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Evangelicals and public worship, 1965 - 2005

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Between 1965 and 2005 there was a drastic transformation of public worship among Evangelicals.¹ The change was readily apparent in the Church of England. Down to 1965 the Book of Common Prayer, compiled in the sixteenth century and revised in the seventeenth, was its only approved liturgy. In that year, however, the Church of England gained the right for the first time to devise its own services without further recourse to parliament. Profiting from this momentous liberation, the church was soon experimenting with fresh services labelled 'Series II'. Other redrafts led to the *Alternative Service Book* of 1980 and eventually to *Common Worship* in 2000. That book encouraged congregations to draw up their own liturgies so long as certain elements were preserved. Evangelicals gladly embraced their freedom, devising orders of service that included, for example, open prayer. There was an end to uniformity of worship in the established church. It is not so widely appreciated that there was as sweeping a process of change amongst most other Evangelicals in Britain, whether the Non-conformists of England and Wales or the Presbyterians and others of Scotland. In 1965 they still adhered to the traditional forms such as 'Thee' and 'Thou' in prayer. By 2005 some were singing extraordinarily untraditional songs including such lines as 'Give me gas in my Ford/ Keep me trucking'. The experience of worship was revolutionised.

This paper explores the developments that took place over the forty-year period. Its purpose is not just to chronicle, but also to analyse and to try to explain. Almost the sole source is a set of note books that the author has kept over nearly the whole of the period. During services I have maintained the habit of taking notes on what takes place: not only the sermons, but also the setting, the worshippers and every individual item, including its timing. The result is a solid body of field research.² There is a problem of reliability with this material. The author clearly states on 16 January 1972 that he has never previously observed members of the congregation saying the grace together at the end of a service,

1 This paper was delivered as the Laing Lecture at the London School of Theology in February 2006. I am grateful to the principal and college for their invitation and hospitality.

2 These note books, in the possession of the author, will be cited as S (for Services), with the date. In the originals the date is coded and occasionally inaccurate.

but equally clearly he has already recorded the practice on 24 November 1968. Like all historical sources, this set of note books needs to be treated with care. Yet it provides a full account of services attended, usually two per Sunday, but sometimes only one and occasionally three or even four. For the purposes of this analysis, I have excluded services on weekdays, consequently omitting gatherings on Christmas Day and Good Friday, in order to concentrate on Sunday worship. I have also excluded non-Evangelical congregations, though many are recorded in the note books. There is a Unitarian service and one in Great St Mary's, Cambridge, when J. A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, was the preacher; there are Roman Catholic services and a celebration of the Russian Orthodox liturgy to mark the millennium of the introduction of Christianity into Russia; and there are High Church Anglican services including Solemn High Mass for Ascension-tide at All Saints, Margaret Street, in London, in 1998, when the preacher told a memorable anti-Evangelical joke. 'Why', he asked, 'is the Church of England like a swimming pool?' The answer was that it is 'because all the noise comes from the shallow end'.³ Within the Evangelical world, I tried to visit most sectors over the years. Because I am a Baptist, most of the services took place in Baptist churches, but there was also worship in Anglican, Methodist, Congregational and United Reformed Church, Church of Scotland and Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches congregations together with a few others: Strict Baptist, Scotch Baptist, Brethren, Church of God and so on. So the data is denominationally varied.

In terms of space, only churches in Britain have been selected, although the note books also contain information on churches in Ireland, on the continent, in the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. Because I moved to Scotland in 1976, the majority of services attended since then have been north of the border, but, since I regularly visited the East Midlands and the south of England for family reasons and often travelled elsewhere for historical research, I built up data on many parts of England and Wales. Patterns of worship were similar in many respects, though change often took place earlier in the south of England, and especially round London, than further north.⁴ Scotland was distinctive in a number of ways: in often retaining metrical Psalms, sometimes alongside hymns, into the late twentieth century; in congregations repeating the Lord's Prayer not with the word 'trespasses', but with 'debts', reflecting the Geneva Bible rather than the Authorised Version; and in widespread aversion to the congregation saying 'Amen' aloud after prayers. Wales was distinctive in elders or deacons in the Nonconformist denominations occupying the 'big seat' at the front, following Calvinistic Methodist practice, as well, of course, as conducting many services in the Welsh tongue. As a general rule, how-

3 S, 21 May 1998.

4 See D. W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism and Cultural Diffusion', in *British Evangelical Identities: Past, Present and Possible Futures*, ed. Mark Smith (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, forthcoming).

ever, there was more contrast within each national unit than between different national units. Thus normally the contrast between rural and suburban congregations was sharper than that between Scottish and English churches. What are taken as central for this study, however, are changes over time. I have therefore selected for close analysis four groups of services at ten-year intervals: 100 each in 1968-70, 1978-80, 1988-90 and 1998-2000. Although other – and particularly later – services have also been considered, these are the periods scrutinised in detail. The special issue is the question of developments. What have been the main trends over the period? Why has there been a transformation of public worship among Evangelicals since 1965?

The starting point is the situation in the late 1960s. What do the notes suggest were the predominant features of worship at that juncture? What were the traditional motifs that were only just beginning to change? In the first place, there was the priority of the spiritual. Evangelicalism was about being set apart from the world, about having a zest for spiritual things. Consequently public worship had an aura of sacredness. It was conducted by somebody whose dress marked him out as different. Anglican clergy wore a surplice together with a broad black scarf, the tippet. Nonconformist ministers almost always wore clerical collars – except Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who when I saw him in 1969 wore a round-cornered collar in the pulpit.⁵ Leaders of worship, unless they were laymen, were designated as religious specialists by their dress. Services, furthermore, were periods of sacred time. When a new hymn was to be practised, the rehearsal took place not within the service but beforehand or afterwards. If sung within worship, the hymn had a particular spiritual purpose that practice would undermine. Although the whole service possessed a measure of separation from the profane, that was specially true of the prayers. Stewards permitted late entry during hymns, but not during prayers. Approaching God, a distinctly spiritual act, was not to be disturbed.

Communion was particularly sacred. At my home church in Nottingham,⁶ as in other gathered churches, the communion service was essentially for members only, and by no means all members attended. Communion was held as a separate event following the ordinary morning or evening service after a break of several minutes. At communion there were items of fellowship news, a special prayer for the fellowship by a deacon and a fellowship offering – for a charitable fund on behalf of the needy of the congregation, a tradition going back to the origins of Dissent in the seventeenth century. All was explicitly designed for the fellowship of believers, who around the Lord's table were most separate from the world. In ordinary services, furthermore, there was a specific spiritual purpose, though it varied according to the time of day. The morning service was adapted

5 S, 26 February 1969.

6 On this church, see D. W. Bebbington, *A History of Queensberry Street Baptist Church, Old Basford, Nottingham* (Nottingham: For the church, 1977).

to the needs of the saints, to promote their growth in grace: it was for sanctification. The evening service was for sinners, and the gospel was preached: it was for conversion. Until just about 1965, numbers at the evening service were higher than those at the morning service. An evangelistic emphasis in the evening remained evident in the sample of services from 1978-80, though it faded thereafter. It sometimes led to repeated choruses of the type found in *Golden Bells*, the Scripture Union hymn book, or Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos*, which was still employed as the evening hymn book at the Baptist church when I moved to Stirling in 1976.⁷ There might also be testimonies from converted individuals and appeals such as that at an evening service in 1970 urging members of the congregation to put their faith in Christ 'now'.⁸ Whether morning or evening, whether for sanctification or conversion, services had an aim beyond themselves, to carry people further into the realm of grace. Worship was concerned with the spiritual.

A second characteristic of Evangelical worship in the late 1960s was (as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida could have said) its logocentricity, its concentration on the word. The sermon was the dominant element in worship. It was dominant in esteem, with the music and prayers being regarded as 'the preliminaries'. It was also dominant in length. In the period 1968-70, the average length of the main constituents of worship was as follows: prayer 10 minutes; congregational hymns 17 minutes; and the sermon 24 minutes. Some addresses could be significantly longer: the longest in this period recorded in the note books was 38 minutes.⁹ At a traditional service in 1979, the preacher caused some dismay when, seven minutes after the opening of a rather dreary sermon, he said that now he wanted 'to begin'.¹⁰ Ninety-five per cent of the sermons in the years 1968-1970 had texts. The distribution was roughly one quarter from the Old Testament and three-quarters from the New – which was exactly the same as the proportions in a comparable survey undertaken in 1896.¹¹ A three-point structure was common, though not the norm. Where the sermon contained three points, they helped ensure a fairly tight exegesis of a passage. The 'message', a term often preferred to the more ecclesiastical 'sermon', was the verbal focus of each act of worship.

People followed the sermons in their Bibles, this often being one of the practices that distinguished an Evangelical from a non-Evangelical congregation. There was always at least one Bible reading. The rendering of the Bible most frequently found among Evangelicals was the Revised Standard Version, because

7 On this church, see Brian Talbot, *Standing on the Rock: A History of Stirling Baptist Church, 1805-2005* ([Stirling: For the Church], 2005).

8 S, 30 August 1970.

9 S, 20 July 1969.

10 S, 12 August 1979.

11 *British Weekly*, 26 March 1896, p. 379. This survey was conducted by readers of the newspaper, mostly Scottish Presbyterians and English Nonconformists, who sent in a note of the length of the sermon and its text on a single Sunday.

its contemporary language (except for prayers to the Almighty) was designed to communicate the gospel more clearly. Yet the Authorised Version was still in common use, for example at two Norwich churches visited on the morning and evening of a Sunday in 1969.¹² The retention of the Authorised Version, as in much of contemporary America, was an indication of a deep-seated loyalty to the text. It was a sign of logocentricity.

Traditional services were, in the third place, notable for their regularity. The standardisation of services was most evident in the Church of England. Evangelicals did not merely tolerate the Book of Common Prayer, but rejoiced in it. The tercentenary of the publication of the Prayer Book in 1662 was marked by the Islington Conference, the annual gathering of Anglican Evangelicals, with the whole proceedings celebrating 'The Glory of our Liturgy'.¹³ The fixedness of the Prayer Book, in embodying the Reformation principles of its chief author, Archbishop Cranmer, was a cause for thankfulness. The attachment of Evangelical Anglicans to the Prayer Book as a whole overcame their worries over particular details, though these scruples sometimes showed in worship. Thus at an Evangelical parish church in Bristol in 1978, before the Prayer Book intercession for priests, the officiant took pains to explain to the congregation that all believers are in reality priests.¹⁴ Discomfort with tiny points was a small price to pay for a pattern of worship that had functioned for more than a century as a bulwark against Anglo-Catholic liturgical innovations. So long as Prayer Book worship survived, Evangelicalism enjoyed a secure place within the Church of England.

Nonconformists, for all their devotion to free worship, likewise had very predictable services. Prayers normally consisted of an opening item of praise, by no means perfunctory, of two to four minutes; a prayer associated with the offering, which could be perfunctory; and a long prayer before the hymn preceding the sermon. As an example of a long prayer, we may take the one offered by Leith Samuel at Above Bar Church, Southampton, affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, on 31 October 1971. Starting with the ground of approach to God, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the prayer went on to cover the individual needs of the members of the congregation. Then the pastor turned to wider affairs, praying that Ulster criminals would be 'brought to book'. Finally he offered prayer on behalf of a special concern of church and minister, the spiritual welfare of students at Oxford, Cambridge, London and elsewhere, and other young Christians. This was essentially intercessory prayer; and it lasted eight minutes. Similar prayers were usual at other churches, though normally they were more like five minutes long. Hymns were interspersed between other items, so that the pattern was sometimes called a 'hymn sandwich'. The singing was normally based on a denominational hymn book. From 1965 even the Anglican Evangelicals had their own, *The Anglican Hymn Book*. The congregation

12 S, 22 June 1969.

13 *Church of England Newspaper*, 12 January 1962, pp. 1, 16.

14 S, 30 July 1978.

uniformly stood to sing, except in Nonconformist communion services, where sitting seemed the right posture for meditation on the work of Christ. It was still the custom in many places in 1965 to sing 'Amen' at the end of every hymn, whether or not it was appropriate, though the traditional practice was fading. Apart from scripture reading and sermon, prayers and hymns, other features that usually appeared in a service were, in the morning, a children's address and in all services the notices, the offering and items by a choir. A choir sometimes contributed an introit at the start, usually an anthem in the middle and occasionally a vesper at the end of the evening service. Often under the baton of a conductor, the choir would normally sing in four parts and might reach high musical standards; or might not. Free Church worship was varied each year by the Sunday school anniversary, with much singing by the children, the harvest festival, with elaborate displays of produce, and (among Methodists) the Covenant Service at the start of January for renewing dedication to the Lord. Ordinary services, however, were little varied. There might be an occasional solo or poem, but many churches were never so bold. Regularity was the order of the day.

Nevertheless it should not be supposed that worship was immune to change in the 1960s. On the contrary, powerful influences were impinging on the way in which services were conducted. Most of the fresh developments can be summed up under the heading of the liturgical movement. In the Church of England, the roots of liturgical renewal went back to the Anglo-Catholic ritualists of the nineteenth century. Emphasising the more frequent celebration of the eucharist, they catered for the widespread desire, specially among the middle classes, for colour, mystery and awe in worship, the rising tide of feeling unleashed on the world by writers of the Romantic school. By the 1940s there was a widespread desire to harness this impulse to pastoral needs. The result was the Parish and People Movement, starting in 1949, which transformed the face of the Church of England. Instead of morning prayer ('matins'), the main service of the day became parish communion. By the 1960s, a parish communion, targeting the whole community, had become the norm.

Against all this Evangelicals set their faces. Morning prayer, in their view, was suitable for every worshipper, and so they wanted to retain it. Communion was designed for believers only, and so was inappropriate for the whole parish. The chairman of the 1961 Islington Conference still warned of the dangers of parish communion.¹⁵ The tide of change, however, proved irresistible. Elements of the newer idiom crept into Evangelical services. Crucial was the position of the officiating clergyman at the communion service. The traditional Evangelical conviction was that the clergyman should conduct the service from the 'north side' of the Lord's table, that is the left from the point of view of the congregation, whose members could then be involved by observing his movements. Evangelicals rejected the view, originally associated with ritualists but normal in the Church of England by the 1960s, that the officiant should adopt the 'eastward

15 *Church of England Newspaper*, 13 January 1961, p. 3.

position', that is stand with his back to the congregation, so symbolising that he, the priest, represented the people before God. During the 1960s, however, a new option became available, originating in the Church of South India and propagated by adherents of the liturgical movement: the 'westward position'. According to this school of thought, the clergyman should stand behind the Lord's table, facing the congregation. To this there was no intrinsic theological objection among Evangelicals, and so the practice started to spread among them. In 1967 the Keele Congress of Anglican Evangelicals circumspectly recommended 'consideration' of the westward position.¹⁶ It rapidly triumphed, the north side position becoming virtually extinct. At the same time liturgical interest became more popular among Evangelicals under the leadership of Colin Buchanan, subsequently Bishop of Aston and of Woolwich, a keen advocate of the parish communion.¹⁷ In due course the Grove Booklets on Ministry and Worship, many of them by Buchanan, became the premier guides to liturgical matters for the Church of England as a whole. Liturgical renewal, shorn of its objectionable doctrinal implications, became entirely acceptable to Anglican Evangelicals.

The liturgical movement also made a major impact on the Free Churches. It spread there in diffuse ways, but was already strong by the later 1960s and continued to influence the churches thereafter. Its hallmark was greater formality. Although its tendency towards a higher churchmanship was in some tension with the populist instincts of Evangelical Nonconformity, several aspects were evident in the churches I visited. The first aspect can be summed up as greater structure. One typical reflection of the insistence of the liturgical movement on the solidarity of the people of God in worship was the practice of the congregation standing for the entry of the minister, sometimes preceded by a layperson carrying a Bible to the pulpit. Prayers requiring the congregation to respond by repeating a phrase, which I encountered at a Northampton Baptist church in 1970, were another symptom.¹⁸ Set prayers that were read, rather than extempore prayers, were a more common feature. At two East Anglian Free Churches visited in 1969, for example, the General Confession was read.¹⁹ Denominational publications such as, among the Baptists, E. A. Payne and S. F. Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Public Worship* (1960), encouraged this practice. Repositioning the main prayer after the sermon as a medium of congregational response was another characteristic sign of concern for structure. This, for instance, was the way in which George Beasley-Murray, principal of Spurgeon's College, preferred to conduct services, as I witnessed in Cambridge in 1968.²⁰ Liturgical renewal also led to more distinctive 'High Church' customs infiltrating into Nonconform-

16 C. J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 164.

17 Colin O. Buchanan, *Patterns of Sunday Worship*, Grove Booklets on Ministry and Worship 9 (Bramcote, Notts: Grove Books, 1972), p. 8.

18 S, 27 September 1970.

19 S, 22 June 1969.

20 S, 24 November 1968.

ity. In some churches there was a formal offertory, in which the elements for communion were taken in procession together with the people's financial gifts to the minister at the Lord's table, a standard Anglo-Catholic practice at which Evangelical Anglicans baulked.²¹ In others, later in the century, there was recitation of the Apostles' Creed, traditionally seen as a fetter on biblical thinking.²² Although the offertory and creed were items that I observed later, fresh elements of structure were already apparent in churches by the 1960s.

A second feature marking the permeation of the influence of the liturgical movement may be called clericalism. Among Evangelicals, though not in other segments of the church, a higher understanding of the status of the minister was associated with liturgical renewal. The more distinct role for the ordained was expressed in dress. In the Church of England, some Evangelicals, especially of the more open variety, started to wear not the traditional black scarf over the surplice but a coloured stole. Some Nonconformists were eventually to copy them, as at New Milton Baptist Church, Hampshire, in 1979.²³ More common, however, was the wearing of a gown, sometimes with academic hood and preaching tabs. Other characteristic expressions were the use of 'you' rather than 'us' in the benediction, so creating a gulf between minister and people, and raising the hand at the same time, long customary among Methodists and Presbyterians but not in denominations with lower traditions. Most striking over the course of time, however, was the willingness of ministers to pronounce a formal assurance of forgiveness, the equivalent of the Anglican absolution, again addressing the members of the congregation as 'you' rather than 'us'. 'Receive forgiveness', declared an Oxford Baptist minister in 1999.²⁴ 'By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, be assured that your sins are forgiven', said the minister of a Welsh Presbyterian church in the following year.²⁵ Ministers were, on this understanding, different from their congregations: they possessed particular 'authority'. This was a symptom of what may justly be termed 'clericalism'.

In the third place, as in the Parish and People movement, so among Evangelicals, communion changed its character. It had been normal in the Free Churches since early in the twentieth century, for health reasons, to have separate pieces of bread and individual communion cups. The liturgical movement, however, encouraged the use of a single loaf and a common cup as expressions of unity. They were gradually introduced into the communion service, often alongside rather than replacing the other form. By 2005, for example, there was a single large white loaf at Chichester Baptist Church, though gluten-free wafers were also available.²⁶ Among Baptists, but not among Congregationalists, it had long been customary for deacons rather than the minister to offer prayers of thanksgiving at the Lord's table. Another change in the observance of communion was

21 S, 18 July 1999.

22 S, 25 October 1998.

23 S, 5 August 1979.

24 S, 18 July 1999.

25 S, 23 January 2000.

26 S, 2 January 2005.

therefore the taking over of the task in some congregations by the minister.²⁷ Most significant, however, was the transformation of communion from a separate service into an integrated part of the main service, a general trend. The new practice was first introduced at Stirling Baptist Church on 1 April 1979, and, though at first it remained exceptional, integrated communion became the sole pattern there from the late 1980s. At first care was taken in many congregations to invite believers to participate, a type of fencing of the table to protect it from unworthy participants. Gradually, however, that limitation was forgotten, and participation was allowed by anyone present, including newcomers with no apparent Christian commitment and the very young. Some churches, though usually those on the broadest fringe of Evangelicalism, frankly accepted this state of affairs by inviting all, and not just believers, to receive the elements. This development totally altered the character of the occasion. From being a closed world for the local fellowship of the strongly committed, communion had become an open event which some ministers, according to the evidence of their exhortations, hoped would be a converting ordinance. Evangelical Nonconformists now observed something very like a parish communion.

Ecumenical contact also allowed the percolation of higher church elements into Evangelical worship. The period coincided with the rise of participation by Evangelicals in the ecumenical movement. Down to the mid-1960s they had commonly looked askance at aspirations after church unity, but, though some remained aloof after 1965, most became cautiously involved, at least in local councils of churches. At joint services Evangelicals were exposed to different styles of worship and in discussion they began to see the point of behaviour they had once shunned. Churches which had previously ignored the ecclesiastical year gradually began to incorporate certain of its elements. Christmas and Easter had long been recognised, but increasing attention was paid to them. The Easter acclamation, 'Christ is risen / Alleluia!', for example, was sometimes introduced.²⁸ More radical was the steady growth of references to Advent, Epiphany and Lent. The process was fostered by the use of the lectionary, drawn up by the interdenominational Joint Liturgical Group, first established in 1963.²⁹ Because the lectionary specified scriptural readings in accordance with the church year, it moulded themes of worship around the Christian seasons. By the time of the introduction of the *Methodist Worship Book* in 1999, there was provision within it for marking the forehead with ashes on Ash Wednesday and the exaltation of the cross on Good Friday.³⁰ At the start of the same century these very practices had been denounced as 'popish errors' and had sometimes provoked Evangelical-

27 S, 7 September 1969.

28 S, 4 April 1999.

29 J. R. K. Fenwick and B. D. Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Twentieth Century Liturgical Movement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), p. 92.

30 Norman Wallwork, 'Developments in Liturgy and Worship in Twentieth-Century Protestant Nonconformity', in Alan P. F. Sell and Anthony R. Cross (eds), *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p. 129.

cal riots. Even if few Evangelical congregations now adopted these particular customs, the tendency was to assimilate more of what other Christians had traditionally observed.

A major consequence of ecumenical contact was, in fact, a willingness among Evangelicals to borrow from Roman Catholics. The process started with the vogue around 1970 for *Prayers of Life* by Michel Quoist, a chaplain in the Catholic diocese of Lyons.³¹ Simple unadorned expressions of how life really was, these frank texts seemed to breathe fresh life into addressing the Almighty. Prayers by mediaeval and post-Reformation Catholic saints began to appear: not surprisingly, perhaps, the prayer of St Richard of Chichester at Chichester Baptist Church in 1979; more unexpectedly, the prayer of St Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, at a notably conservative Evangelical Baptist church in Cheltenham the year before.³² High Church words of administration also crept into communion. By 1990 an Edinburgh Baptist church was using the words 'The body of Christ, broken for you' and 'The blood of Christ, shed for you', which might naturally be interpreted as implying the real presence of Christ in the elements.³³ Prayers edged towards intercession for the dead, though usually concentrating on giving thanks for the lives of those who had died. The closest to actual prayer for the departed was at a broad-minded Methodist/United Reformed Church in the south of England in 2005. The phrase used was 'commending into your eternal care those who have died'.³⁴ By then there were many other indications of the assimilation of Catholic influence: the anthem *Ave Verum Corpus* at a Cornish Methodist church; holding up Mary the mother of Christ as an example in a Scottish Baptist church; and prayer there for Catholics on the death of Pope John Paul II.³⁵ Inherited anti-Catholic inhibitions were steadily eroded. Direct ecumenical contact reinforced the thrust of the liturgical movement, pushing Evangelical worship towards a higher churchmanship.

The fascination of the period, however, lies partly in the circumstance that this trend, largely in the direction of formality, coincided with an even stronger impulse in the opposite direction, towards informality. This process was what may be called an expressive revolution, a dimension of a wider process in society at large that has been described by that phrase.³⁶ Instead of keeping their feelings to themselves, worshippers increasingly expressed themselves in services. This trend has roots in the so-called expressivism that remoulded Western art and literature in the early twentieth century – as in the architecture of the Modern movement or the fiction of Kafka. In Britain its pioneers were the Bloomsbury Group, and the novels of Virginia Woolf well illustrate its ethos. This

31 S, 29 March 1970; 7 November 1971.

32 S, 7 January 1979; 23 July 1978.

33 S, 12 August 1990.

34 S, 24 July 2005.

35 S, 10 July 2005; 13 December 1998; 3 April 2005.

36 Bernice Martin, *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), chap. 2.

cultural mood, originally confined to a small elite, first became a popular phenomenon in the 1960s, represented at the extreme by the unrestrained self-expression of drug, sex and rock 'n roll. Individuals were called on to 'let it all hang out', to display the undifferentiated mixture of thought and feeling that seethes beneath the surface of the human personality. The tide of postmodernism in the late twentieth century can legitimately be seen as the intellectual formulation of this social phenomenon. This fresh idiom, reinforced by other changes, affected all spheres of life in Britain, including worship. Evangelical churches were encouraged by a succession of organisations – Church Growth, Willow Creek, Saddleback – to put as few obstacles as possible in the path of potential converts, and so to adapt to contemporary culture. Deliberate action by many churches therefore hastened what was in any case happening, an accommodation of worship to prevailing idioms in the host culture.

A clear instance was the spread of informal dress. Suits, white shirts and ties were still normal church wear for men in the 1960s. By the 1990s even stewards taking the offering had discarded the suit and tie in favour of open neck and shirt sleeves. Young men were allowed to sport baseball caps and other headgear in church, a shocking breach of the dress code of their elders. On 4 July 2004 the minister in a distinguished English Baptist church wore a ring in his left ear. Another, and generally earlier, phenomenon was the disappearance of the use of the seventeenth-century language of 'Thee' and 'Thou' in prayer. This alteration was a natural corollary of the adoption of modern-language Bibles, but the sacredness of prayer dictated the retention of the customary form of address in many churches for a considerable time. I was still noting 'you' as relative rarity in 1969; but by 2000 'Thou' had become very uncommon indeed. Contemporary language in prayer was also fostered by liturgical renewal, and it has to be recognised that some of the developments in worship were equally the results of the liturgical movement and of the expressive revolution. Both, for example, encouraged the laying on of hands. The act was a formal recognition of the proper ecclesiastical channels for the transmission of spiritual influence, an imitation of High Church practice. At the same time it was a way of seeking the blessing of the Holy Spirit, an expression of the deepest feelings of all concerned. In general, however, the expressive revolution pointed in fresh directions, away from the structured and the traditional and towards the casual and the novel. What were its dimensions?

In the first place there was social change. The late twentieth century witnessed a transformation in the role of women. Inevitably the churches were deeply affected. At the start of the period Free Church communion services provided a reminder of the balance of authority between the sexes. A row of exclusively male deacons in sober suits would assemble alongside the minister facing the congregation. Any women deacons, such as the two out of ten at Broadmead Baptist Church, Northampton, in 1969, were an exception.³⁷ Hats were still com-

37 S, 7 September 1969.

mon for women in the late 1960s. There was an intriguing survival of this custom at a Carmarthen chapel in 1990, when, on Sisterhood Sunday, a woman appeared in the pulpit as the preacher wearing a black felt hat.³⁸ There were, however, signs of a growing awareness of the changing role of women. In 1978 an intercessory prayer at Stirling was devoted to women.³⁹ In 1990 Simon the Pharisee was denounced in an Edinburgh sermon (by a woman) as a 'sexist'.⁴⁰ In 1998 motherhood was treated at Stirling as an exemplification of the spiritual journey.⁴¹ Gender-inclusive language came into fashion. The need to avoid male pronouns for human beings in general was one of the salient changes between the *Alternative Service Book* of 1980 and *Common Worship* of 2000 in the Church of England. The Methodists went so far as to refer to 'God our Mother' at one point in their *Worship Book* of 1999.⁴² Feminist consciousness had made headway in the churches.

The actual role of women in the services made equivalent advances. They already occasionally read the notices and offered prayer in the late 1960s, but both practices became much more common as the century wore on. Reading the scripture lesson became almost a female prerogative. On five successive Sundays during the summer of 1998 at different Free Churches in England and Wales, a woman took the Bible reading. A crucial breakthrough came with the ordination of women to priest's orders in the Church of England in 1994. Previously, women could be prominent, but had their limitations. Thus at a Bristol parish church in 1978, a woman dressed in surplice and stole led the whole service, but at the absolution referred to 'us', not 'you'. She lacked the authority of a presbyter to pronounce that the sins of others were forgiven. By 2005, however, nearly one-fifth of Anglican clergy were women, and, notwithstanding the principled resistance from the conservative Evangelicals of Reform, many were Evangelicals. There had, of course, long been female ministers in the Free Churches, but they had been far less likely to be welcomed to congregations than their male counterparts. Although that feeling still lingered in certain places at the end of the period, women were coming forward for ministry in large numbers. In 1998, 44% of the first-year intake at London Bible College were female.⁴³ Evangelical women could increasingly express themselves in worship.

A second factor, parallel to the coming forward of women, was the rise to prominence of young people and their culture. In an earlier day, churches had looked askance on the young. In 1960, for instance, the deacons of an East Midlands Baptist Church approved a youth weekend 'with the proviso that skiffle

38 S, 8 July 1990.

39 S, 26 November 1978.

40 S, 12 August 1990.

41 S, 13 December 1998.

42 Wallwork, 'Liturgy and Worship', p. 129.

43 Ian Randall, *Educating Evangelicalism: The Origins and Development of London Bible College* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 287.

should not be used at Sunday services'.⁴⁴ The prominence of pop music in the lives of many of the younger generation, however, meant that if they were to be reached in evangelism, there had to be concessions to their preferences. Occasional youth services, often using the Church Pastoral Aid Society's *Youth Praise*, were launched. *Youth Praise*, for example, replaced the denominational hymn book at a Congregational evening service in Southampton in 1971.⁴⁵ Churches started to permit their own pop groups, choruses from *Youth Praise* began to infiltrate into ordinary services and the compositions of Graham Kendrick became popular. Children, too, enjoyed choruses. At annual services marking their summer holiday clubs, simple upbeat songs were tolerated that would have been unacceptable on other occasions.⁴⁶ From these initial footholds, a new musical idiom gradually gained ground in the churches.

As the young of the 1960s became the middle-aged of the 1980s and after, they naturally wanted their own taste to occupy a more prominent place in worship. Older guitar players, as at Knutsford Methodist Church, Cheshire, in 2004, led the singing.⁴⁷ The new mode was consolidated in fresh song books such as *Mission Praise* (1983), which actually drove out the denominational hymn book in many an Evangelical congregation. Organ playing and singing in parts faded away. Choirs were disbanded or else confined to those eligible for Saga holidays. Thus at Redruth Methodist Church in Cornwall in 2004 there were as many as twenty-seven choir members, but all except one were over the age of fifty.⁴⁸ Younger people had in most places won the battle for the song against the hymn, the guitar against the organ. It was significant that when the worship leader at Stirling Baptist Church in 2005 announced that the congregation was about to sing a 'Golden Oldie', he meant not a classic hymn by Watts or Wesley but 'At your feet we fall', composed in 1982.⁴⁹

Technological change, in the third place, created alterations in the style of services. In many churches, though not in some of the poorer congregations, technical innovations facilitated the process of musical adaptation. The earliest instruments other than organs were normally basic guitars, as strummed by folk singers. That was true of the accompaniment to a duet sung at an Oxford Baptist church in 1969.⁵⁰ Other instruments could be added, as at Stirling in 1980, when a group of five musicians consisted of two singers together with a guitarist, a pianist and a player of the castanets.⁵¹

During the 1980s, however, electric instruments were often introduced: electric guitars and keyboards. Drums frequently joined them, and sometimes flute,

44 Bebbington, *Queensberry Street*, p. 51.

45 S, 31 October 1971.

46 E.g. S, 12 August 1990.

47 S, 14 November 2004.

48 S, 28 November 2004.

49 S, 3 April 2005.

50 S, 7 December 1969.

51 S, 19 March 1980.

violin or saxophone. To amplify the music, elaborate sound equipment was often bought. The sound booth could become a focus for male bonding within a congregation, for it was a last field in which men generally possessed the upper hand. The result was a huge increase in the volume of the music, often to the discomfort of the elderly. A further consequence was a change in the style of praise. The worship group at the front, equipped with instruments and microphones, represented the performers. The congregation, as at a pop concert, might sing along or not, according to its whim. At many services congregational participation in the singing became minimal.

Technical change had other dimensions, however, affecting the visual as well as the aural. The first use of overhead projectors in worship, as opposed to their employment at other church events, that I observed was in 1978, at Queensberry Street Baptist Church, Old Basford, Nottingham.⁵² Soon screens were acquired, often to the aesthetic detriment of the building. Overheads were eventually, in the richer congregations, superseded by Powerpoint. With either, the words of the songs could be read by members of the congregation when they raised their eyes. There were two crucial consequences. There was no longer any need for a hymn or song book, whether denominational or other; and the hands of worshippers were free, so that they could be used for self-expression. Technical change also ushered in tape/slide presentations, videos and films. Promotional visual material from TEAR Fund, missionary societies or Alpha, which once would have been deployed outside a service, was increasingly located within an act of worship. The visual could also be used for notices, sermon outlines and themes for meditation. New technical aids, furthermore, were not confined to large congregations. Taped music was invaluable for reinforcing singing in small churches, as in a city-centre congregation of only fifteen in Preston in 2004.⁵³ Technology, then, made an enormous impact during the period, greatly enhancing the variety of worship.

Change in spirituality, fourthly, was a major agent of transformation. One of the most potent motors of development in worship was the charismatic movement. 1965 was the year when the first British charismatic periodical, *Renewal*, started to appear.⁵⁴ Where charismatic experience remoulded a congregation, worship was revolutionised. Most obviously, hands were raised in worship. It was intriguing to visit a Baptist church in Nottingham regularly and watch the increase in the number of individuals raising their hands: 2 in 1978, 8 in 1988, 20 at the start of 1989 and 30 at the end of the year.⁵⁵ *Renewal* never took over the whole church, and the number of hands raised fell away afterwards. Elsewhere there were other distinctive fruits of charismatic renewal. At a chapel in Wales in 1989 there was singing in the Spirit, the gentle use of tongues for congregational

52 S, 13 August 1978.

53 S, 10 October 2004.

54 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 230.

adoration.⁵⁶ At a Scottish church in 2003 there was a word of knowledge. The pastor explained that he knew there were individuals present with particular problems – a fear of death, bowel cancer and so on – that needed prayer counselling.⁵⁷ Renewal brought ways all its own.

The growth of charismatic phenomena was propagated by a succession of agencies: the Fountain Trust, Dales Week, John Wimber and his Vineyard churches. Perhaps most influential, however, was Spring Harvest, a week-long training conference that from 1979 brought together charismatics and non-charismatics. It ensured that styles of worship associated with renewal penetrated far beyond the movement's immediate constituency. A local preacher at a Penzance Methodist church in 2004 referred to being asked at Spring Harvest what gives us the 'wow' factor.⁵⁸ Many Evangelicals brought back to their home congregations the 'wow' factor that they had discovered at the conference. Consequently non-charismatic churches were encouraged to change their ways. An Edinburgh Baptist church, for example, had specific prayer to the Holy Spirit at its evening service in 1988.⁵⁹ Without the influence of renewal, that invocation would have been unthinkable. So there was sanction in transformed spirituality for much of the alteration that took place during the period.

Cultural change, in the fifth place, ushered in new developments. The shift towards informality of the late twentieth century reflected the broader remoulding of Western civilisation during the period. Whether in the media or in historiography, the use of the body moved to the centre of popular preoccupations. It was so in worship too. The raising of the hands, for example, was a symptom of the fresh stress on the physical. The posture of the body, too, was modified. Since at least the early nineteenth century the standard custom had been to stand for song and to sit or kneel for prayer. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, with the introduction of many choruses, it became common to ask the congregation to remain seated for some of them. Eventually, as the new technology was brought in, it became usual again to stand for most or all of the singing, but in a different way from what had been customary. The new pattern consisted of blocs of music, which I first noted in 1978, in which the worshippers remained standing for several songs at a stretch.⁶⁰ During these periods, the body was free to respond to the rhythm, the content and the spirit of the music. Prayer, which was often interspersed between the songs, was now undertaken while the congregation stood. Other physical expressions came into vogue: dance, mime, humorous skits and greetings by handshake and hug. Actions, and specially clapping, were frequently started first with the children, who were allowed to behave differently,

55 S, 13 August 1978, 10 July 1988, 1 January 1989, 31 December 1989.

56 S, 2 July 1989.

57 S, 16 March 2003.

58 S, 21 November 2004.

59 S, 13 November 1988.

60 S, 13 August 1978.

but then were taken up by the whole congregation. The body as well as the mind was drawn into the worship experience.

Another way in which a concern with the physical came to the fore related to people's sense of a lack of wholeness. Healing services were introduced, specially where charismatic influence was strong. Those who were suffering from illness were encouraged to seek a cure from Christ himself. These occasions were not simply prayers for healing, which had long been common, but rather entailed prayer counselling, that is spiritual guidance with the laying on of hands, usually at the end of services at the front of the worship area. I first witnessed this style at a partly charismatic Nottingham church in 1988, when seven of the eight prayer counsellors raised their hands in praise.⁶¹ Often the problems addressed were psychological difficulties as well as physical ailments, for the human being was characteristically treated as a psychosomatic whole. The consequence was to alter the received pattern of Evangelical worship. The traditional mode had assumed the absolute priority of the spiritual over the physical. The newer style rejected that organising principle, choosing to put much greater emphasis on the physical.

Another feature of the age, sixthly, was the rise of the visual relative to the verbal. Children preferring television to books constituted one telltale symptom, but the rapid progress of information technology strengthened the trend over time. Devotion to the film and the film star was another aspect of the phenomenon in society at large. It was echoed in church by the replacement of sermon allusions to literature, common in the 1960s, by references to films, sometimes entailing the display of clips on screens during services. Much else in worship reflected the change. It is true that two visual features, once excluded from Evangelical buildings as idolatrous, had been admitted well before 1965. Flowers had been generally acceptable since the 1880s, though as late as 1967, when visiting a Strict Baptist chapel in Worthing, I was given, as a teenager, a tract devoted to denouncing flower displays in church. The other acceptable item was a cross (never crucifix) displayed in the building, the first instance of which in a Baptist church was reputedly the one erected at Mare Street, Hackney, immediately after the Second World War.⁶² Other visible features, however, made their entrance only in the late twentieth century. Banners bearing pictures or signs in needlework, collage or other media were originally generated by charismatic renewal. Still, in 1990, a charismatic congregation in the East Midlands had two of its four banners referring to the Holy Spirit.⁶³ By that time, however, banners were common in Evangelical churches of nearly any description. Candles were widely adopted during the 1990s at the same time as they became popular in gift shops. Sometimes, as at a North Welsh Presbyterian church in 2000, they

61 S, 10 April 1988.

62 Information from the late Rev. C. M. Moore-Crispin, once minister of the church.

63 S, 22 July 1990.

were lit throughout the service to symbolise the light of Christ. Most frequently there were Advent candles, with one lit by a child on each of the Sundays before Christmas, often at considerable fire risk. The sign of the cross, long regarded as Catholic superstition, crept into some quarters, though most Evangelical Anglicans still preferred to avoid it in absolution or benediction. A cross, for example, was traced in the foreheads of infants at dedication services in Stirling Baptist church from 1997. The service had become a dry christening. Other symbolic actions were introduced, specially at the end of the period. At the start of 2005, for instance, members of a Chichester congregation wrote prayers responding to the Indian Ocean tsunami and filed forward to stick them on the front wall of the church. An appreciation of symbol became much more widespread.

Corresponding to the rise of the visual was the decline of the verbal. This process was by no means absolute. According to my samples, the average length of the sermon in the late 1960s was 24 minutes and in the late 1990s was still 23 minutes, virtually unchanged. Nevertheless the sermon was far less of a work of art. It was often delivered not from a pulpit but from a lower platform or reading desk. Preachers were less declamatory and more chatty. And sermons could be broken up into two, three or four sections, no doubt to cater for the assumed shorter concentration span of the hearers. Where the Bible reading was not prescribed by the liturgy, furthermore, it was frequently abbreviated, incorporated within the sermon or else omitted entirely. Likewise at the communion service in the Free Churches the words of institution might be left out. At the same time tolerance of ungrammatical songs grew. In the popular piece 'Lord, I come to you' there occurred the subject phrase 'The knowledge of your love as you live in me' without any following verb or complement. Spelling on display screens became erratic. One instance from 2005 was the presentation of 'cords of sinfulness' as 'chords'.⁶⁴ Punctuation often disappeared entirely. While this development was primarily a result of declining educational standards, it was also something more. The word had lost part of its sacredness. The visual had risen in esteem but the verbal had declined.

In the seventh place there was the advance of the ideal of authenticity. To be spontaneous, genuine, laying all bare, carried increasing cachet. So the cult of authenticity gained a major place in worship. Its hallmark was the use of the first person singular. Those leading worship, representing the whole congregation, had traditionally used 'we' in prayer. In 1989 I registered a deacon at a Nottingham church saying 'my' in a prayer at the Lord's table, though this usage may have been little more than a slip. That drop soon turned into a flood. By 1998 it was common for ministers to employ 'I'. Often associated with an intensification of the voice, it was meant to express ardour of feeling. Lay worship leaders, often lacking experience of taking congregational prayers, did the same even more frequently. The rise of the worship leader can itself be seen as a way of making

64 S, 20 February 2005.

services more authentic. Instead of a single preacher imposing his ways on the church, members of the congregation could take the initiative in singing and prayer. In the earlier phase of this development, in the 1970s, the worship leader conducted only about one third of the service and was not normally a musician. From the 1980s, however, a musician frequently led nearly all of the service except the sermon slot. Wishing to demonstrate their immersion in the worship experience, and no doubt moved by the music, leaders would often close their eyes, not while praying (as was traditional), but while singing (which could risk collisions with music stands). The congregation, too, was to enjoy a glow of authenticity. Thus separate periods of music began to be provided, distinguished as praise and worship. Praise was loud and celebratory; worship was quieter and more reflective. The congregation could also show its approval of songs or presentations by applause, something totally prohibited by the conventions of the 1960s. The barrier was first breached by applause at the enthronement of Robert Runcie as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1980, when the choir broke into clapping and the congregation joined in. Evangelical congregations followed after some delay. At Stirling Baptist Church a superb solo in September 1988 elicited no applause, but a year later, in September 1989, a duet and trio of lower quality were followed by spontaneous clapping.⁶⁵ Other instances of allowing greater licence to the congregation included the singing of 'Happy birthday to you' to the minister.⁶⁶ Worshippers were more able to show how they really felt.

Some of the biggest shifts towards genuineness were in the area of prayer. There was decreasing use, especially by laypeople, of a concluding formula such as 'in the name of Jesus Christ' or even, in some cases, 'Amen', so that it was difficult to know when a prayer was over. Again, instead of two long prayers of praise and intercession, perhaps three and five minutes respectively, there were often short, sharp prayers, frequently linking musical items. Thus in a service at Stirling in 1998 there were six prayers, but each was tiny, of one minute or less.⁶⁷ Such brief contributions were sufficient to express the sentiments of the moment. More formal prayers such as those associated with the offering could disappear entirely. There was a serious consequence of this shift in practice. Intercession often became drastically curtailed. There was frequently no prayer for anyone beyond the bounds of the congregation. At some services there was no intercessory prayer whatsoever. Those with whom there was no personal link ranked low on a scale of priorities determined by spontaneous inclination. The elevation of authenticity had its casualties.

There was, then, an expressive revolution that affected much of Evangelicalism in the period. Nevertheless there was also strong resistance within so diverse a movement. Each of the facets of the revolution had its determined opponents who would not change their ways. Thus women were not always given fuller scope. At an independent Brethren meeting at Chester in 2000, the four

65 S, 4 September 1988, 24 September 1989.

66 S, 25 February 1990.

men sat round a table for open Bible study while the three women occupied seats behind them, singing the hymns but not otherwise uttering a word.⁶⁸ Neither were young people consistently given their head. At a Cornish Methodist chapel evening service in a rear hall in 2004, all twelve present except the pianist were elderly. The traditional order of service included prayers with the response, 'Lord, keep us faithful'.⁶⁹ Technology had no impact on some. The assembly of the Church of God in Kirkintilloch, Scotland, observed in 2000 a form of the Lord's Supper that was modelled as far as possible on the details recorded in the New Testament. The elders of the Church's assemblies from all over the world met every two years to ensure that worship conformed to any new light discerned on the teaching of scripture. The oldest pattern of worship was the ideal; newfangled technology was anathema.⁷⁰ Change in spirituality was also resisted. At St Ebbe's Church, Oxford, a bastion of the Reform movement within the Church of England, there was in 2001 an up-to-date atmosphere with an immensely flourishing student ministry, but not a single individual raised a hand. A resolute form of confessional Calvinism prohibited specifically charismatic practices.⁷¹ The physical was not necessarily respected. At Bethel Strict Baptist Chapel, Luton, in 1994, there was a devotion to patterns of Dissenting worship derived from the eighteenth century that emphasised the spiritual nature of the local church. Nobody was allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper who was not a member of the church.⁷² Nor was the visual consistently preferred to the verbal. In 2000 a Chester congregation affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches possessed a flipchart for writing words rather than drawing illustrations, displayed not banners but posters carrying scriptural texts and recited an extract from the Heidelberg Catechism.⁷³ And authenticity was not a universal motif. Instead discipline could prevail. At congregations of the Free Church of Scotland, after much debate during the 1990s, it was settled that there must never be more than four sung items in a service; and of course the sung items continued to be unaccompanied metrical psalms. These cameos illustrate that the process of change could be resisted, and that in some restricted circles it could be resisted successfully.

Notwithstanding the persistence of congregations where change was not embraced, the bulk of the evidence points to sweeping alterations in public worship among Evangelicals between 1965 and 2005. The traditional pattern was already being eroded in the 1960s by the impact of the liturgical movement. Prayer Book worship started to be varied in the Church of England, and there was an injection of elements of greater dignity into Free Church services. This imitation

67 S, 25 October 1998.

68 S, 16 January 2000.

69 S, 21 November 2004.

70 S, 17 December 2000.

71 S, 11 March 2001.

72 S, 7 August 1994.

73 S, 16 January 2000.

of selected High Church practices continued under the influence of greater ecumenical contact for the rest of the century. More radical, however, was the impact of the expressive revolution, leading for the most part not towards greater formality but towards less of it. This process had firm social foundations in the second wave of feminism and the spread of youth culture. It drew on new technology and the currents of spirituality associated with charismatic renewal. And it was rooted in the cultural trends of the time, particularly the growing prominence given to the physical, the visual and the authentic. These characteristics largely superseded the leading features of Evangelical worship at the opening of the period. The priority of the spiritual gave way to an equal emphasis on the physical. The logocentricity of earlier times was drastically modified by the rise of the visual. And the old regularity of Evangelical services was undermined by the quest for authenticity. Each aspect of contemporary culture subverted a typical aspect of the older paradigm. The consequence, in most places, was a transition from one style of Evangelical public worship to another.

Abstract

Evangelicals altered their patterns of public worship drastically between 1965 and 2005. In the late 1960s worship was set apart as spiritual, there was a focus on the word and services were marked by regularity. The liturgical movement encouraged greater formality, more clericalism, less restricted access to communion services, ecumenical borrowings and an erosion of anti-Catholic inhibitions. More influential, however, was an expressive revolution fostering greater informality. Women became more prominent, the taste of young people came to the fore, technical equipment was introduced, charismatic renewal made an impact, the physical came into vogue, the visual was upgraded relative to the verbal and there was a rise of the ideal of authenticity. Despite stern resistance to change in some quarters, there was in most congregations a transition from one style of worship to another.

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