

Latimer Fellowship of New Zealand

Communion in Crisis: the Way Forward for Evangelicals National Latimer Conference - 15-16 May 2006

1. Evangelicals : Have we a place?

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Some would say that the word 'evangelical' has ceased to have any helpful meaning. On the world scene this may be so. But it is a noble word with a noble history, and I think that we may still use it in contexts, such as this conference.

Who and what are the evangelicals?

I do not mean by it all who may be called evangelical, or even all who may wish to be called evangelical. I want to use it for our purposes with both an historical and a theological explanation. I intend in the first instance to refer to Anglican evangelicals. There are of course plenty of evangelicals who are not Anglican, but this conference concerns the place of evangelicals in the Anglican Communion and it is fair to restrict it in this way.

If this is so, it is clear that I am referring to that movement within the Church of England, beginning in the eighteenth century which took its shape from the Reformation, the Puritans and the Pietists, and gave itself especially, but not exclusively, to the task of evangelism. In one sense, its founding Father and great saint is Thomas Cranmer. Its luminaries were men and women such as the Wesley brothers, Whitfield, Simeon, Wilberforce, Newton, the Countess of Huntingdon, and the Clapham Sect. Its theology was distinguished by a commitment to the authority of Scripture above all, a keen sense and recognition of sin and guilt, the centrality of the penal substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, and the experience of conversion and assurance.

It embraced an eighteenth century version of the great Reformation watchwords, Christ alone, Scripture alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, to the glory of God alone.

It was a highly serious movement. Its adherents were active both to evangelistic mission and social action on behalf of the poor. It was committed to the Church of England, the Homilies, the Prayer Book and the Articles of Religion. From it came some of the greatest missionary movements that the Christian history has ever seen. It is indeed no accident that the first preaching of the gospel in New South Wales and the first preaching of the gospel in New Zealand were biblical expositions by Anglican evangelicals.

I suppose that in some ways it was akin to the low church movement, but it was not the same. Certainly, however, there has always been a preference for simplicity of worship, an emphasis on fellowship which spans denominations, a commitment to congregational singing of hymns and a willingness to be flexible about outward order in the interests of the gospel.

From its beginnings, it included both Calvinists and Arminians; but the Arminians were mainly with Wesley and the Calvinists were largely those who stayed in the church, believing with some reason that the theology of the Reformation as found in the thirty-nine articles favoured them. Nonetheless, I would say that the Arminians and Calvinists have worked together in this movement and it is large enough to contain both.

I have already mentioned both New South Wales and New Zealand and the Christian history which binds us together. It was, after all, the Anglican evangelical Samuel Marden who brought the gospel to this place from Sydney where he was a chaplain. I must apologise in advance for any errors I make about New Zealand, its history or culture. Naturally, as an Australian, I secretly admire all the New Zealand has achieved and what it stands for. But the admiration is secret; it is wrapped in a self-defensive blanket, and it may sometimes seem that I am careless of the things which I ought to know, enjoy and praise. Please make every allowance. After all, even I can see that you have a far better national anthem than we do!

Evangelical history has had its twists and turns. They seem to have had a massive impact on Victorian Britain and its colonial possessions. Their cause lapsed somewhat from the 1880s onwards as the Anglo-Catholic movement came into its own and as liberal views of scripture began to dominate the universities. It languished in the 1930s, but was reborn in the 1950s, and today in England at least is one of the most significant elements of the Church of England and the Church in Africa, Asia, South America and Australia too. You are not alone – you are part of a great movement in and beyond the Anglican Church.

Its regeneration was accompanied by an academic flourishing, so that the old charge that evangelicals are simplistic and even uneducated is completely untrue. On the other hand, like all vigorous movements it has also developed all sorts of emphases, variations and branches. There is no spokesperson for Evangelicalism, although I think that you could point to the fact that John Stott and Jim Packer are admired by evangelical Anglicans everywhere.

If you wanted to sum it all up, I guess you could say that the evangelicals of the Church of England have always been gospel people.

They put the gospel above the church; they see that the gospel is what the Bible is about; they understand the gospel to be a proclamation of Christ's Lordship in the power of the Spirit calling for submission in repentance and faith, bringing salvation from the guilt of sin and so freedom to live the Christian life and the promise of life eternal. They believe in the wrath to come, and do not accept universal salvation. They have been famously active in good works. A recent authority on the nineteenth century points to 'the transformation of English religion from faith to works by the Evangelical Revival.'¹

Relations with others

Evangelicals often make other Christians feel uncomfortable. They are enthusiastic. They have assurance which others read as overconfidence or even arrogance; they value fellowship above the denominational church; they do not assume that all who are baptised are necessarily saved; they appeal to the scriptures and the right of individual judgement; they engage in Christian witness at times and in ways which seem inopportune.

Many evangelicals (though not all) would say that they are evangelicals first and Anglicans second.

¹ Frank Field, reviewing F.Prochaska's book, 'Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: the Disinherited Spirit', in the *Spectator* March 4th, 2006 p40

The result is that many would say that evangelicals regard them as second class Christians, or not Christians at all. On the other hand, it is the favourite game of some to call evangelicals by abusive names such as 'fundamentalist' – a dangerous charge just now.

How many evangelicals are there? It depends where you are when you ask the question and who you include as evangelical! It would be fair to say that at least one third of Australia's active Anglicans are evangelical, for example. Of course the Diocese of Sydney is a big contributor to that number. But you must also remember that Melbourne has something like half of its church-goers in the evangelical camp and all the metropolitan Dioceses and some of the rural ones have an evangelical presence independent of Sydney. I believe that you could also point to Dioceses and indeed Provinces elsewhere in the world with a preponderance of evangelicals. Likewise in England, almost all of the biggest churches are evangelical (broadly speaking), and so too the theological colleges. Of course many of these evangelicals would also want to be known as charismatic. They are not proportionally represented in hierarchy of the Church in England.

On the other hand, in considerable parts of the Anglican Communion there has never been an evangelical influence or presence, or it has died out or even seceded. Alternatively the evangelicalism is present, but small in number and may even have become more charismatic than evangelical. The evangelicals seem to have seceded from ECUSA in the nineteenth century, and they seem to be relatively few in number in Canada. I know so little about the history of evangelicalism in New Zealand that I had better remain silent, apart from saying that I know that it has always existed and that it has brought forth some great children some of whom have been given to Australia and to the mission field. In any case, it remains an important and legitimate part of the Churches which have descended in some way from the Church of England. But what is to be its future? What is its place in the Anglican Communion and the churches which go to make it up?

The present crisis

I suppose that one way of answering this is to ask whether Christianity itself has a future in countries like New Zealand. Cullum Brown's book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, suggests that the marked decline of the mainstream churches in the UK has now reached the point where Christianity will cease to be a significant presence in those islands. Some forecast that only 1% of Britons will go to church by 2016. The situation in the UK parallels that in France and other European countries, in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Church going is in serious decline, and those who go to church are elderly. In New Zealand, according to the 2001 census as many as 26% of respondents claimed no religion, while a further 17.2% did not specify, making a total of 43.2%. The corresponding figures in Australia were 15.3% and 12.7%. It looks very much as though the triumph of secularism, predicted by the sociologists in the 1960s, has come to pass.

And yet, that judgement appears far too simplistic. Dr Kevin Ward of Knox College Dunedin has given us a learned account of the real situation in his inaugural lecture entitled, 'Is New Zealand's Future Churchless??'² In this interesting paper, Dr Ward makes the point that the census reply 'no religion' really means 'not connected to a Church' and that in fact many of the people who would answer in this way or by not specifying, would profess to be committed to spirituality rather than religion. In this analysis, the problem is not religion as such; it is belonging. In an age of individualism, long working hours and the entry of women into the work-force, voluntary organisations of all sorts are in trouble. In a most telling illustration, Dr Ward tells us that whereas in 1970, 400,000 New Zealanders were involved in Rugby, by 2000, the number was down to 120,000. Here is a religious decline of some magnitude!

² Dr Kevin Ward (www.schoolofministry.ac.nz)

The picture that emerges is of a religious society, but not a Christian one. Christianity is faced with two major problems in the drift from organised religion.

The first is that Christianity is in essence a revealed faith, not what you may call a natural one. Human beings are, if you like, naturally religious, naturally spiritual. But they are not naturally Christian. For the Christian faith to be sustained, it needs to be transmitted intentionally and adopted intentionally. The favoured ideas of much contemporary Christianity such as inclusiveness and tolerance will not hold and transmit the faith. We need to recognise its contours and its limits; we need to teach it; we need to know what the Bible says; we need to have some rudimentary account of Christian doctrine. Spirituality in what has been a Christian community will begin with Christian notions, such as the importance of Jesus, that God is personal, that there is an afterlife. But as time passes these notions will disconnect more and more from the original corpus of Christianity and a new and different religion will emerge.

That is, in some ways it will be different. I predict, however, that in other ways it will simply be the coming again of the old religious notions of paganism. There are only a certain number of ways of thinking about the world, our relationship to it and the spiritual forces which may or may not run it. Our natural ways of being religious will be revived; there will be a supermarket of beliefs; each individual will be responsible for his or her faith; truth will hardly matter. According to Professor Peter Jones, who has written extensively about these developments, we will resume our natural monistic view of the world in which all is spirit and in which there is not and cannot be a transcendent Creator.

The second problem for us is that there is no such thing as a churchless Christianity. We may suggest, for example, that the way forward for Christianity is simply to embrace the new interest in spirituality, to accept that it is going to be individualistic, to encourage people to create a faith which best suits them, and not to insist that such a faith includes the church.

As I have already said, however, Christianity is a revealed faith; we do not take it on our own terms but on its own terms. There are distinct limits to what is Christian and what is not. In Christianity, God is committed to truth and hence to the repudiation of error. We have never believed that Unitarianism or Arianism were compatible with Christianity. And without doubt it is a faith which as from its inception bound believers together and insisted that they minister to one another as members of what the New Testament calls, 'the Body of Christ'. In short Christianity cannot survive without 'church'.

Dr Ward is of the view that if the church is going to survive it is going to have to be very different. He outlines a three-fold strategy. First he suggests reforming the existing church and make it more effective. Second, he talks about revolution, or creating new forms of church. Third, he discusses resourcing, or the social and cultural role of the church.

He points out the limits of reform in that even effective churches will on the whole only reach those who have already some church in their personal history. To his mind, the churches of the revolutionary future are going to have to be 'marked with fluidity rather than solidity' (9). He describes the contemporary world with terms such as 'looser', 'less structured', 'less hierarchical', 'more fragmented', 'network society' and argues that churches are going to have to reflect this culture if they are to survive and embody faith: 'it is obvious that forms of church that effectively contextualise the Christian faith into this fluid and shifting culture will be markedly different from those that did so for a previous solid and stable culture.' (9)

I cannot do justice to his paper here, but he concludes by saying this: 'So to return to our original question of "is New Zealand's future churchless?" I hope that I have clearly articulated that I do not believe that this is our future. There will still be churches, but there will also be a wider and more diverse religiosity and spirituality outside the church, "churchless faith" beyond its control. The church,

however, can still have an important role resourcing that and seeking to give some shape to it. So it will not be a “church-less” society but it will be one with “less-church”, if I can reverse the order of the words. The church will be less; in its form being less institutional, in its role being less central, and its authority being less powerful. Learning how to function positively in this new social and cultural reality is I believe the central challenge we face. But I would also suggest that in the New Testament the church existed in a not dissimilar context and so we can learn much from a fresh reading of our central text.’ (13)

No doubt that Dr Ward and I would disagree about a number of important issues. I want argue that he is largely right in his analysis of the situation, but only partly right in his strategy.

Let me explain. First, I think that he is right to pour cold water on the view that secularism means the end of religion. What I would say is this, that the Enlightenment of the 18th century was premised on a denial of Christian claims and the central place of the Church in the community. Its assertions were at the same time denials of basic Christian claims. Since this denial was made in the name of human Reason, it seemed as though the triumph of Enlightenment thinking would be at the expense of all religion.

This now seems to be wrong. The Enlightenment succeeded in damaging the Christian religion, but it did not destroy the religious impulse of humanity. In the vacuum created by the decline of Christianity has come the revival, in modern forms, of paganism and Gnosticism. I want to stress the likely continuity between modern religious spirituality and the common religions of humanity. I also want to say, however, that in some way we must also challenge the Enlightenment still, and reassert the Christian view of God, humanity and the world.

Second, I think that he is right to suggest that the inherently churchly form of Christianity will survive in what may be called ‘liquid’ forms. Church will be rather different from what the outward appearance connotes today. It may meet on a different day of the week; it may not have a fixed liturgy; its ministry may be informal; its location may be non-ecclesiastical; its numbers may be small. It will have priest-less communion services.

But such meetings will have no connection with the Christian gospel unless they are self-consciously based on the gospel and the scriptures. Indeed the more ‘liquid’ the church in form, the more ‘solid’ will have to be the doctrinal basis. I am, of course, fully aware that this will make such culturally attuned churches also fundamentally counter-cultural. They will be living in a state of tension. I am also aware that this goes exactly opposite what we see happening in many mainline denominations, where we have an ever-solidifying way of doing church with an ever-liquid grasp of biblical teaching. We are conservative where we should be adventuresome, and adventuresome where we should be conservative.

The task of evangelicals

I want to argue that evangelicalism which is true to itself is ideally situated to be the form of church life which carries the gospel forward in to the next decades.

Consider some of the characteristic marks of evangelicalism. In the first place consider its doctrine of the church. It has been a constant criticism of evangelicals that we have no doctrine of the church – there is a great hole where one should exist. Supporting this charge is the undoubted fact that evangelicalism earns its keep by challenging the individual to give his or her life to Christ. Evangelical preachers are never content with the idea that church-going and participation in the sacraments is the key to salvation. They believe that it is quite possible for the unsaved person to hide in church, even to be a leading dignitary of the church and to have no personal and so saving faith. They therefore preach for conversion even in church and seek for personal testimony living relationship with the Lord.

At the heart of this alarming behaviour is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Classically, evangelicals are fearful of attempts made by us to justify ourselves. They are aware that it is often religion which provides the vehicle for self-justification and that it is quite easy for us to deceive others and deceive ourselves with the rituals of religion. In this they have scripture on side – we need only think of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. Evangelicalism is based on an Augustinian doctrine of sin (found of course in the Book of Common Prayer and the Articles) in which our inherent sinfulness is such that we cannot save ourselves – all our righteousness is as filthy rags.

When human inability to save becomes clear, faith alone and grace alone become the heart-beat of piety. Only through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross can there be forgiveness and redemption; only by abandoning all attempts, even religious attempts to win God's approval, can I gain access to him. Then I cast myself upon him for his mercy and forgiveness. Here is an experience, the experience of confidence in the presence of God, not based on anything good in us, but entirely on what is good in him and what he has done for us through Jesus. As Paul says: 'In Christ and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence' (Eph 2:12).

This confidence is based on the word of God which tells us about the gospel. We are persuaded of the truth of God's word by the Spirit of God. In particular the Spirit persuades us through the word that God loves us, unworthy as we are. From this point of view, an indispensable part of being converted is the awareness of the love of God for us, even as individuals: 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). In evangelical theology this awareness goes by the name of 'assurance'. It could be presumption if it is based faith without repentance; it could be superstition if it is not a trust in the word of God; it could be arrogance if it is actually self-confidence in the things of God; but it is a biblical, Holy Spirit gift, a wonderful transforming experience if it is a confidence in the Son of God and his all-sufficient death for us on the cross: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.'

It may be imagined that such assurance is naturally pietistic and private. The strange, paradoxical fact is that it is nothing of the sort. Those who have held this doctrine, those who have most clearly held to justification by faith have also proved to be outstandingly active in doing good works. Why is this? If we do good in order to justify ourselves, it is a natural tendency to define the good in a narrow way and to labour over it for the wrong reason. Once it is clearly established that we are not going to be judged on the good that we do, we are set free to swell the definition of the good and to set to with gratitude and joy.

As Frank Field says, 'The English recommitted themselves to Christianity because it became a way of life lived out within the family and then the wider community through a whole myriad of voluntary welfare bodies' (op.cit). The strange thing is that the preaching of justification by faith alone became the engine room of a vast reformation of manners and morals and hence of living conditions. This is powerful, Holy Spirit religion.

As a consequence of this, an unordained evangelical believer is just as likely to 'preach' as the ordained, that is, to share the gospel on an individual or even group basis as the ordained. The chief reason why evangelical churches have a tendency to grow is that they make it their aim to teach the Bible as God's word and to invite growth. But it is not just a matter of having a good child-care program and a large car park. The growth sought is a spiritual growth. It begins with an explanation of the Christian gospel and invites people to put their trust in Christ and to commit their lives to him. It looks for and expects Christian conversion. The reality of that conversion is measured by the obedience to the Lord which it produces. In other words, its pastoral care is 'transformationist.'

Furthermore, evangelicalism is not a priestly religion: it is a lay one. It is not believed that the priest has a unique prerogative in gospel work; nor does episcopal authority matter a great deal compared

with the need for people to come to know Christ. To the whole body has come gifts of the Spirit, not to a special group. Likewise, while the sacraments are cherished, they are subordinate to the word. The sacraments give an assurance of the presence of God, but only because they are dependent on the word of God, blessed by the Spirit of God. In an overly sacramental religion, the sacraments attempt to do the job of the word; they supplant the word rather than adorning and confirming the word. When the word disappears so does the assurance of access to God and a frenetic use of the sacraments will not make this good.

Where, then, is church in all this? A justification by faith which is against church, is not justification by faith. Our faith in God comes from the Spirit of God; the Spirit of God unites us with Christ; our union with Christ unites us indissolubly with all other believers. We are, 'all one in Christ Jesus'. That is to say, we are equally all one. The basis of our union with Christ is his blood shed for us, not any sense of inferiority or superiority; we all have equal access to our heavenly Father in the power of the Spirit. You cannot have God for your Father if the church is not your mother. Of course, as the New Testament teaches, there is an order of ministry within the church, and there are those who have a responsibility for oversight. The New Testament is not egalitarian in that sense. But, on the other hand, the whole body and not just some within it, is priestly.

The church of which I speak is the one, true church, the church to which all who belong to Christ belong, whether living or dead. We encounter this church in its earthly manifestation in a great cathedral congregation, in a megachurch, in a suburban gathering of fifty elderly saints, in a church whose label may be Anglican or Baptist or Methodist, or even when two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ on a hillside in China. We encounter it when believers assemble to meet Christ through his word and in the power of the Spirit. As Article 19 tells us, 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'

Over the centuries such churches have connected with each other in networks of believers called denominations, some of which are very ancient indeed. The networks function to guard and sustain and unite the churches. From such networks have come such useful developments as episcopacy, liturgies, buildings, rules and regulations, synods and the like. But they are not of the essence of the church; its life could be organised differently, and often is.

At the heart of this evangelical doctrine of the church, then, is what we may call 'communion' or 'fellowship'. Our communion with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, finds an answering expression in the fellowship we have with each other – a common sharing of Lord – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all and through all and in all. Such communion necessarily transcends denominational barriers as such, though our denominations may hinder, or channel, or provide boundaries for our experience of unity at various points.

If your doctrine of the church identifies denomination with church and if you believe that the Holy Communion constitutes church, and that episcopacy is essential to it, you may well regard this account as being highly deficient or even 'unanglican'. To say it, however, is not the same as to prove it. The evangelical church experience is based on the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments; it is congregational first before it is denominational; its buildings are designed for preaching rather than sacraments; its officials are ministers rather than priests; it reaches out easily to other Christians. As such it is flexible and open to innovation and this is the key element as we think of the future. It is rooted in the Anglican past; I believe it is going to be the Anglican future, if we are to have one.

If Dr Ward is right to think that that churches of the future will need to be flexible and open, and I think he is, then the evangelical doctrine of the church actually fosters churches which are more 'liquid' in form. Evangelical churches are more fit to be an instrument of mission in a less formal age, more accessible to outsiders, more fitted to the sharing of the gospel than our conventional churches. They major on relationships and fellowship. They are, to quote the Church of England language, 'fresh expressions of church'.

I would say to mainline church leaders, foster your evangelicals! I would say to evangelicals, be yourselves and work hard at drawing people to Christ through the word and in the fellowship of God's people. You have a way of doing things which will work in the twenty-first century. It actually reflects the beginnings of the church as we find it in the New Testament in a pagan and multicultural world. You have the capacity to be the future of the church.

And yet. You will remember that I have already raised the question of how such churches are going to retain their identity as Christian. Can they be so 'liquid' in form without also being 'liquid' in content? In his address, Dr Ward also mentions those churches which believe that the right strategy is 'to return to more traditional forms and the people will flock back'. For these he accepts the label 'fundamentalist' and the criticism that fundamentalism appeals by providing (false) certainty in an uncertain world. His only real critique, however, is that this appeal will not work: 'While attractive to some,' he writes, 'it is unlikely though that it will ever attract a majority in modern liberal democratic societies such as New Zealand, and is therefore an ultimately unhelpful response'. Given that Dr Ward does not believe that the churches on any strategy are going to achieve this sort of result, I am not sure why he thinks that this is in itself a damning criticism.

Now, I am not prepared to wear the label 'fundamentalist'. But I have more confidence in the potential of evangelical churches to be missional churches. On the other hand, I also believe that in order for the new expressions of church to mission effectively, they will need to be strongly biblical. They need to understand the faith and be able to promote the faith. They will need to preach the word of God and seek conversion. A mild and casual 'belonging' is not going to be enough. Preferably also they will need strong and fruitful connections to the mainstream churches, so that they are helped to retain the faith. Unfortunately, if the mainline churches either reject the new evangelical churches or if they themselves become radical theologically, the connection will be an unhelpful one. There will be great loss on both sides.

The communion crisis and evangelicals

You may be wondering what has happened to the topic of this conference, 'Communion in crisis: the way forward for evangelicals'. I want to say to you that we have not left it. I guess that most people would suggest that the phrase 'communion in crisis' is a reference to the present struggles in the Anglican Communion over the ethics of sexuality. But I want to put that crisis into a broader context, for whether or not Gene Robinson had been consecrated as the Bishop of New Hampshire, we would still have a crisis on our hands in the Communion. The crisis concerns the state of the churches in the West and the affect they have on the whole Communion of churches.

Put simply, the crisis is a missionary one. As I have already indicated the western churches face an unprecedented decline. This is true even in the USA where church going as a whole remains steady, but where 'mainline' churches are suffering signs of terminal decay. I have the impression that many in the UK are now alarmed as they consider the future of the Church of England. Certainly it is good to see real leadership from the Archbishop of Canterbury in the area of church planting and fresh expressions of church.

The decline of the churches is indissolubly linked to the state of the host culture. As we know, it is not only the churches which are suffering. The culture is hostile to belonging, hostile to authority, hostile to

the God of the Bible. Nothing here surprises: human beings left to our own devices are like that. The danger is, however, that the churches have become inculturated – perhaps corrupted by - the individualism and liberalism of the age. We have doubted the things about which we should be sure, and accepted without question the things which we should have doubted.

The result has been an astonishing change of mind about what constitutes sin and where God's authority is expressed. It has now become almost impossible even to say aloud what a mere twenty years ago were fundamental truths hardly worth saying because they were so evidently based on the teaching of the written word of God. On the other hand, habits of thought which owe more to secular philosophy than to God's word have been allowed to shape the church's teaching and practice. You need only ask what has happened to the doctrine of repentance in the modern church.

The sad truth, furthermore, is that where the church allows the culture to dominate its message, it falters in its missionary task. It is hard enough to be Christian and to maintain the churches in a culture which sees things so differently. But if experience and the pattern of the New Testament is anything to go by, the church goes forward not by acceding to those parts of the culture which are at odds with the Bible, but by resisting them, by being counter-cultural precisely at this point. Who would want to belong to a church which is so attuned to the culture that it abandons its foundation? Why would it not merely be a religious club?

We may illustrate this contention from the very heart of the gospel message itself. The religion of the ancient world – apart from Judaism – was 'multicultural'. There existed a supermarket of faiths, in which one could choose, but choice was not saying that others were wrong. The proclamation of Christ was offensive, deeply offensive, because it was singular. In accepting the Lordship of Christ you were accepting his sole rights over your life; more, you were abandoning all other gods and consigning them to their graves. 'There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...' (1 Tim 2:5). This is the true universalism of the gospel, that it exists for all and summons all to belief in the one and only Saviour. This gospel is deeply resistant to the idea that there are many ways to God and that Jesus is one of many saviours or manifestations of God. Jesus Christ is the only way to God. One of the glories of the Christian religion is that it is prepared to say what is wrong, as well as what is right.

Not surprisingly, when leaders of western churches pass through diocese which once were missionary but which are now flourishing independent works of God, and say that another religion is a valid way to God, the locals are outraged. It is their blood which has been spilled as a witness to the uniqueness of Christ; it is they who preach the gospel in the midst of a really hostile culture. The problem with the western church is that once having given them the gospel and the bible we now ourselves draw back from it when our own culture proves less than hospitable.

This is the crisis of the Communion. It is far wider than merely human sexuality. To my mind the future task of the evangelicals, then, is twofold: first, to reiterate and explain and defend the biblical gospel which we preached in Africa and Asia. This will require a firm adherence to God's written word as the supreme and infallible authority in all matters of faith and conduct. It will require us to develop a way of interpreting the scriptures which will be biblical and pastoral. It will require us to show how the teaching of the Bible is actually for the benefit of our human family. We will have to show the simple truth – that the Bible is the chief tool of pastoral ministry and that it works in transforming lives giving hope and engendering love. It is dynamite!

It is, let me say, a task that will require a very high order of intellectual skills and spiritual understanding. It is not for the faint-hearted. It will also involve supporting our Global South friends theologically, as they preach Christ in difficult circumstances. And it will require us to treat them as equals and learn from them. It is the task of theological education.

The second task of the evangelicals is to engage in evangelistic mission in the West including New Zealand, exhibiting the necessary flexibility when it comes to matters of the church and the necessary fidelity when it comes to matter of theology and conduct.

It is sometimes said that New Zealand gets to the future first. I would hope then that the evangelicals of New Zealand will play an absolutely crucial role in showing us how a church can be missional and biblical. I hope that you will create and adhere to a preaching, biblical theology which will see the churches of the West returning to their theological moorings, and at the same time prove to be in the forefront of evangelism which will actually create church communities suitable for the modern age. I hope that you will be conservative in theology and radical in mission; not radical in theology and conservative in mission. I trust that we will be able to do this within the Anglican Communion. I believe that we can and will. But if we cannot, the work still needs to be done, and we should do it in any case. In broad terms, that is the way forward for evangelicals: theological strength and missional enthusiasm and creativity.

One last word. To accomplish these tasks you are going to need to be united as far as possible. You will be called divisive, controversial and worse! You will need to find ways of bridging divides, of setting yourselves serious theological work to do, of acting together. A divided, far-flung evangelicalism will not help anyone in the years ahead. I suggest that you take confidence that you legitimately belong to the church; that you are essential to its future; that we need unity of heart and mind; that we need to reach out to other evangelicals in the Anglican church, in all the churches and in the overseas churches, to contest for Biblical authority and the gospel of Jesus. 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline' (2 Tim 1:7).