvin's second mark of the church, viz. preaching the 'pure Word of God', he adds, 'unadulterated

11. London: SCM Press, 1977.

12. R. T. France, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship (2) The New Testament', pp.48-49.

by human speculation or, as is more the case today, by liberal theology.' I think I understand what Melvin Tinker is affirming, and I, no less than he, want to insist that there is a gospel 'once for all entrusted to the saints', to use Jude's words. But greater awareness of the nature of the opposition would surely encourage him to state his case no less forcefully, but with clear evidence of greater reflection on the relation between the 'pure Word of God' and the theological syntheses that we evangelicals, too, bring to the table. In other words, it is not that I am disagreeing with his point: far from it, I endorse it enthusiastically. But I fear that some will not listen with the sympathy he deserves because he has not guarded himself against hermeneutical misunderstanding.

### C. Different Readings of Anglican History

Reading Alister McGrath in the France/McGrath volume, and David Holloway and to some extent J. I. Packer in the Tinker volume, force upon me the recognition of how much each side is trying to lasso history in order to support a case.

Compare, for instance, what Alister McGrath and David Holloway say about the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571). Pointing out that the Articles 'are explicitly described as "for the avoiding of diversity of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion";' McGrath concludes: 'They are not, and were never intended to be, a confession of faith.'<sup>13</sup> Isn't this a confusion of form and function? I have always thought that one of the functions of confessions was 'for the avoiding of diversity of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion'. Besides, two pages later McGrath says that the Thirty-Nine Articles is 'the only document, apart from Scripture, the creeds'<sup>14</sup> and the Prayer Book, regarded as *authoritative* [emphasis mine] for Anglicans.'<sup>15</sup> In what sense are articles shaped in the form of a creed and possessing the authority of the great ecumenical creeds and even (insofar as they reflect the Bible) the authority of Scripture itself, *not* a creed? I frankly do not understand what McGrath means when he says that the Articles were never intended to be a confession of faith. Does he make a distinction between 'creed' and 'confession of faith' that quite escapes me?

The purpose of this section of his work, however, is clear enough:

Historically, Anglicanism has encompassed within its ample girth a variety of theological positions, regarding itself as possessed of a comprehensiveness which prevents the exclusion of demonstrably Christian positions. The latter was viewed as a sectarian tendency, inappropriate for a national established church. As a result, views which could be labelled 'evangelical', 'liberal', 'rationalist' or 'catholic' have been found throughout Anglican history. ... I have no intention of claiming that evangelicalism is the only authentic form of Anglicanism. My concern is simply to insist that evangelicalism is, historically and theologically, a legitimate and respectable option within Anglicanism.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, if the Articles are viewed as in any sense a confession, is not the Church bound *only* to evangelicalism? Is that why the denial that they constitute a confession so firm?

More fundamentally, does McGrath really think that classic liberalism is one of the 'demonstrably Christian positions'? Surely if liberalism adopts a position on, say, Christology that effectively relegates Nicaea and Chalcedon to an age of superstition, it cannot in any useful sense be thought of as a demonstrably Christian position. It is a 'Christian position' only in the dubious sense that many people espouse it, both within Anglicanism and without, and still think of themselves as Christians. If that is a valid use of 'demonstrably Christian position', it is difficult to see on what grounds the stances of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons or the Moonies should not be acknowledged to be 'demonstrably Christian positions'. After all, if the Thirty-Nine Articles have never been a creed and cannot be used to reject classic liberalism, and if even the early ecumenical creeds have no power to expel 'liberal' views on Christology from the 'ample girth' of Anglicanism, why not embrace the Mormons and thus avoid the charge of sectarianism? On McGrath's reasoning, I cannot think of any *doctrinal* reason for not proceeding to accept Mormons into the Church of England. The only *real* reason, I suspect, is that in the 'accidents' of history the Mormons have not historically been part of the Anglican communion – and for that matter would not want to be part of it, because they are too doctrinally robust themselves (as are most cultists).

For David Holloway (in this volume), Anglican history teaches quite

16. *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

13. Alister E. McGrath, 'Evangelical Anglicanism: A Contradiction in Terms?', in France/McGrath, eds, *Evangelical Anglicans*, p.11.

14. Although McGrath does not specify, it is of course a commonplace among Anglicans to espouse the first four ecumenical creeds.

15. McGrath, 'Evangelical Anglicanism', p.13.

different lessons. The Thirty-Nine Articles, the Ordinal, and the Book of Common Prayer were designed to be doctrinally binding. That was what the English Reformation under Cranmer was all about. The parameters were sufficiently firm and comprehensive that the Church of England properly belongs to the Reformation tradition, yet sufficiently free from cluttered detail that Hooker could establish his principle: where Scripture does not speak, the Church is free to establish patterns that seem useful and beneficial. Holloway argues that historically the prime dispute between the Church of England and the nonconformists was not over the form of government (two offices or three?) but as to whether or not there should be a *national* church.

My comments on this reading of Anglican history are three.

*First*, I suspect that Holloway's comments on the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer are right: they were designed to shape the direction of the church, and bring about a doctrinal uniformity in line with the magisterial Reformation. But they were never systematically and effectively used to excise those elements that disagreed. However much their most loyal adherents are right in thinking of them as credal, they were not so deployed that those who choked over some of the Articles were excommunicated forthwith. Doubtless Cranmer was moving the Church toward a consistent Reformation stance. In that sense, the Articles and Book of Common Prayer functioned as agents of change within a Church that was now independent of Rome for primarily pragmatic reasons: Henry VIII and his wives cannot be completely ignored. If by 'confession' we understand an ecclesiastical instrument of exclusion *not only in stated aim but also in practice*, the Articles have never served very effectively as a confession. Is this what McGrath means? If so, what McGrath sees to be a badge of honour Holloway would, I suspect, take to be an unfortunate and regrettable lapse.

*Second*, although the Hooker principle helped the Church wend its way through the swamp of debates over vestments and other matters, what is less clear – to me, at least, as an outsider – is precisely how that principle squares with Article VI, on the sufficiency of Scripture. If the Church has the right to *prescribe* on matters that are not clearly spelled out, then where is the freedom of conscience for those who are in entire accord with the Scripture *and its sufficiency*, and who feel that the doctrinal formulation accurately reflect what the Bible says, but who are very uncomfortable with binding prescriptions about adiaphora? I

would very much like to see some intelligent debate between the most sympathetic reading of Hooker and the most sympathetic reading of the Presbyterian regulative principle. Perhaps that is to ask too much. What is clear, I think, is that Hooker did not intend to extend his flexibility to the doctrinal foundations.

*Third*, if Holloway is right about the fundamental divergence between the Church of England and the Nonconformists, and if others in this volume are right about the Church being primarily the local church, with dioceses and bishops being little more than useful organizational options (of the *bene esse* and not the *esse* of the church),<sup>17</sup> I remain unclear as to what exactly is meant by 'national church'. Suppose there were in England as many Baptist churches or Methodist churches as Anglican churches. Suppose they were organized into areas (dioceses?) and gently supervised, with the consent of the churches themselves, by district superintendents (bishops?). Would they constitute a national church? Why not? Certainly in some parts of the world that is exactly how the expression 'national church' is used. Yet here in England not only would most Anglo-Catholics tie the rubric to the three-fold office and to apostolic connections, but most Anglicans from all theological stripes connect it with establishment: the monarch is the head of the church, and Parliament directly regulates some of her affairs but not the affairs of any other church. David Holloway's attempt to be faithful to Scripture and to read the Church's foundational documents in an historically responsible way is entirely commendable. How then would he defend establishment biblically? Or does establishment, too, depend, rather anachronistically, on the Hooker principle? What a staggering thought.

However much an evangelical reading of the primacy of the local church can be justified after the fact (and theologically I am entirely sympathetic with that view), J. I. Packer's brief summary of the Eliza-

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17. During a long walk with an Anglican Archbishop a few years ago, my learned interlocutor put forth the interesting argument that the only biblical defense for the office of bishop was the example of Timothy and Titus – not apostles, yet not exercising merely local ministry, but clearly sent to exercise a kind of general oversight over groups of churches. The question arises as to whether Timothy and Titus are best thought of as constituting a paradigm of a continued operational structure, or as an extension of the apostles themselves (or of a particular apostle). I incline toward the latter, which of course relegates bishops (and district superintendents) to the level of useful optional leaders who may serve well but who cannot under any circumstances be thought of as defining the church or as establishing continuity with the apostles. The arguments of Lightfoot, that noble Anglican, are still sound.

bethan settlement (in this volume) is surely an accurate reading of the arrangements that soon prevailed in the Church of England, regardless of the intent of the earliest Reformers. To which period of Anglican history should one refer to establish what is normative?

But Packer's essay offers a reading on another historical matter about which I am less than persuaded. Packer holds that the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer established catholicity and unity, a kind of bipolar arrangement that accepted evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, but would surely have had little truck with liberals steeped in naturalism (this wording, of course, is mine, not his). This arrangement basically worked, with minor lapses in the seventeenth century when the Puritans were expelled and in the eighteenth century when Whitefield and the Wesleys were not in good odour. I doubt if either the Puritan pastors of the great ejection or the people who became known as Methodists would have viewed these events as 'minor lapses', but I shall let that point pass. According to Packer, the arrangement was threatened in the nineteenth century by the Tractarian charge that the Church of England exhibited 'defective catholicity because of what it jettisoned at the Reformation'.<sup>18</sup> Certainly that is one of the arguments that the Tractarians deployed. But hasn't it been well established that one of the primary motivating factors in Tractarian thought was the search for authority and finality at a time when the Broad Church was becoming more and more anaemic about almost everything?<sup>19</sup> I would have thought that this reflects an ongoing tension generated by the extraordinary diversity within the body of empirical Anglicanism rather than some radically new development.

In short, I cannot escape the feeling that J. I. Packer is reading history to support a kind of consensus of Christian theistic supernaturalism, whether evangelicalism or Anglo-Catholicism, over against liberalism and other forms of unbelief. True, the Thirty-Nine Articles cannot easily be understood to tolerate modern liberalism, which was of course virtually unknown when they were published. But it is less than clear to me that the Articles are quite so tolerant of Anglo-Catholicism as Packer suggests. The institutional Church was more tolerant than her founding documents.

18. So Packer in this volume.

19. See, for instance, David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993 [1966]), *passim*.

My point in going over this old ground again is that the Church of England has always been broader than its foundational documents.<sup>20</sup> Part of the reason is bound up with the peculiar circumstances by which she came into the Reformation camp. But the result, in the eyes of this outsider, is that different parties are reading that complex history in order to justify particular theological stances today. Theologically, I am entirely sympathetic with attempts not merely to win a place in the sun for the theology articulated in the Thirty-Nine Articles, but to ensure that it will prevail in the Church of England. But historical difficulties must be faced. I suspect these divergent readings of Anglican history say as much about modern evangelical Anglican thought as they do about the history itself. More serious yet, I suspect that in an age when postmodern assumptions control so much intellectual endeavour in the Western world, readings of Anglican history, no matter how cogent, will have little influence on the direction the Church of England actually takes today. The arguments serve, rather, to strengthen the hands of those already within this or that party, rather than to win people from one party to another.

#### D. Lloyd-Jones (1966), Keele (1967), and All That

The France/McGrath volume repeatedly and somewhat triumphalistically refers to Lloyd-Jones's call to evangelical Anglicans to come out from Anglicanism, and to John Stott's celebrated intervention. Triggered in part by this public difference of opinion, the National Evangelical Anglican Congress held at Keele University the next year crystallized the commitments of evangelical Anglicans to work within the framework of Anglicanism and to view themselves as part

20. This is quite another matter from the argument of Alister McGrath, 'Evangelical Anglicanism', in France and McGrath, eds, *Evangelical Anglicans*, p. 19, that a 'separatist' view of the church 'carries with it the danger of imposing such doctrinal commitments upon church attendance that the mere attending of church can be seen as equivalent to a public Christian profession', while the Anglican tradition assumes 'that the congregation will include both believers and unbelievers, and that attendance at church does not necessarily signify any profession of Christian faith.' I am astonished by this judgment. Quite apart from the fact that believers in what he calls the 'separatist' tradition do not normally refer to themselves that way (they are 'nonconformists' or belong to 'free churches' or to 'the believers' church tradition'), I know very few congregations in that tradition that assume attendance signals doctrinal commitment or any profession of Christian faith. This is simply a caricature. In any case it is a separate issue from my observation that the doctrinal experience and range of (sometimes uneasily) tolerated opinion within the Church of England has always been broader than what one might have expected from its foundational documents.

of the Church of England's framework, rather than as a group of awkward outsiders who couldn't quite bring themselves to leave. This Congress, we are told, marked 'the beginning of the more positive role of evangelicalism within the Church of England, and the end of any serious "separationist" party within English evangelicalism.'<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the Tinker volume avoids Lloyd-Jones (Why?), but tends to view Keele as a sign of doctrinal declension.

The most trenchant assessment of the France/McGrath line on Keele is not found in the Tinker volume, but in a review:

They all [i.e. the contributors to France/McGrath] seem committed to the myth of Keele. Before SEAC 1967 all was chaos and darkness; pietism, parochialism and isolation reigned unchallenged. Then a thousand evangelicals met, and there was light! They bathed the church, the world, cultures and structures with instant illumination.

Like most myths, this cartoon has just enough truth to make it plausible. Writer after writer now passes it on, with no suggestion of anything lost in the process and no trace of the shudder among Free Church evangelicals. One day someone will write the story differently. My own vicar in 1967 was a first class scholar-pastor, absent from Keele since he was helping our bishop to run his diocese, up to his neck in those ecclesiastical structures whose existence, it is alleged, we never before suspected. Other clergy and laity have told similar stories.

Up to then we had survived on Quiet Times, Prayer Meetings and Guest Services; Keele discovered politics, sacraments and the arts. But evangelicals were outside Aldermaston by 1960; Alan Stibbs on the Lord's Supper still looks radical today; and the tragi-comic side of post-Keele culture is the thirteen-hundred page slab of staleness called the 'Alternative Service Book of 1980'. If we are so newly literate, so culturally adult, why is it virtually impossible to find any senior literary figure of the late twentieth century who has a good word to say for it?<sup>22</sup>

I am not sure that any of the major figures in these defining moments of modern Anglican evangelicalism covered themselves with glory. Lloyd-Jones could have been clearer and more focused if he had not tied the primacy of the gospel to the call to abandon Anglicanism. Despite repeated assertions to the contrary, he did not invite evangeli-

21. 'Introduction', in France and McGrath, eds., *Evangelical Anglicans*, p.5.

22. Christopher Idle, review of France and McGrath, eds., *Evangelical Anglicans*, in *Churchman* 107 (1993) 279.

cal Anglicans to come out *and form a new denomination*: he was so little given to questions of strategic organization that it is far from certain he had a clear conception in his own mind as to what he was inviting them to.<sup>23</sup> But he did want evangelical Anglicans to leave the established church, primarily because he perceived that many were shifting from a view in which evangelicalism, at its best, is the locus of where the gospel is defended and proclaimed, to a view in which evangelicalism is one form of the gospel, within the cherished diversity of other equally valid forms expressed in the national church. What was at stake, for him, was the gospel. And I have to say that, however much I think his solution was misjudged, his reading of trends was both accurate and prophetic. One of the tragic ironies is that the form of his appeal probably hastened the developments he was trying to derail. Doubtless with the benefit of hindsight many wish he had focused his considerable energies, that evening of 18 October 1966, on the non-negotiability of the evangel, with clear warnings as to the drift he was seeing, without calling on evangelical Anglicans to leave the Church many were still committed to reforming (even if other evangelical Anglicans were less interested in reformation than in securing their place in the ecclesiastical sun). Doubtless with the benefit of hindsight many wish that John Stott, if he was going to step out of the chair in that unprecedented way, had spent less time blunting the unfortunate call to 'come out' and more time reinforcing the urgency of preserving the exclusiveness of the evangel among evangelical Anglicans he wanted to stay in. Had both these wishes been realized, perhaps English evangelicalism would today be far more robust, and unified, than it is. But if I continue in this vein I shall soon be in danger of drifting from hindsight to speculation.

The issue, surely, is the evangel, the gospel – what it is, and how it relates to what the church is. Melvin Tinker rather shrewdly comments that when evangelicals are patronizingly dismissed as having no ecclesiology, 'what critics often mean is that they do not like the ecclesiology evangelicals have'.<sup>24</sup> I wish there were space to address this complex question here, for clearly not all evangelical Anglicans share the ecclesiology articulated by David Holloway, Melvin Tinker and John Woodhouse.

23. Here, surely, Iain H. Murray is right: see his *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), *passim*.

24. 'Toward an Evangelical View of the Church', in this collection, p.95.



### E. Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

It would be tiresome to summarize, even briefly, the divergent stances on this subject taken by the France/McGrath and the Tinker camps. Certainly there is no space here to evaluate the quality of the argumentation on the two sides, or to analyse the underlying hermeneutical issues. My own views are well enough known that it will surprise no one if I say that the best of the arguments in the Tinker camp on this issue are far more cogent, and their conclusions far more biblically aligned, than those of their counterparts. But perhaps four practical observations from an outsider will suffice for the moment and may be helpful to some.

*First*, it is mildly shocking that not one of the twelve bishops normally thought of as evangelical voted against the ordination of women to the priesthood. It is shocking not because it happened – frankly, there is little the House of Bishops does these days that strikes outsiders as particularly shocking – but because the convictions of tens of thousands of ordinary conservative evangelicals were entirely unrepresented in that House. One could draw numerous inferences, but I refrain, because I am not certain how many of them are valid.

*Second*, if left to stand unmodified, the decision of November 1992 does not bode well for the future of the Church of England. Regardless of what one thinks of the decision on exegetical and theological grounds, the distressing fact remains that not one mainline denomination anywhere in the world has taken this step, to the best of my knowledge, without accelerating the denomination's decline. Doubtless the reasons are complex. Moreover, if those who voted did so with reverent conviction that this was the wise and godly and biblically responsible thing to do, regardless of the outcome, then their courage should be applauded, whatever one thinks of their judgment. Nevertheless, though I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, I predict accelerating decline in the Church of England unless this decision is reversed or substantially modified.

*Third*, although current incumbents who are doctrinally opposed to this step are not threatened by it, it is hard to see how a substantial number of new evangelicals of the Tinker stripe will manage to be ordained in the future. The odd one will slip through this cordon, of course: ABM may be asleep at the switch, or someone may change his mind after taking the ordination vows, or perhaps the occasional candidate will be ordained in Sydney before returning to England. But

unless this step is reversed, the number and witness of conservative evangelicals is heading for precipitate decline. And since the witness of conservative evangelicals is quite commonly the most evangelistically fruitful in the church, the loss of such young men to the ministry, or at least to the Anglican ministry, will inevitably damage the Church of England.

*Fourth*, a substantial number of evangelicals associated with the Tinker group have pointed out that the hermeneutical and exegetical slippage that has sanctioned the ordination of women is indistinguishable from the arguments some now advance to champion the ordination of homosexuals. Others concede the point, but think it is strategically unwise to bring the matter up, as it unnecessarily alienates some who might otherwise help. I tended to agree with the latter camp, until the House of Bishops recently decided to validate lay homosexual relationships. If present trends continue, it is only a matter of time before the ordination of homosexuals comes up for a vote: three years? four years? Let the arguments begin, courteously and firmly: confessional believers will want to know if there are any lines the leadership of the Church will not cross, any at all. It is even conceivable that that issue will generate the schism that Lloyd-Jones called for. Conceivable, but unlikely: the habit of belonging is a hard one to break, regardless of whether belonging is a badge of honour, courage and loyalty, or a badge of shame, fear and compromise.

### F. Reform and Miscellaneous Musings

There are several interesting papers in these two volumes on which I have said nothing or almost nothing – e.g. Oliver O'Donovan in the France/McGrath volume, and John Woodhouse in this one. In addition to their intrinsic value, the best of them show that both sides can make useful suggestions and advances in areas where they are not in dispute with each other. But in a paper already grown too long, I pass by the luxury of comment on these matters, and offer five final observations.

(1) One of the really attractive features of *Reform* is its attempt to influence the Church of England not simply on a single agenda item, but on a broad base that is passionately gospel-related, committed to evangelism, devoted to a return to doctrinal standards. What its prospects are I really cannot say; how wise or effective its tactics are I am too poorly positioned to judge. But I am encouraged by its published goals and articulate call, and pray that God will use this movement in

surprising and fruitful ways. Whether it will prove to be nothing more than a spirited rearguard action in the context of an institutional church determined to go another way, or an agent of genuine reformation, is probably too early to say, even for those who have much closer access than I.

(2) A number of critics have pointed out that the only person in the France/McGrath volume to mention the importance of justification for evangelicals, or to reflect on how close to the centre of things substitutionary atonement is for them, is the liberal Anglo-Catholic bishop who wrote the last chapter. What is at stake is not, finally, the ordination of women or even the authority of the Bible, but the gospel. The Tinker volume makes more insistent reference to the gospel, and provides us with one essay to define it.<sup>25</sup> That essay is an important summary, even if at one point its content is debatable<sup>26</sup> and at a couple of points it ventures into critical terrain where one might wish, perhaps unreasonably, that it would argue its case instead of merely affirming it.<sup>27</sup>

(3) Insofar as Anglican evangelicalism is part of worldwide evangelicalism, it reflects some of the strengths and weaknesses of the broader movement. Because both books, for understandable reasons, focus so much attention on (if I may put it this way) *Anglican* evangelicals rather than on Anglican *evangelicals*, neither locates the parameters of the debate within the framework of worldwide evangelicalism, but within the framework of (English) Anglicanism. That means there is too little attention, especially in the France/McGrath volume, devoted to the critical issues that the broader movement is facing: novel

25. Viz., Mark Thompson, 'Saving the Heart of Evangelicalism'.

26. The sixth distinctive of evangelical theology, Thompson avers, is 'the imminent personal return of Jesus to judge: a distinctive view of universal history'. There is nothing in the following paragraphs to which thoughtful evangelicals would be likely to take exception. On the other hand, the word 'imminent' in the heading of that section (a word not developed within the section) is normally taken to refer, in evangelical theology, to the belief that Jesus could return at any time – and certainly some influential evangelicals have denied that belief. They have insisted that Jesus is coming at the end of the age, but insist that his return will not be before the gospel triumphs in glorious splendour around the world. Such postmillennialism, of course, was typical of the English Puritans, whom Thompson would surely not wish to exclude from his definition.

27. E.g. the current debates on justification, or the rising body of literature insisting that evangelicalism must be defined primarily in the categories of the social sciences, cry out for interaction.

definitions of justification; the drift to the peripheral at the expense of the central; a nervous, reactionary twitching in some parts of its constituency because of the pace of cultural change, and an infatuation with novelty in other parts of its constituency for exactly the same reason; secularizing trends in many sectors, and an ill-informed flirtation with forms of 'spirituality' divorced from the gospel in others; and so forth.

(4) The first of these two books has a title that is slightly misleading. It does not really attempt to assess the 'role and influence' of 'Evangelical Anglicans' in the Church of England today. For a start, it refuses to mention anyone to the 'right' of where its contributors are, no matter how influential (e.g. Dick Lucas), and it does not evaluate the extent and influence of evangelical movements, clergy, and institutions, however defined. For example, there is not a word about evangelical hymn-writers (e.g. Timothy Dudley-Smith and Michael Perry). Primarily it justifies the ways of (one subset of) evangelicalism to Anglicanism, and calls on evangelical Anglicans to be better Anglicans, not better evangelicals.

(5) Finally, although I have deployed two books as the foci for offering comments on evangelical Anglicans, I must conclude by confessing that this is in some measure artificial. There is a spectrum of views, and many who are perceived to be in the 'other' camp on some issues are clearly in 'our' camp on others. The France/McGrath contributors celebrate John Stott's leadership in 1966 and 1967, though I suspect that some of them would be very uncomfortable with many of the things he insists upon with respect to the Bible, the cross, and the gospel. Which contributor in the Tinker volume has not greatly benefited from Stott's writings and preaching, even if they might want to distance themselves from him here and there? A score of other examples come to mind.

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Many of us nonconformist evangelicals feel we owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to many, many evangelical Anglicans in this country. We pray for you and agonize with you as you face a crisis in theology, leadership, and ecclesiastical direction of very considerable proportions. If we offer suggestions, do not always listen to us: we make our own share of mistakes and commit our own sins. But we beg of you to

retain the integrity of the gospel, unflinching commitment to its finality, uncommon courtesy toward those who will disagree with you, a continuing zeal for a continuing reformation, and a clear-sighted ability to distinguish between what is of ultimate importance and what is a passing allegiance. May the Lord have mercy on us all.