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What it Means to be an Evangelical Today – An Antipodean Perspective

Part One – Mapping our Movement

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Key words: Theology; evangelicalism; New Zealand.

Introduction[1]

Our faith commitments are fundamental for our lives and mission as theological educators. Particularly for evangelical theological educators. As those responsible for central teaching functions in the church of Jesus Christ, we need a clear, common and enthusiastic understanding of the essentials of our faith. We are obliged, therefore, regularly to clarify and confirm how we understand the central tenets of evangelicalism. Particularly so when going through times of significant growth in the enrolments, programmes and involvements of evangelical theological institutions, as is currently the case in New Zealand. While we may be at the ends of the earth, we conduct our self-evaluation as part of the world-wide church. This paper is an antipodean attempt to respond to the ever-current and ever-relevant apostolic challenge: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves' (2 Cor. 13:5). Its perspective may also contribute to the wider global need for integrity and clarity regarding our identity as evangelicals. Part One focuses on our first task: *Mapping our Movement.* Part Two will consider *Confirming our Core* and *Engaging our Changed Context.*

1 This paper was first presented as a Bible College of New Zealand Academic Staff Study Paper for their Annual Retreat, September 2002. The views expressed are those of the author, not necessarily of the College.

Mapping our Movement

Global Evangelicalism is a multi-faceted reality. Our first step is to map some contours and to identify some distinguishing features of the movement. In this section we shall look at various perceptions of our movement, mainly as analysed by key proponents of evangelicalism. The analyses and the presuppositions they portray reveal significant aspects of our self-understanding.

Groupings within the Movement

Whatever may have once been the case, Evangelicalism today embraces a number of groups with differing features and emphases. John Stott, in what he expected to be his swan song, or as he put it, his 'kind of spiritual legacy', under the section headed 'Evangelicalism's tribes and tenets' refers to the *Church of England Newspaper* Editor's April 1998 suggestion that there were '57 varieties of evangelicals', and Clive Calver's comments about 'the twelve tribes of evangelicalism'.[2] More substantially, he compares Peter Beyerhaus' 1975 list of six different evangelical groupings with Gabriel Fackre's1993 categories. We can set them out in a comparative table[3] (see next page).

The similarity between these lists despite the nearly twenty years between them might suggest consolidation and a settling down into mutually exclusive 'camps'. Such overviews do not indicate the extent of mistrust or even mutual ex-communication different sections of the spectrum confer on one another. But the patterns of inter-relationships are by no means simple. Not least because many evangelicals would want to claim simultaneous membership in several of these groups, and see no inconsistency in doing so.

David F. Wells, in an important 1994 symposium by evangelical historians, offers an hypothesis for understanding recent developments within the movement – and reasons for ambiguity in the term 'evangelicalism' – based on three movements in the centre of self-perception amongst evangelicals since the 1940s.[4] The first he calls *Confessional.* This was,

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2 John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity*, Leicester: IVP, 1999, 25.

3 *Ibid.*, 25-26, citing the chapter, 'Lausanne between Berlin and Geneva' in W.Künneth and P. Beyerhaus (eds), *Reich Gottes oder Weltgemeinschaft*, Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1975, 307-308; and Gabriel Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.

4 David Wells, 'On Being Evangelical: Some Theological Differences and Similarities' in Noll, Mark A., David W. Bebbington and George A Rawlyk, (Eds), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 389-415

Groupings Within Evangelicalism

Beyerhaus 1975	**Packer – 1993**
Strict Fundamentalists – Uncompromising in separatist beliefs	*Fundamentalists* – Polemical & separatist
New Evangelicals – Distance themselves from fundamentalism's science-phobia and political conservatism, and strive for greatest possible collaboration	*Old Evangelicals* – Emphasizing personal conversion and mass evangelism
Confessing Evangelicals – Stress confession of faith and reject contemporary doctrinal error	*New Evangelicals* – Acknowledging social responsibility and apologetics
Pentecostals and Charismatics	*Charismatic Evangelicals* – Stressing work of Spirit in tongue-speaking, healing and worship
Radical Evangelicals – Acknowledge socio-political commitment and unite evangelistic witness and social action	*Justice & Peace Evangelicals* – Socio-political activists
Ecumenical Evangelicals – Critically participating in ecumenical movement	*Ecumenical Evangelicals* – Concerned for unity and cooperation

> . . . the characteristic way of thought that was dominant, on both sides of the Atlantic, from the early 1940s through to the 1970s, and that sought to define evangelical belief in terms of biblical doctrine. . . . This kind of evangelicalism found its unity in commonly owned, commonly confessed *truth*; this truth is the thread by which it was tied to the previous expressions of historic protestant faith.

For Wells a shift in evangelical centre, toward what he labels *transconfessionalism*, begins in the late 1970s consistent with the steps common in the routinization of movements:

> . . . the charisma of the post-war evangelical leaders, a charisma that was undoubtedly personal in many ways but also confessional, has undergone a transformation as evangelicalism has become increasingly organized and bureaucratized. As a result, its outward success, coupled with its growing diversity, has redefined its center or, more precisely, relocated it. The diversity has required a shift from confessional substance to simple,

> organized fraternity. . . . The ground of relatedness among evangelicals . . . [has far more to do] with belonging somewhere within the entrepreneurial or organizational life of this righteous. . . . The ubiquity of the flow chart has become inescapable. . . . The appearance of the upwardly mobile in evangelical institutions has become a common sight. The pursuit of personal careers is no longer a matter to be concealed. . . . And everywhere the importance of theological belief is being replaced by the importance of effective strategy, proficient fund-raising, and the bold building of personal bases of power and influence.[5]

Although its flowering came later, the beginnings of Wells' third centre of evangelicalism can be traced back to the early 1960s with the emergence of the *Charismatic* movement in Britain. While gaining impulse from the older Pentecostal movement, this shift is something new.

> What pentecostalism and the renewal movements have in common is that they are both forms of evangelicalism that are not primarily theologies. Both arise centrally from a spiritual intuition about the presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . Here, biblical confession arises not as a thing in itself but as an adjunct to the experience of the Holy Spirit; this experience of the Holy Spirit provides the ground on which charismatics desire to meet others, whether Catholic or Protestant. [6]

While Wells sees Charismatics as sharing with Transconfessionals a lack of interest in theological confession, he also sees Charismatics,

> . . . busy reestablishing links across the Atlantic and around the world that the earlier confessional evangelicals had sought to forge and that the transconfessional evangelicals had allowed to erode, precisely because of their diminished interest in the confession by which those links had originally been made. In this sense, the charismatic movement is a complication in the organizational fraternity of contemporary evangelicalism.[7]

Wells' analysis reminds us not to overlook historical and sociological factors in trying to understand a movement like ours.

In a 1992 *Scottish Journal of Theology* Review Article, Douglas Jacobsen and Frederick Schmidt present a view from non-evangelical outsiders as they survey recent evangelical contributions to Christological study:

> It is, of course, difficult to talk of evangelicalism in general. It is a complex and worldwide phenomenon. Therefore some basic distinctions need to be made if a map of evangelical christologies is to make sense. The most

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5 *Ibid.*, 391.
6 *Ibid.*, 392.
7 *Ibid.*

basic distinction we will make will be between the two social realities within the movement: the custodial core and the penumbra.[8]

Jacobsen and Schmidt see evangelicals within the custodial core operating in two ways. They see themselves as responsible for sustaining:

> . . . a way of thinking, the inheritors of something they do not have the right to alter. They are preservers of truth. At the same time the custodial core also functions as a self-appointed leadership within the evangelical movement, defining both its norms and its social boundaries. . . . The custodial core has typically defined evangelical faith in terms of general religious and political conservatism. In terms of method and strategy, it has traditionally adopted a defensive, oppositional posture with regard to modern scholarship – especially towards the scholarship of the larger religious academy.[9]

By contrast:

> Penumbral evangelicals come in three forms. Some are 'private' evangelicals trying to make sense of their faith as individuals. Many are academics, like James Dunn. . . . Others are representatives of 'hyphenated' evangelical groups (i.e., religious groups that see evangelicalism as only one part of their religious heritage). Anabaptist-evangelicals, Pentecostal or charismatic-evangelicals, and many third world evangelicals fit in this group. Finally, some are 'non-aligned' – i.e., mainstream theologians who happen to have arrived at conclusions that are more or less evangelical in content, tone, or application; T.F.Torrance, Louis Berkhof, and Gabriel Fackre are examples.[10]

On the basis of this taxonomy Jacobsen and Schmidt proceed to categorize somewhat predictably the contributions of evangelical scholars in Christology. They identify methodology as the key issue in Christological study for evangelicals and suggest four 'general positions' can be distinguished. 'The first two groups are clearly custodial in orientation' – one group devoting 'most of their work to critiquing the appropriateness of one or another method', the second tends 'to use method, sometimes rather inventively, as a means of defending their pre-formed faith commitments'. The third group 'more or less sits on the fence between custodial and penumbral identities' – rec-

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8 Douglas Jacobsen and Frederick Schmidt, 'Review Article: Behind Orthodoxy and Beyond It: Recent Developments in Evangelical Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol 45(4) 1992:515-541. [For those like the present writer who needed it, the Oxford Dictionary definition of 'penumbra' is: A fringe region of half shadow resulting from the partial obstruction of light by an opaque object!]

9 *Ibid.*, 516.

10 *Ibid.*, 517. Note that 'Louis Berkhof' must be a slip; it is clear that the reference should be to Hendrikus Berkhof (cf. 527).

ognizing that 'new methods of biblical study could lead to conclusions vindicating unorthodox views' – albeit very rarely and probably never impacting crucial articles of faith. The final group is 'more radical and distinctly penumbral, feeling that method and text must be given free rein to go where they will and there are no guarantees that historic orthodoxy will be corroborated'.[11] Jacobsen and Schmidt restrict their analysis to scholarly contributions in the specific field of Christology but their categories could probably be applied across a range of evangelical scholarship with similar results.

These various attempts to describe the groupings within our movement have sketched some useful parameters to keep in mind as we take our analysis a little deeper. They also indicate the importance of some challenges to which we shall refer shortly. They all, with the exception of Jacobsen and Schmidt, suffer from a common problem. They all assume that evangelicalism can be explained and mapped by reference only to the North American and British/European expressions of the movement. This narrow focus is no longer representative of even the geographical spread of evangelicalism as a global movement. Moreover, the use of criteria like political activism and ecumenical alignment to distinguish different sectional groups rests on distinctly Western dualistic assumptions, and may therefore distort the way a great proportion of evangelicals would categorize themselves today.

Some Distinguishing Features

Before considering the central beliefs of the movement, we can mention a number of other features characterizing the movement.

i. A Protest/Renewal Movement within Christendom

Evangelicalism is fundamentally a Protestant, and therefore a protest, movement.[12] Evangelicals take a particular position within the wider church world. That wider church world has, to date, always been essential for defining evangelicals and as the milieu within which they

11 *Ibid*, 528-9.

12 Kenneth Scott Latourette traces the origin of the term 'Protestant' to the 1829 Diet at Speier at which the German Lutheran Princes formally protested against the Roman Catholic majority decisions ordering no further changes in religion; refusing liberty of worship to Lutherans in Catholic Territories; and demanding that liberty for Catholics in Lutheran Territories, *A History of Christianity, Vol.II – Reformation to the Present*, Revised Edition, Paperback, New York: Harper & Row, 1953, 1975, 727. Williston Walker clarifies that the decision of the diet in February 1529 was followed up by the formal 'protestatio' presented in the German Reichstag on 19 April 1529, *A History of the Christian Church*, Revised Edn., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1959, 320.

operate, as is indicated by the following cursory comments on the various stages through which evangelicalism has developed. For each stage the wider context against which they were protesting was essential for evangelical identity:

The Reformers – against mediaeval Catholicism.

The First Evangelical awakening – against the 'deadness' of the contemporary church. 'Jonathan Edwards wrote that the Awakening occurred "after a long continued, and almost universal deadness."'[13]

The Second Evangelical awakening – against the Deism, laxity and Unitarianism in the early 18th century church.

The Clapham Sect and early 19th Century Evangelicals – against lack of 'seriousness' and nominalism in the established church(es).

The 'Fundamentalists' of the early 20th century – against proponents of the Social Gospel and Higher Criticism.

The mid 20th century evangelicalism – against Liberal theology and Neo-orthodoxy.

At each stage the existence and state of the wider church provided the backdrop against which evangelicalism expressed itself. Moreover, until quite recently, the protest of Evangelicalism against the conditions in the wider church has also normally had the even wider backdrop of Christendom as an essential part of its context. This double backdrop has made an integral contribution to the priorities, approach, operating style and content of the evangelical movement. As Andrew Walls puts it, 'Historic evangelicalism is a religion of protest against a Christian society that is not Christian enough. . . . Evangelical preaching is primarily addressed to a world that is both Christian and unbelieving.'[14] We shall find that changes in that backdrop are part of the major challenge confronting Evangelicalism today.

This 'protest' aspect of the movement can, of course, also be seen more positively as a 'renewal' movement. There has usually been a close inter-relationship between the protest and renewal aspects. But again, the nature, shape and direction of the renewal has at each

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13 John B. Carpenter, 'The Fourth Great Awakening or Apostasy: Is American Evangelicalism Cycling Upwards or Spiraling Downwards?', *JETS* 44(4) December 2001:653, citing Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Boston: S. Kneeland, 1741, 125.

14 Andrew F Walls, 'The Evangelical Revival, The Missionary Movement, and Africa', in Noll, Mark A., David W. Bebbington & George A Rawlyk (Eds), *Evangelicalism* . . . 310-330

stage been determined in significant measure by the double background of the wider church and Christendom.

ii. The resulting Custodial and Combative Mentality

The central place of protest and the self-conscious mission to renew what was deficient have both helped produce other aspects of the evangelical mindset. Stuart Piggin[15] found what he called 'dogmatic intolerance' or a 'combative mentality' a significant characteristic of evangelical candidates for missionary service in the period from the 1790s to 1850s. In this regard the missionary movement has continued as it began, as the current popularity in many evangelical circles of the 'spiritual warfare' paradigm might suggest. The common evangelical sense of having, if not owning 'the truth' all too easily finds expression in a belligerent attitude.

The custodial attitude highlighted by Jacobsen and Schmidt can be seen as a more healthy expression of this same concern for proper stewardship of the truth of the Gospel. The biblical underpinnings, and balance, for this necessary aspect of the 'defence and confirmation of the Gospel' were perhaps best set out in the plea for evangelical theology in the two opening chapters of John Stott's 1970 essay, *Christ the Controversialist.*[16] If re-read with the final chapter in his latest book on evangelicalism, headed 'The pre-eminence of humility',[17] Stott's earlier emphasis with its custodial overtones could help ensure that the positive rather than the negative aspects of custodialism predominate as evangelicalism moves into the 21st century.

iii. A Contextualization Movement – in Western Modernity and around the world

One aspect of our evangelical heritage has been criticized both from within and outside the movement as a sellout to Enlightenment and 'Modern' presuppositions. Donald Bloesch suggested, and others like Alister McGrath have taken up his concern, that we need 'to call into question the bent towards rationalism in current evangelicalism', listing Carl Henry, John Warwick Montgomery, Norman Geisler and Francis Schaeffer as successors to the rationalistic tendencies within the 'Protestant scholastic orthodoxy of the Princeton School', championed in earlier generations by the Hodges and Benjamin

15 F. Stuart Piggin, *Making Evangelical Missionaries 1789-1858: The Social Background, Motivation and Training of British Protestant Missionaries to India.* [Evangelicals and Society from 1750 Series, No.2 Editor G.E.Duffield] London: Sutton Courtenay Press 1984, 248-9.

16 John R.W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion*, London: Tyndale Press, 1970.

17 John R.W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Plea for Unity*, 147-151.

Warfield.[18] From another quarter, Lesslie Newbigin also critiques fundamentalism and evangelicalism's understanding of scripture. He sees the claims to have an absolute certainty of truth expressed in inerrant propositions as an unconscious surrender to the rationalistic 'plausibility structures' of the Enlightenment paradigm.[19]

That the rationalistic tendency is there is undeniable. How to understand it is another matter. Andrew Walls' alternative suggestion may be more helpful than simply accepting that leading thinkers within our movement have sold out to the academic spirit of the age. Analyzing the Enlightenment impact on Western culture in the late seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Walls writes:

> Western Christianity . . . faced a cultural crisis – attrition of its basis in Western culture, with the weakening of the sanctions of the institutional church, the increasing efficiency of the centralized state, and the relegation of religion to the private sphere. The Evangelical Revival was perhaps the most successful of all the reformations of Christianity in the context of changing Western culture. Not, of course, that it arose *de novo.* Besides renewing the call to radical discipleship so often sounded in earlier Christian history, it retained the medieval concern (deep rooted in the European psyche) for propitiation. It also extended and clarified the Reformation idea (particularly as developed by the English Puritans) of a life of holy obedience in the secular world and in the family. Above all, it combined the traditional framework of the Christian nation and the established church (whether with or without a formal *principle* of establishment was really a matter of locality) with serious recognition of individual selfhood and personal decision. That reconciliation bridged a cultural chasm in Christian self-identity. It helped make evangelical religion a critical force in Western culture, a version of Christianity thoroughly authentic and indigenous there. To use the appalling current missiological jargon, the Evangelical Revival contextualized the gospel for the northern Protestant world.[20]

As Walls admits in his further development of the idea, such contextualization can easily become syncretistic.[21] Bloesch and McGrath have highlighted the point at which a charge of syncretism is most applicable to the contextualization efforts of some Western evangeli-

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18 Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Volume Two, Life, Ministry and Hope,* San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979, 267-8; Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism,* Leicester: Apollos, 1996, 168-9.

19 Lesslie Newbigin, repeatedly in several publications, e.g., *Proper Confidence,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

20 Andrew Walls, 'The Evangelical Revival, The Missionary Movement, and Africa', in Noll et al, *Evangelicalism* . . . 313-4.

21 Andrew F. Walls, 'Enlightenment, Postmodernity and Mission.' In *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission After Newbigin,* ed. by Thomas F. Foust, et al, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 145-152.

cals. In seeking to make the Gospel meaningful and relevant to the Enlightenment mindset, with its preoccupation with rationalism, some of evangelicalism's best apologists have erred on an overly rationalistic contextualization. In the postmodern era we need significantly to correct that error. But, following Walls' lead, we can do so generously, recognizing the problem as part of the inherent difficulty of contextualization, rather than assuming those 'contending for the faith' were simply bewitched by the spirit of the age. Some evangelicals, like J.I.Packer in *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* as early as 1958, while drawing on the very scholars who are now accused of rationalism, have presented carefully nuanced, biblical descriptions of the role of reason in the way of faith, sounding remarkably like the position for which Newbigin himself pleads in his writings in the 1980s and 1990s.

As we move into the postmodern context, the other aspects of evangelicalism's contextualization achievement in the modern era that Walls lists – the call to radical discipleship; retaining the concern for propitiation; clarifying holiness in the secular world and family life; and combining Christian concepts of nationhood and church with individual selfhood and personal decision – still await re-contextualization. His list could form part of a curriculum development agenda for relating evangelical faith to contemporary culture.

Evangelicalism has not only contextualized the Gospel message to adapt to the presuppositions of the Western worldview. As Walls also points out,

> . . . it is important to note that the fruit of the work of evangelical missionaries has not simply been a replication of Western evangelicalism. The Christian message that they set loose in Africa has its own dynamic, as it comes into creative and critical encounter with African life with its needs and hurts. Exactly the same thing happened when the Evangelical Revival bridged the culture gap for northern Protestantism to such spectacular effect. Africans have responded to the gospel from where *they* were, not from where the missionaries were; they have responded to the Christian message as they heard it, not to the missionaries' experience of that message.[22]

So, as the African experience has been repeated on all six continents, to be an evangelical today means to be a participant in the global church which with all its cultural diversity increasingly reflects the 'variegated wisdom of God' (Eph 3:10).

iv. Centres of Dynamism

Evangelicalism continues to evidence considerable power in eliciting

22 A.F. Walls, 'The Evangelical Revival, The Missionary Movement and Africa', *op cit.* 326,

a deep sense of fellowship, loyalty and commitment to its core beliefs that adherents attribute to the reality of their shared life in Christ and their common experience of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This has led historically to centres of dynamism developing within global evangelicalism that wield widespread influence both within and beyond the movement. We could trace examples of such centres of dynamism from any historic period of evangelicalism.

The role of key *families* in such centres of dynamism has proved significant. The renowned 'Clapham Sect' focused around Wilberforce/Buxton and Venn family dynasties from the late 18th century offers one example.[23] Or fifty years later perhaps the classic example would be the Hitchcock family. George the London draper greatly influenced the international growth of the YMCA through his apprentice, cum son-in-law, cum business partner, George Williams. Hitchcock's three London Missionary Society missionary sisters, Sarah, wife of Aaron Buzacott of Rarotonga and Australia, Charlotte, wife of James Sewell of Bangalore, India, and Jane, wife of Charles Hardie of Samoa and Australia spread the evangelical ethos broadly. This unspectacular, but influential family network contributed to evangelical movements and mission, both in Britain and the Colonies for several generations.[24]

As well as such family dynasties, perhaps confirming yet modifying David Wells' concept of *transconfessionalism* already mentioned, centres of dynamism often focus on *particular people and institutions.* Consider the influence on global evangelicalism in recent decades of institutions like Moody Bible Institute; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School/ Trinity International University; Fuller Theological Seminary and its various Schools, particularly the School of Global Mission; Dallas Theological Seminary; or, crossing the Atlantic, London Bible College or the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies; or, coming closer to our antipodean home, Moore Theological College, Sydney. In each case the contribution of faculty, the ministries of graduates and the publications emanating from these institutions is vast. And the list is very partial.

Or, for another dimension of anecdotal evidence, take the following list of influential persons in global missionary thinking in recent

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23 As well as the standard biographies of William Wilberforce by Travers Buxton and Oliver Warner, see, e.g., Michael Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect,* London: Lutterworth Press,1958, and *Sons of the Prophets: Evangelical Leaders of the Victorian Church,* London: SPCK, 1979,and, Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1976.

24 See Clyde Binfield's chapter on the Hitchcocks in his, *George Willams and the YMCA: A Study in Victorian Social Attitudes,* London: Heinemann, 1973, 179-201.

years. What do all of the following have in common? The late Harold W. Turner (leading authority on New Religious Movements and Gospel and Cultures), Lamin Sanneh (African missiologist holding Missions Professorship at Yale University), Jonathan Bonk (Director of Overseas Ministries Study Centre and Editor of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research)*, Kwame Bediako (influential Ghanaian thinker and writer, Board member of OCMS), Cyril Okorocha (previously Coordinator of Decade of Evangelism globally for the Anglican Communion, and Nigerian Bishop), Paul Ellingworth (of the United Bible Societies), Jocelyn Murray (previously CMS historian and editor/contributor to academic journals on Africa), Sigamony and Nalini Arles (Indian member of IAMS Executive, Missions lecturers at Serampore College and other Indian theological Colleges), Tokumboh Adeyemo (General secretary of Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar), Adrian Hastings (previously leading Catholic historian of Church and Mission), John Roxborogh (previously IAMS Executive, now Knox College, Dunedin), Allan Davidson (St John's Theological College, Auckland), Wilbert Shenk (recently Dean of SGM of Fuller Theological Seminary), etc, etc? They have all been teaching colleagues or post-graduate students of Andrew Walls. Key evangelical thinkers like Andrew Walls have exerted a wide-spreading influence across the movement. Think what the list would be like if we just extended it to include those impacted by another of Andrew's fellow Aberdeen University colleagues, I. Howard Marshall, and then went on to include other holders of university teaching posts like F.F.Bruce in Britain, or Ted Ward at Michigan State or our own Professor E.M.Blaiklock, at Auckland – highlighting the role *university professors* have filled as centres of evangelical dynamism.

Movements generated within evangelicalism have also served as centres of dynamism. Perhaps the most significant modern examples would have to be the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Movement. The rejuvenated World Evangelical Fellowship, now World Evangelical Alliance, particularly its Theology and Missions Commissions (which owed much to our New Zealand contributions through Bruce Nicholls and Ray Windsor in the 1970s-1990s), has done much to bridge the divide between first- and third-world developments in recent decades.[25] No mention of centres of dynamism in

25 We could, of course, have referred to the early history of the Evangelical Alliance from its inception in 1846, and its links back to the beginnings of the YMCA and the circle of friends around George Williams as an earlier 'movement' centre. See, Clarence Prouty Shedd, et al., *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, London, SPCK, 1955, 103, n.1; Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, London, SPCK, 1954, 318-324.

global evangelicalism can overlook the seminal and wide-ranging influence of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization during the period since 1974. Nor can the influence of John R.W. Stott within and through that movement be underestimated. We must face David Wells' critique that during this period, for some the developments have meant empire building. But I have deliberately listed a few of the large number for whom that charge is totally inapplicable. How could anyone who knows, or knew, the Andrew Walls, Howard Marshalls, F.F. Bruces or John Stotts of this world ever think of them as empire builders? At the heart of evangelicalism there is, and has always been, a dynamic running much deeper than that. This dynamic arises from the commitment to a core of commonly accepted biblical truths and the shared experience they create.

The diversity of evangelical representation across *denominational groupings* needs to be kept in mind also when thinking of centres of dynamism. If some sectors of North American evangelicalism appear to take the principle of dynamic centres to triumphalistic extremes, we should not overlook the growing influence within North American evangelicalism of the Anabaptist tradition with its radical Reformation roots and strongly anti-triumphalistic stance. The contributions of Mennonites Wilbert Shenk, David Shank and Ron Sider in missiology are cases in point. Jacobsen and Schmidt can claim that 'North American Anabaptists have devoted more time and energy to explicit christological debate in the 1980s than any other group that fits within the evangelical penumbra.'[26]

Clarifying the diverse roles of centres of dynamism can be extended by reference to the next developing feature of our movement.

v. The New Heartlands in the Two-thirds World

We are seeing some significant changes in the centres from which evangelicalism is growing and flowing in our times. The shift in the heartlands of evangelical influence, as of Christianity more broadly, to the African, Asian, Latin and South American and Oceanic churches is already making its impact globally. Think of the influence of the writings of Orlando Costas and Rene Padilla, to mention only two Latin Americans; of Vinay Samuel and Ramoth Ramachandra for two from the Indian sub-continent; and Kwame Bediako and David Gitari for two from Africa, and the extent of this change becomes evident if we even restrict our view to the area of serious scholarship.

Andrew Walls has for some time been spelling out the significance

26 *Op cit.* 522.

of this change in heartlands for the church generally.[27] For a specific example of the way third world evangelical leaders are questioning the presuppositions of Western evangelicals, Kwame Bediako provides a pointed challenge in his article, 'World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of the Christian World Mission'.[28] Bediako commends the wholistic understanding of the Gospel achieved at Lausanne 1974, but is deeply concerned about the erosion of that wholistic approach in subsequent international evangelical gatherings, particularly questioning the right of Western agencies to initiate global evangelistic programmes based on concepts like 'unreached peoples' without any reference to the existing churches adjacent to such groups. He also questions Western overdependence on the social sciences rather than Christian mission history as the proper source for deriving methodology in evangelism. To be an evangelical today requires a willingness to take seriously such third world voices.

Two Initial Challenges

From this overview of the map of evangelicalism two basic challenges have come into focus for evangelicals today.

Defining Ourselves and Identifying Boundaries

The task of defining evangelicals is not simple. The actual differences within the movement need to be faced realistically. But the commonalities must also be upheld. Thus terminology becomes both important and tricky. Here in New Zealand we should resist some current trends. We should not allow any of the biblically rooted terms that describe key characteristics of our whole movement to be used as labels for only one section of the movement. Hence the recent categorizing of New Zealand churches into three camps labelled, 'Evangelical', 'Charismatic' and 'Pentecostal' should not be accepted. All three groups are evangelical in the better sense of the word. Some of us would also like to reclaim at least 'charismatic' as a descriptor of all evangelicals – just as, at another pole 'ecumenical' should be kept for use by all who uphold a 'whole inhabited earth' perspective on

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27 See, e.g., 'Culture and Coherence in Christian History' in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996, 43-54.

28 Kwame Bediako, 'World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of the Christian World Mission', in Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser, (Eds), *Proclaiming Christ in Christ's Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism: Essays Presented to Walter Arnold on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1989,52-68.

the church. We need particularly to resist any tendency to adopt narrower definitions of such terms than those used commonly in other parts of the world – especially in the new heartlands of Christianity.

Likewise in our self-definitions let us heed the recent statement, 'The Word Made Fresh: A Call for a Renewal of the Evangelical Spirit,' signed and circulated by a group of 108 American evangelicals:

> . . . we admonish all evangelicals to resist attempts to propagate rigid definitions of evangelicalism that result in unnecessary alienation and exclusion. And we call all evangelicals to affirm the genuine diversity and fresh reflection, rooted in the authority of the written Word and centered on the Word incarnate, that has been the hallmark of the true evangelical spirit.[29]

The importance of such a discerning and inclusive definition of our movement is highlighted again by the June 2002 number of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* which reports attempts to exclude from membership of the ETS proponents of what is being dubbed 'the Openness of God' theology. Thankfully there is in the same number at least one call for us to apply to our self-definitions the insights inherent in the concept of membership on the basis of 'centred-sets' rather than 'bounded-sets', concepts popularized amongst evangelicals by missiologist Paul Hiebert.[30]

We also need to think carefully about our relationships with those we would rightly call 'fundamentalists'. We need to understand and theologically endorse the differences between evangelicalism and fundamentalism – and John Stott lists them pointedly in the first section of his swan-song.[31] But having established the differences, we here in New Zealand still need a *modus operandi* that allows proper levels of cooperation appropriate for brothers and sisters in Christ – even when the differences are as important as they are. Our evangelical theological education institutions and their potential students are aligned with churches that will readily accept the 'fundamentalist' tag. Evangelical theological educators have a responsibility to open doors into theological and biblical study for such students – and to give them the respect that responsibility carries.

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29 'The Word Made Fresh: A Call for a Renewal of the Evangelical Spirit,' A Statement emanating from The Evangelical Theology Group meeting at the American Academy of Religion Meetings, Toronto, 2002. Accessed from www.thewordmadefresh.com, reprinted in full below.

30 *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol 45(2) June 2002. See Stanley Grenz, 'Die begrenzte Gemeinschaft ("The Boundaried People") and the Character of Evangelical Theology', 301-316

31 John Stott, *Evangelical Truth* . . . 19-24

Perhaps the most difficult definitional task facing evangelicalism in our country – and probably around the Western world – is whether, and to what degree our movement should embrace or distance itself from thinkers who differ from evangelicals only in the extent to which they espouse a Barthian theology. The old lines drawn between 'confessional' evangelicals and 'Neo-orthodoxy' in the 1960s need to be revisited. Barth's own changes in position, and certainly the ways his followers have moved from his original emphases call for careful discernment and that rare mix of caution and welcome towards others that Paul describes as 'the mind of Christ' in Philippians 2:1-9.

This brings us to the second basic challenge.

Maintaining our Evangelical Ecumenism and Avoiding Fragmentation

This is the flip side of what we have just been saying. One strength of evangelicalism has been its ability to transcend denominational boundaries and give in-depth expression to the reality of the unity that belongs to true believers in Christ. There was always more than mere hype in the claims we used to make during the blossoming ecumenical fervour in New Zealand in the 1960s, that the so-called ecumenicists only talked about Christian unity while we evangelicals, at places like the Bible Training Institute, lived it. But, now, in the old age of ecumenical interest in wider Christian circles, the words of our Lord linking unity and mission as interdependent and mutually essential, as in John 17:20-23, still call for practical expression.

Again, the Call reprinted below says it eloquently and sets a standard for us to demonstrate as the hallmark of our understanding of what it means to be an evangelical today. The new context, to which we shall return in Part Two of this article, cries out for us as theological educators humbly but firmly to re-apply our heritage of serving the full spectrum of evangelicalism in New Zealand and the Pacific, and to stand strongly against tendencies to restrict the openness of our welcome. May we, with the Apostle, always be able to say to all who delight in the central affirmations of our faith, 'We have spoken freely to you . . . and opened wide our hearts to you . . . open wide your hearts also' (2 Cor. 6:11,13).

Appendix

The Word Made Fresh: A Call for a Renewal of the Evangelical Spirit

A Statement emanating from The Evangelical Theology Group meeting at the American Academy of Religion Meetings, Toronto, 2002[32]

Special Feature Statement

To be evangelical is to be committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ – the Word incarnate – in all areas of life and to the supreme authority of the canonical Scriptures – the written Word – in all matters of faith and practice. To be evangelical also entails being characterized by an irenic, Christ-like spirit of love toward those with whom we disagree and a cautious openness to the reform of tradition as the Spirit leads us to fresh understandings of the Word that are even more faithful to the entirety of God's revelation. We oppose unfettered theological experimentation and accommodation to culture that threatens the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we also deplore a present tendency among some evangelicals to define the boundaries of evangelical faith and life too narrowly. For this reason, we call evangelical leaders and thinkers to make room for reverent exploration of new ideas and reconsideration of old ones without assuming too quickly that we know what Scripture clearly does and does not teach.

Throughout history, evangelicals have courageously stood against attempts to compromise biblical faith. Unfortunately, passionate resistance to error has repeatedly also led to militant, separatistic habits of mind and heart from which evangelicals in the mid-twentieth century struggled to free the movement. We are concerned that some claimants to the evangelical heritage appear to be falling back into some of the more onerous attitudes of fundamentalism. Out of this concern, we call all evangelicals to acknowledge the value of the kind of genuine diversity and fresh reflection, grounded in the written Word and centered on the incarnate Word, that has always been the hallmark of the true evangelical spirit.

To this end, we call all evangelical leaders and thinkers not to reject out of hand constructive theological proposals that are reverently rooted in biblical reflection, even when they challenge aspects of what some consider to be the "received evangelical tradition." Rather than a sign of decline, constructive theological endeavor and rigorous debate about theological issues are marks of evangelical theolog-

32 Accessed from: www.thewordmadefresh.com.

ical vitality. Premature closure of dialogue and debate by means of condemnations and threats of exclusion, in contrast, disrupts community and often quenches the Spirit who brings new life and leads us toward ever more faithful readings of God's Word. Therefore, we admonish all evangelicals to resist attempts to propagate rigid definitions of evangelicalism that result in unnecessary alienation and exclusion. And we call all evangelicals to affirm the genuine diversity and fresh reflection, rooted in the authority of the written Word and centered on the Word incarnate, that has always been the hallmark of the true evangelical spirit.

Let peace prevail among evangelicals. We pray not for peace at any price, but for peace and harmony among equally God-fearing, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving evangelical Christians who may find that they disagree about many secondary matters. We call all evangelicals to rediscover and honor the motto: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." May the irenic spirit of generous orthodoxy that has energized and unified the evangelical movement prevail in our evangelical theological discourse. And may all evangelicals seek to renew the broad, historic evangelicalism that honors the oneness of faith that unites all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and submit to the authority of the Word.

There is then a list of 108 names and addresses of [mainly North American] evangelical teachers and writers appended.

Abstract

In the first part of this article the author attempts an analysis of the current state of evangelicalism, outlining the different groups that can be found within it, and charting some of its distinctive features – its character as a protest and renewal movement, its custodial and combative mentality, its striving for contextualisation, its dynamic centres, and its new heartlands in the Two-Thirds World. He identifies two challenges: the need for self-definition and the identification of boundaries, and the need to maintain ecumenism and avoid fragmentation.