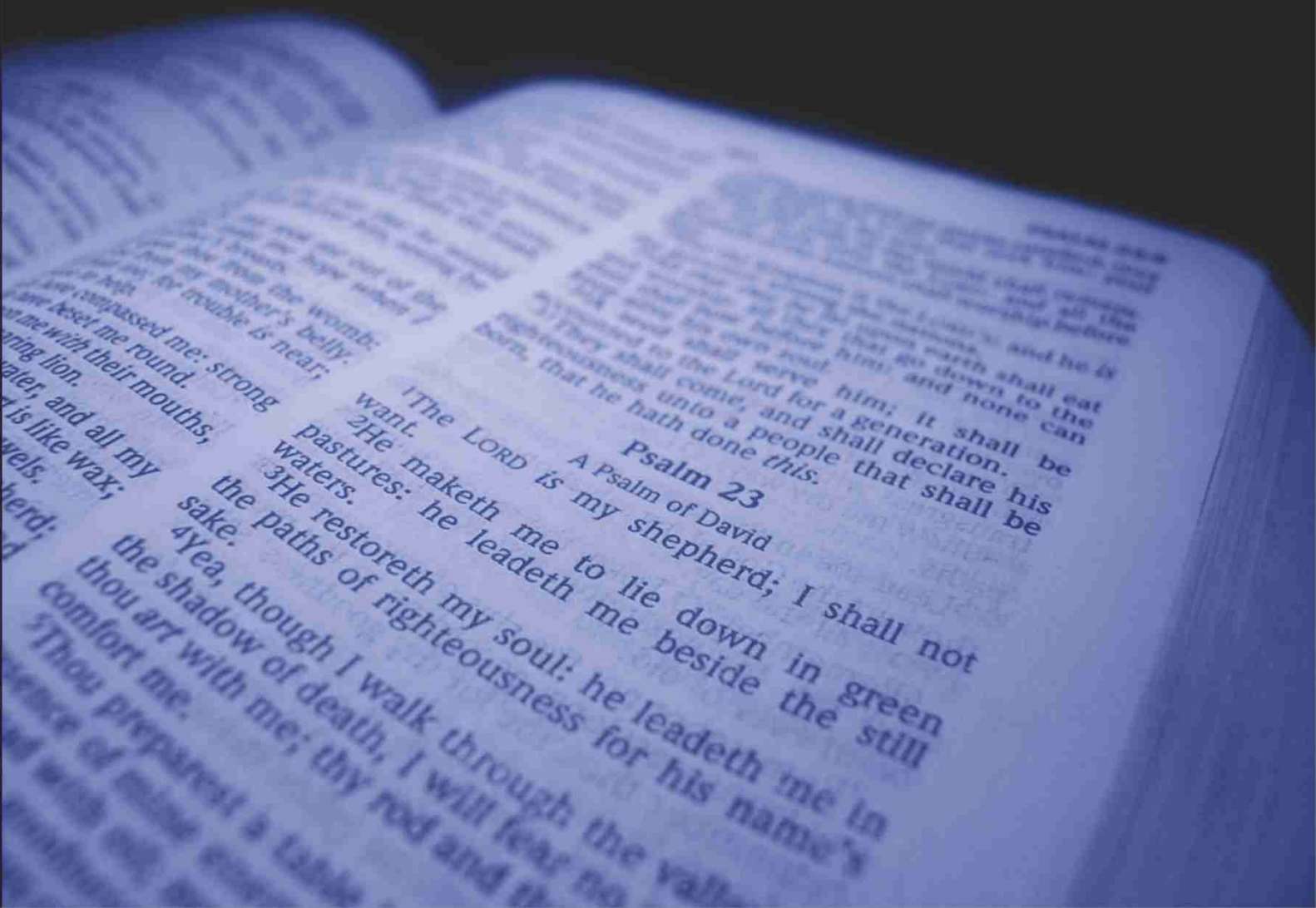
Evangelicals in Methodism:

Mainstream, marginalised or misunderstood?

Martin Wellings



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Preface

It was a great privilege to be invited to deliver the 2003 Fernley Hartley Lecture at the Methodist Conference in Llandudno, and I am grateful to the Fernley Hartley trustees for the opportunity to develop some work on evangelicals in Methodism. I am also very grateful to Headway for offering to publish the lecture. An abridged version has appeared in the October 2003 issue of the *Epworth Review*, but this is the full text, with some additional material not presented to the Conference.

The notes indicate some of the debts of gratitude incurred in the research upon which this lecture is based. I would particularly like to thank the Revd Robert Kitching for making available to me material from his M.A. thesis, Dr Peter Forsaith for help with material from the W.H.S. Library at the Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University, and Dr Clive Marsh for reading a draft of the text and offering helpful comments. This remains work in progress, and further material, responses and reflections will be gratefully received.

Martin Wellings,
Kidlington,
July 2004.

Evangelicals in Methodism: mainstream, marginal or misunderstood?

I like the story of the Church Council at Little Snoring in the Sticks which almost came to blows over the use to be made of a small legacy. The property stewards proposed the purchase of a chandelier, and everyone gladly agreed, except the Council secretary, who spoke and voted against the suggestion, and when it was passed, threatened to resign. After the meeting the minister took him aside to find out what was wrong. 'What's the problem?' she asked, 'Why do you object to us buying a chandelier?' 'Well,' said the secretary, 'in the first place, I can't spell it. In the second place, none of our members here knows how to play it. And in the third place, if there's any money going spare, what we really need is some better lighting in the chapel.'

Defining Terms

Words can be treacherous things, can't they? We think we know what they mean. We certainly know what we mean when we use them, but what about our partners in dialogue? As we turn to consider evangelicals in Methodism, we need to be as clear as we can be what we're talking about. Let me invite you to eavesdrop on three conversations I've shared or overheard which indicate some of the dimensions of our subject.

Here's the first: a remark by a Circuit Steward in a Midlands circuit, describing his previous Methodist church: 'The church was divided into two parties. There were the conservatives, and there were the evangelicals.'

Here's the second: a Church Steward in another circuit, who asked rather plaintively, 'What have the evangelical churches got that we haven't?' That question provoked quite a sharp retort from the Superintendent to the effect that we are evangelical and shouldn't let other people monopolise the term.

And the third remark: this time a question put to a leading church historian, not a Methodist but a committed Christian in another denomination: 'Is Methodism an evangelical church?' His reply? 'It used to be.'

Let's draw a little more from those three exchanges. The first suggests that some Methodists are evangelicals and some are not. The split between 'evangelicals' and 'conservatives' may interest us, especially if we are rather inclined to put the two words together. I think in this conversation the defining characteristics were to do with preferred styles of worship, and particularly music in worship. The second conversation starts from the presupposition that Methodists are not evangelical, that evangelical churches are outside our connexion and way of being, a point of view that is then vigorously challenged. Indeed, the response is to assert that we are *all* evangelicals, making 'evangelical Methodist' a tautology. The third comment says that Methodism used to be evangelical at some point in the past, but isn't now. So when did it change? And why?

Think for a moment about whether you would describe yourself as 'evangelical'. Whether you would, or wouldn't, what do you mean by that slippery term? Research has shown that many people who do include the word 'evangelical' in their own self-description qualify it in some way: 'liberal evangelical', 'conservative

evangelical', 'moderate evangelical', 'radical evangelical' and so on. Are we left then with the early post-modernism of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty: 'When I use a word, … it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'?[1]

I don't think so. There are three broadly accepted definitions of 'evangelical', some of which are picked up in the conversations we've just overheard.[2] The first definition, which is the most comprehensive and also therefore the least useful, comes from the New Testament Greek word ευαγγέλιον (euangelion), which means gospel or good news. On this definition evangelicals are those who believe in, live by and proclaim the good news of the salvation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ.[3] In this sense, as the exchange in our second conversation asserted, we are indeed all evangelicals if we are committed to the gospel.

The second broad definition goes back to the Reformation debates of the sixteenth century. Sir Thomas More, staunch supporter of Papal authority and opponent of Protestantism, dismissively referred to the people he perceived as sympathetic to the Reformation as 'those Evaungelicalles'.[4] This coining of a new term in the English language presumably reflected the Reformers' insistence that the gospel – the evangel – must be the primary source of authority for Christians.

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1 L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-glass* (Oxford, 1992), 190.

2 See my 'What is an Evangelical?', *Epworth Review* (Peterborough), 21/3 (September 1994), 45-53.

3 Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (E.T., Carlisle, 1986), ii, 107-15.

4 G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London, 1933), 50n.

Thus obedience to Scripture was set against adherence to the complementary witness of tradition and deference to the teaching authority of the Church.[5] This sixteenth century usage, then, makes 'evangelical' almost synonymous with 'Protestant', and this is still a significant definition today in the context of global Christianity.[6]

The way we often use the word 'evangelical', however, reveals a third understanding of that term. Surely no one would deny that Methodism is committed to the gospel – our first definition. We know that we accept the 'fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation' – our second definition – because the doctrinal clause of our Deed of Union tells us so,[7] although it doesn't tell us what those principles are. And yet there are Methodists who are uncertain about calling themselves evangelicals and there are self-professed evangelicals who would hesitate to ally themselves with Methodism. Notoriously, many Anglican Evangelicals strenuously opposed the Anglican-Methodist 'Conversations' in the 1960s because they believed, and I quote Jim Packer's biography, that 'Methodism had become deeply influenced by a theological liberalism which they had no desire to see spread in the Church of England'.[8] We'll

5 Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London, 1996), 2, seeks to rehabilitate this usage for supporters of religious reformism in the 1530s. The description of evangelicals as 'Bible people and Gospel people' is favoured by John Stott: Derek J. Tidball, *Who are the evangelicals?* (London, 1994), 12.

6 M. VanElderen, 'Building bridges: The WCC and Evangelicals', *One World* (Geneva), 192 (Jan/Feb 1994), 8. I am grateful to the Revd J.A. Impey for this reference.

7 *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (Peterborough, 2002), ii, 213.

8 Alister McGrath, *To know and serve God. A biography of James I. Packer* (London, 1998), 113.

come back to that claim later, but I hope you see the point. There is a sense of an entity called 'evangelicalism' which is narrower than Christianity, narrower than Protestantism, and it's that phenomenon that we are trying to pin down. This is the point of contention. No one is seriously going to deny that we are gospel people, nor that we belong in the family of Christian traditions stemming from the Reformation. But are we evangelical in this third, narrower sense?

Can we give some clarity to this more restricted sense of what it means to be evangelical? I think we can. Evangelicalism has always been diverse, and attempts to map it have had to struggle with that diversity. The most imaginative model was proposed by Derek Tidball in 1994 and it took the form of a modified Rubik's Cube – do you remember that craze? Tidball used the cube's three dimensions to represent approaches to the world, attitudes to the Church and styles of spirituality, and argued that evangelicals could combine facets of each dimension in quite different ways.[9] Evangelicalism can comprehend Jonathan Edwards the athlete and Jonathan Edwards the eighteenth century New England divine. I can see the athlete preaching, but I'm not sure about the Calvinist theologian doing the triple jump! Elaine Storkey and Ian Paisley can claim kinship as evangelicals – though whether they'd wish to do so is another matter!

The definition I'm suggesting today doesn't require an ability to solve Rubik's Cube. I want to propose three defining strands of evangelical religion.

9 Tidball, *Evangelicals*, 20-4.

First, there's a shared ancestry: a family tree with many branches, but with its roots in the eighteenth century evangelical revival, and we'll come back to that in a few minutes.

Second, there's a matrix of beliefs or emphases which are characteristic of evangelical religion. This matrix has been crafted by David Bebbington, the foremost modern historian of evangelicalism, and it is now widely accepted among scholars. It's made up of four components:

- The priority of the Bible;
- An emphasis on Conversion, whether gradual or instantaneous;
- A system of theology centred on the Cross of Christ and the atonement;
- A commitment to Action: an ethic requiring faith to be evidenced in deeds.

In itself none of the four is exclusive to evangelicals, but in combination and priority this blend reflects a particular way of being Christian.[10] We'll revisit those four interlocking components at stages during this lecture as we dip into periods of Methodist history and see how what we find there squares with this model.

To complete my defining strands: the third and final element comprises involvement in particular networks or institutions. The heyday of English evangelicalism in the early nineteenth century coincided with the great era of voluntary societies: charitable, philanthropic, missionary and so on. Evangelicals have always been inclined to

10 D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 2-17.

band together in networks of the like-minded, for mutual support and to achieve common purposes. Such a network might be the supporters of a given missionary society, or the subscribers to a particular periodical, or those who regularly attend a conference or a convention. These networks have often been non-denominational, built on the assumption that shared evangelical beliefs transcend denominational differences.

So we may identify evangelicals as people who share a common ancestry, who hold particular beliefs and emphases and who are likely to be found supporting certain networks, whether formal or informal.

Before we move on, we should note that each of my three strands has a flip side. Common ancestry doesn't prevent family feuds. Evangelical history is littered with fratricidal conflict over the family name and family heirlooms. Who are the true descendants, the true heirs? Who have sold the family honour short? Turning to beliefs and emphases, the Bebbington quadrilateral is very helpful, but as we'll see, it allows for considerable latitude of interpretation. People can take the Bible seriously but still disagree violently about what it says! And evangelical institutions can turn from expressions of unity into cockpits of conflict as different groups battle for control, while investing energy in para-church organ-isations can undermine commitment to the Church and its structures.

The Wesleys' Methodism

As we proceed to our main theme of evangelicals and Methodism, we look first at the Wesleys. Let's be clear that the Wesleys' Methodism was at the heart – I suppose we might even say the warmed heart – of the evangelical revival in England.[11] We need to underline though that the Wesleys' Methodism was not the whole of the revival. Popular Methodist history has sometimes suggested that it was: that revival began at about 8.45 p.m. on 24 May 1738 in Aldersgate Street and spread as John Wesley jumped on his horse and galloped off in all directions. Notwithstanding the very proper celebrations of the Wesley tercentenaryin 2003, the revival movement was far wider than the Wesleys' Methodism. Its roots were in Central Europe. It spread across the Continent and across the Atlantic. It was manifest in these islands in quite different forms. We know that John Wesley made a very limited impact in Wales and Scotland, and even in England there were plenty of non-Wesleyan 'Methodists': A 'Methodist' in the mid-eighteenth century meant anyone who supported the revival and who stressed the core evangelical doctrine of justification by grace through faith and claimed the defining evangelical experience of conversion. The societies founded by the Wesley brothers or assimilated into their 'connexion' were part of a much wider movement including the Moravians and Calvinistic evangelicals inside and outside the Church of England.[12]

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11 Against the view advanced by John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans* (Cambridge, 2002), 1, that the evangelical revival is a myth concocted by modern historians.

12 For the broader picture, see W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992) and Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, chapter 2. Compare Richard Cecil's definition (1798) of a Methodist in Elizabeth Elbourne, 'The foundation of the Church Missionary Society', in John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor (eds), *The Church of*

That said, we shouldn't belittle or explain away the Wesleys' achievement. Their branch of the revival was enormously significant. In purely numerical terms, it grew, sometimes by fits and starts, to reach some 70,000 members by 1791. John Wesley's decisions in 1784 to ordain preachers for America and to bequeath authority after his death to the Conference gave the connexion institutional and legal continuity, and charted a course for eventual denominational independence. The Wesleys' movement was underpinned by a clear Arminian theology, which marked it off from most other evangelicals, who were mainly moderate Calvinists. It was dynamic in worship, creative in evangelism and flexible in polity.

If we look back to the four classic emphases of evangelicalism, we can see how the Wesleys were right in the mainstream of that movement:

- Bible: John Wesley famously described himself as 'a man of one book', although insisting that his preachers should read as widely as possible.[13]
- Conversion: the Methodists certainly preached and experienced conversion. John Wesley seems not to have made much of the Aldersgate experience in later life, but Charles Wesley continued to mark the day of his own conversion, and the original title of his hymn 'O

England c.1689-c.1833. From toleration to Tractarianism (Cambridge, 1993), 251.

13 'Let me be *homo unius libri*': *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons* (London, 1980), vi.

for a thousand tongues to sing' was 'For the Anniversary Day of one's Conversion'.[14]

- Cross: John Wesley, writing to Mary Bishop in 1778, says this: 'nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement.'[15]
- Action: well, how many Methodist ministers have seared into their consciences the first of Wesley's 'Twelve Rules of a Helper' (1753): 'Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time, nor spend more time at any place than is strictly necessary.'? And what about the hymn 'A charge to keep', with its third verse:

> 'Arm me with jealous care,
> As in thy sight to live;
> And O thy servant, Lord, prepare
> A strict account to give!'[16]

As we know, eighteenth century Methodism drew people into a network of activities and groups, and this was part of the glue holding the connexion together. John Wesley urged his preachers to make sure that they only preached the gospel where a society could be established to garner and to nurture the fruits of their labours. George Whitefield, arguably a more eloquent and successful popular preacher than Wesley, noted ruefully that his own work had disintegrated because it

14 J.R. Watson (ed.), *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford, 2002), 167. For the debate about Aldersgate, see Randy L. Maddox (ed.), *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville, 1990).

15 John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of John Wesley* (London, 1931), vi, 297.

16 *CPD*, i, 77; *Hymns and Psalms* 785 (Charles Wesley, 'A charge to keep I have').

lacked that sustaining structure of bands, classes and societies. Whitefield said that his people were ‘a rope of sand’, and after his death in 1770 his connexion gradually leached away into Evangelical Anglicanism or Dissent.

Perhaps less familiar to most of us is the story of the attempts that were made to hold the different branches of the revival together, to form a common evangelical front. At intervals there were proposals for conferences of the leaders, some of which bore fruit and there were various shared enterprises.[17] Some of the characters involved though were not easy colleagues, not least among them our venerable founder. We might say that John Wesley was not really a team player. Within two or three years of Aldersgate Street he had broken with the Moravians and fallen out with Whitefield: with the Moravians over their neglect of the means of grace and with Whitefield over Calvinism. And there was a fair amount of mudslinging on both sides. This pattern of collaboration, conflict, recrimination and reconciliation continued right through the eighteenth century.

17 Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Nashville, 1995), 171.

Methodism after the Wesleys

If we move into the nineteenth century, into the fifty or sixty years or so following Wesley's death, we continue to find Methodism firmly in the mainstream of a broad evangelical movement which was numerically powerful – increasingly so, at least until the 1850s – culturally pervasive and intermittently paranoid.[18]

For Methodism, the years after 1791 were characterised by tremendous numerical expansion. This was the period in which the connexion grew by leaps and bounds. Wesley left 70,000 members in the 1790s; by 1851 Methodism claimed two and a half million people attending worship on the day of the national religious census – a quarter of the church-going population of England and Wales. The four hundred preaching houses of 1791 had swollen to more than 10,000 Methodist buildings.[19] So we see the shift from itinerancy to institution, from movement to monument, with the administrative structure to back it up.

This Methodist growth went hand in hand with internal conflict, secession and expulsion which produced a cat's cradle of competing connexions: Methodist New Connexion, Independent Methodists, Bible Christians, Primitive Methodists, Wesleyan Association, Wesleyan Reformers, United Methodist Free Churches and so on, as well as the Wesleyans, who claimed to be the true heirs of John and Charles.

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18 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, chapter 3. See also Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford, 1988) and Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness* (London, 1976).

19 A summary of the census returns is printed in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (London), iv (1988), 497-505.

The expansion of Methodism took place in the context of numerical and cultural success for the wider evangelical movement. The effects of the eighteenth century revival were felt in the older Dissenting denominations, the Baptists and Congregationalists in particular, who took on a new lease of life. An evangelical school was established within the Church of England and the early nineteenth century saw this group begin to achieve recognition in the power structures of the national Church: the first Evangelical bishop, Henry Ryder, was appointed in 1815, the first Evangelical archbishop of Canterbury, J.B. Sumner, in 1848. In politics William Wilberforce and a band of evangelical MPs, the so-called 'saints' of the Clapham Sect, sought to bring faith to bear on parliamentary debates. Evangelicals from different denominational and theological traditions banded together in the Bible Society (1804) and the Religious Tract Society (1799), in the Sunday School movement, in the campaign against slavery, and in a whole range of devotional, philanthropic and missionary enterprises. James Stephen, one of the younger generation of the Clapham cousinhood, wrote of the period: 'Ours is the age of societies. For the redress of every oppression that is done under the sun, there is a public meeting. For the cure of every sorrow by which our land or our race can be visited, there are patrons, vice-presidents and secretaries. For the diffusion of every blessing of which mankind can partake in common, there is a committee'.[20]

20 James Stephen, 'The Clapham Sect', *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography* (London, 1849), citing the 1907 reprint, ii, 248. The original essay appeared in *Edinburgh Review*, 161. The quotation is cited, with slight inaccuracies, in Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United. Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Metuchen and London, 1983). 194-5.

This was an expression of evangelical activism, engaged, in David Smith's phrase, in 'transforming the world'.[21]

Of course, there was another side to this apparently rosy picture. There were major tensions within the evangelical movement. The Nonconformist quest for religious and political equality, shading into a campaign for the disestablishment of the national Church, pitted evangelicals against one another, Dissenters against Anglicans, with Methodists balanced uncomfortably in between.[22] Evangelicals remained extraordinarily adept at falling out among themselves over a whole range of issues. Despite their cultural influence, many evangelicals viewed the world around them with foreboding, seeing in the High Church Oxford Movement of the 1830s, the growth of Roman Catholicism fuelled by Irish immigration from the 1840s and explorations in more liberal theologies signs of impending national apostasy. This is the paranoid tendency in evangelicalism which rather enjoys being a righteous remnant and tends to assume that success must mean that someone, somewhere has sold out on fundamental principles. Despite the nervousness, despite the anxiety, despite the longing to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, it remains the case that the seriousness and earnest high-mindedness and perhaps to us unattractive overt religiosity which we associate with the Victorians derives in large measure from types of evangelical religion.

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21 David W. Smith, *Transforming the World? The Social Impact of British Evangelicalism* (Carlisle, 1998).

22 Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality. Nonconformist politics in mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, 1999) discusses the issues and locates the various branches of Methodist opinion in the debates.

And Methodism, in its various branches, swam within that broad religious current. Let me give one example.[23] Conversations about evangelical unity and co-operation in the early 1840s led to the convening of a conference which met in London in August 1846 charged with the task of forming an 'Evangelical Alliance'. Five denominational leaders signed the letter of invitation to that inaugural conference, and one of them moved the first resolution on day one and gave the closing address to the survivors thirteen long days later. That chosen speaker was Jabez Bunting, twice Secretary and four times President of the Wesleyan Conference, and described by his numerous critics as 'the Pope of Methodism'. The organising committees of the EA were full of Methodists; between a quarter and a fifth of the nine hundred people who attended the inaugural conference were Methodists – mostly Wesleyans, but some Prims, Bible Christians, New Connexion and Wesleyan Association members too. The conference was funded by donations and the published list of donors was headed by four individuals, who each gave a munificent £100, equivalent to £5,000 today.[24] One was an Anglican banker; one was a quasi-Congregationalist

23 The main source for this section is the published *Report of the Proceedings of the Conference held at Freemasons' Hall, London, from August 19 to September 2 inclusive, 1846* (London, 1847). Accounts of the founding of the EA may be found in John W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship* (London, 1946) and Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ. The history and significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle, 2001). Neither study gives full weight to the Methodist involvement. Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 200, gives a negative view of the impulse behind the EA; this is corrected in John Wolffe, 'The Evangelical Alliance in the 1840s: an attempt to institutionalise Christian unity', *Studies in Church History* 23 (Oxford, 1986).

24 I am grateful to Mr John Ellis for suggesting the multiplier to convert 1840s values to their 2003 equivalent.

baronet; two were Wesleyan Methodists.[25] The donors' lists read like a Who's Who of the mid-century Wesleyan plutocracy: the Corderoys of Lambeth, the Ashtons of Liverpool, John Robinson Kay of Bury, James Wood of Manchester and his Stockport son-in-law John Fernley, benefactor of this lecture, among others.[26] The EA was launched with ambitious, unrealistic and incompatible objectives, so it is not surprising that it didn't fulfil its early promise, but Methodists were very involved in the formative vision and continued to participate in the Alliance for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Naturally so; they were part of the evangelical family, and they knew it.[27]

Let's check our quadrilateral of references: Bible, conversion, cross and action.

The priority of Scripture is a given in this period. More interesting is the way the Bible is understood. Although in Adam Clarke the Wesleyans produced a real pioneer

25 For the banker, R.C.L. Bevan, and the baronet, Sir Culling Eardley, see Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (Oxford, 1995), i, 90 and 340-1 respectively. The Methodist donors were Thomas Farmer, Esq., of Gunnersbury House, Middx, and William Betts, Esq., of Southampton. Farmer (1790-1861) was treasurer of the WMMS (and first treasurer of the EA): see John A. Vickers (ed.), *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough, 2000), 116-7.

26 For the donors, see *Report of the Proceedings*, appendix B. Wood and Fernley are in Vickers, *Dictionary*. The other names appear in the list of Methodists attending the conference and in the connexional committees listed in contemporary *Minutes of Conference*, a sign of denominational standing and material prosperity.

27 See, for example, *Evangelical Christendom*, July 1890, 217 and 221, reporting a visit by an EA deputation to Headingley College by invitation of the Governor, G. Stringer Rowe, and listing ten Methodist signatures, including S.F. Collier, John Brash, Simpson Johnson and Enoch Salt to an invitation to the EA to hold its annual conference in Manchester.

of critical scholarship, most Methodists continued to offer very conservative responses to questions about the Bible, its composition, inspiration and authority.[28] Radical European scholarship challenging traditional views was written off as 'rationalism'. Early works in biblical criticism by English scholars like Samuel Davidson and Bishop Colenso got a hostile reception in the Methodist press, although Methodists were not as sympathetic to rigid doctrines of verbal inspiration as some of their fellow evangelicals.[29]

Conversion remained central to the Methodist understanding of Christian experience. I was fascinated to find that a proposal for Anglican-Methodist union was put forward in the York Convocation in 1868, and that one of the speakers against the scheme was the evangelical bishop of Carlisle, the Hon. Samuel Waldegrave. The bishop had this to say about the Wesleyan doctrine of conversion: 'I have, of course, never been present at scenes such as those which are reported to be of frequent occurrence in Methodist places of worship. Let us not have our congregations thrown into a state of excitement by impassioned appeals from the pulpit; let us not have a person invited to place himself in a particular spot, that members of the church may crowd around him, offering prayers and almost compelling the Holy Spirit of God to come down and convert that soul. I will only say that if we wait to see the reality of the work, we shall find that that which has gone

28 Stephen B. Dawes, *Adam Clarke. Methodism's First Old Testament Scholar* (Truro, 1994).

29 *London Quarterly Review* (London), July 1879, 265-85; October 1879, 104; January 1863, 285-322; April 1863, 193-225. John Farrar, *Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (London, 1851), 353-5, comes close to endorsing verbal dictation, but this was altered by J.R. Gregory in the revised edition of 1889, 670-1.

up with the brilliancy of a sky-rocket has come down a worthless, harmful thing, a scorn and reproach, and a stumbling block to all around.'[30] Waldegrave went on to make some insinuations about what Methodist young people got up to on their way home from emotionally super-charged evening meetings. This naturally provoked a response, in the form of a magisterial article in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* by Thomas Jackson, one of the most senior and respected Wesleyan ministers. Jackson defended the Methodist theology of conversion from Scripture, reinforced with pointed quotations from the Book of Common Prayer, refuted the allegations levelled by the bishop with a thinly-veiled appeal to his own conversion as a young man and concluded: 'Take away conversion, in doctrine and in experience, from Wesleyan Methodism, and you have nothing left but what is as unsubstantial as the shadow that follows a man in a moonlight night.'[31]

The cross retained its place at the heart of Methodist theology in this period. The greatest Methodist theologian of the mid-nineteenth century, William Burt Pope, published a systematic theology in 1875, expanding it to three volumes in 1879-80. This work, entitled *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, pivots around what Pope calls 'the mediatorial ministry', in other words the plan of salvation focused on the death of Christ. Pope is not an easy read. It's recorded that on one occasion he

30 *Guardian* (London), 12 February 1868, 178.

31 *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (London), 1868, 414-26, quotation at 426. Jackson's article, with minor alterations, was also published separately as a pamphlet: *The Wesleyan doctrine of conversion vindicated against the censures which were cast upon it in the late meeting of the Northern Convocation* (London, 1868). I am grateful to the WHS library at the Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University, for access to this pamphlet.

read a piece of his own work and said: 'I don't quite know what that means; but the more I think about it, the nearer I come to knowing what I must have meant at the time I wrote it.'[32] You may have met systematic theologians of whom the same could be said!

And Methodists continued to be busy. We may ask though about the sort of activity they were engaged in. Charles Cashdollar's study of congregational life in the Reformed traditions in the nineteenth century identifies a significant shift in emphasis, and the same changes may be observed in Methodism. To quote Cashdollar: 'A congregation in 1830 engaged in little except worship, pastoral care and mission; by 1900 a fully functioning church included sports teams, literary clubs and organized groups of every sort.' Intense activity, focused on the church building, could march hand in hand with the privatisation of piety and a quest for comfort and respectability. This shift was symbolised by the advent of pew cushions and the replacement of unadorned preaching houses by splendid Gothic buildings, complete with towers, spires and chancels.[33]

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32 I have discussed Pope's theology in '"Throttled by a dead hand?": The 'Wesleyan Standard' in nineteenth and twentieth century British Methodism', *Methodist History* (Madison), 37/3 (April, 1999), 168-70. See also Elden Dale Dunlap, 'Methodist theology in Great Britain in the nineteenth century: with special reference to the theology of Adam Clarke, Richard Watson and William Burt Pope', Yale Ph.D. thesis, 1956, especially 450. The comment on Pope's opaque style may be found in R. Waddy Moss, *The Revd W.B. Pope, DD. Theologian and Saint* (London, 1909), 87.

33 Charles D. Cashdollar, *A Spiritual Home* (Pennsylvania, 2000), quotation and summary on 11. I owe this reference to David Bebbington, at a conference convened by the Christianity and History Forum in April 2003.

Divergence within evangelicalism

For the world at large the half century between 1880 and 1930 was a traumatic time, moving from the heyday of Victorian imperialism through political and social conflict to the cataclysm of the First World War and then on to post-war economic depression. This period also witnessed profound changes to the landscape of religious life in Britain. Developments in the realms of thought, belief and practice challenged the identity of evangelicalism, reshaped it significantly and created some of the stereotypes about evangelical religion which we have inherited.

We began this lecture with a three-strand definition of evangelicalism. In these years, each strand came under pressure. The quadrilateral of doctrinal emphases - Bible, conversion, cross and action - was stretched as never before, posing questions about the boundaries of acceptable diversity. Some looked to history, to the family tradition, to settle disputes, while others rejected the history as unhelpful or irrelevant. In Methodism of course that usually meant wrestling with the Wesleys in some shape or form. The tensions were played out in institutions and in churches, some of which broke under the strain. I want to approach this difficult period through the quadrilateral, to show how the evangelical world-view came under increasing pressure.[34]

34 These tensions are summarised in my 'The Wesley Bible Union', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (Birmingham), 53/5 (May 2002), especially 157-8. A blunt example of the rejection of the appeal to Wesley was Frank Ballard's description of the Standards as being 'throttled by a dead hand': *Journal of the Wesley Bible Union* (Gloucester), August 1915, 171.

Beginning with the Bible, traditional assumptions were challenged from two angles. One was the new critical scholarship, which made an increasing impact on the British churches from the 1880s, spreading from the universities through the theological colleges to ministers, Local Preachers and congregations. The application of the historical-critical method to the Old Testament revolutionised perceptions of the Bible, rewrote the history of Israel and cast doubt on the authority and inspiration of a book whose historical accuracy was now seen as open to debate. The other challenge came from Darwinian biology, and this left Christians not only with a new element to the old puzzle of harmonising Genesis and geology but also with the problem of correlating the biblical scheme of creation, fall and redemption with the Darwinian model of evolution. For Christians of all kinds, the basic questions were: could modern scholarship reach an accommodation with traditional beliefs? If so, how? If not, which would have to give way? For evangelicals, with their commitment to the priority of Scripture, this was a particularly sharp dilemma.

Let's stay with theology and turn to the Cross. Here again we can discern two challenges to the traditional evangelical world-view. The first was a revulsion from substitutionary models of the atonement which had dominated evangelical theology for more than a century. There had always been voices raised against penal substitution but this became a growing chorus in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.[35] The second challenge was more fundamental still and it reflected a shift in the centre of gravity in English theology from the atonement towards

35 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 16, notes that W.B. Pope was not committed to penal substitution.

the incarnation. This was symbolised by the publication of a volume of essays in 1889 entitled *Lux Mundi* and subtitled 'a series of studies in the religion of the incarnation'. The essayists were Anglo-Catholics, representing the most dynamic and vigorous school of thought in the Church of England, and they set the tone for the next generation of English theology. Again, evangelicals faced the question of accommodation or resistance.

Moving on to conversion and action – we can put those together – the late nineteenth century saw the churches in England beginning to lose ground numerically and failing to keep pace with a growing and now predominantly urban population. Coupled with the rise of respectability in the churches, with the temperance movement which took off in the last quarter of the century and with the burgeoning craze for sports and leisure in society, this raised a cluster of questions about effective methods of evangelism, attitudes to sport and the use of Sunday, the interface of the Church with working-class culture and the whole conversionist model of Christian initiation. Was the Aldersgate paradigm of the strangely warmed heart still relevant and appropriate? What should Christians be doing, and what should Christians not be doing? When the Liverpool Conference of 1896 debated the formation of the Wesley Guild, one argument in favour was that it would help the connexion to retain the loyalty of the young; one argument against was that the Church should not be in the business of promoting the cult of amusements: 'Was the Methodist Church an excursion agency?' asked Dinsdale Young.[36]

36 There is an extensive literature on declining church attendance in the late nineteenth century. One avenue of approach is Robin Gill's *The*

So these dilemmas, common to all evangelical Christians, afflicted Methodism in this period too. The substance of the Fernley lectures and the careers of the Fernley lecturers make the point. In 1880 the Fernley trustees invited Methodism's leading ordained scientist, W.H. Dallinger, to give the annual lecture. It was rumoured though that Dallinger was favourable to Darwinism, so connexional traditionalists blocked the invitation, and his lecture, The Creator and what we may know of the method of Creation, had to wait until 1887.[37] The lecturer of 1889, J. Agar Beet, got into serious trouble a little over a decade later for a very cautious challenge to the doctrine of eternal punishment.[38] In 1891 and 1892 the lectures were devoted to the inspiration of the Bible, and both lecturers took a very conservative position.[39] Scott Lidgett in 1897 took up another big subject, addressing The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement and falling foul of those who judged that

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Myth of the Empty Church (London, 1993). For the application to Methodism see my '"A time to be born and a time to die"?: a historian's perspective on the future of Methodism', in Jane Craske and Clive Marsh (eds), *Methodism and the Future* (London, 1999), esp. 148-9. For the temperance movement in Methodism see George Thompson Brake, *Drink. Ups and downs of Methodist attitudes to temperance* (London, 1974). On sport, Hugh McLeod's paper '"Thews and sinews": Nonconformity and Sport', in David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (eds), *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations* (London, 2003), traces the change in attitudes in the late nineteenth century. Frank Ballard engaged in a pamphlet war over 'amusements' with the ultra-conservative pastor of the East London Tabernacle, Archibald Brown. For the birth of the Wesley Guild, see William Leary, *Wesley Guild. The first hundred years* (n.p., n.d.), 12.

37 The story is told in J. Scott Lidgett, *My Guided Life* (London, 1936), 88. The trustees' minute book is silent on the subject, as on most other controversial topics.

38 David Carter, 'Joseph Agar Beet and the eschatological crisis', *PWHS* 51/6 (October 1998).

39 The lecturers were Francis Sharr and Marshall Randles.

he had understated the penal aspect of the doctrine.[40] Frank Ballard, the lecturer for 1916, was a leading and pugnacious protagonist on behalf of 'modern thought' and served for many years as an itinerant connexional apologist, lecturing and writing against secularism. And the appeal to take on board moderate biblical criticism and a measure of doctrinal restatement in the lecture of 1912, George Jackson's 'The Preacher and the Modern Mind', triggered the nearest thing Methodism experienced to a fundamentalist controversy and inspired the form-ation of an umbrella group for campaigning and dyspeptic conservatives, the Wesley Bible Union.[41] Meanwhile the Primitive Methodists' Hartley Lecture, established in 1896, addressed 'Inspiration and Revelation' in 1899 and in 1904 the trustees invited the connexion's most eminent scholar, A.S. Peake, to consider the question of suffering in the Old Testament.

Jackson and Peake, Wesleyan and Primitive, ordained and lay, illustrate perfectly the difficulties of this period of transition in Methodist and evangelical history. A good deal of popular history and a good deal of anecdotal history proceed on the basis that the challenges posed by the late nineteenth century forced Christians to choose between their hearts and their heads. They could hold on to traditional evangelicalism and leave their brains at home when they went to church. Or they could throw evangelical religion out, lock, stock and barrel, along with Jonah's whale and the talking snake in the Garden of Eden. Depending on your point of view, then, the Peakes and the Jacksons were either courageous

40 Lidgett, *Guided Life*, 156-8.

41 Wellings, 'Wesley Bible Union'; D.W. Bebbington, 'The persecution of George Jackson: a British fundamentalist controversy', in *SCH* 21 (Oxford, 1984).

champions of progressive thinking or sinister conspirators undermining the old faith.

This stark dichotomy, cloaked in the overheated rhetoric of 'fundamentalism' and 'modernism', may appeal to superior liberals and paranoid conservatives, but it doesn't bear scrutiny as a piece of historical analysis. Let me introduce a few qualifying points.

First, there were very few out-and-out fundamentalists in Methodism, beyond the splenetic ranks of the Wesley Bible Union. The W.B.U. was vitriolic and tiresome, and it was certainly noisy, but it was also very small and spectacularly unsuccessful in its attempts to persecute advocates of modern scholarship. When I say that it denounced Samuel Chadwick as a liberal fellow-traveller, accused the Evangelical Alliance of selling out to modernism and published an article claiming that George Jackson's Fernley Lecture was the direct spiritual cause of the First World War, you'll see that the group was unlikely to win much support. What the W.B.U. did achieve was to discredit the ultra-conservative cause for at least a generation and to provoke the Conference of 1919 into declaring that the doctrinal standards of the Church were 'not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on our preachers': a useful phrase, which was carried forward into the 1932 Deed of Union.[42]

Second, there were very few militant modernists in Methodism. English modernism always had a slightly donnish air about it and was much more comfortable in

42 Wellings, 'Wesley Bible Union', 157, 167; *Evangelical Christendom*, Nov-Dec 1921, 139, offered a sharp rejoinder from the EA; *Minutes of (Wesleyan) Conference* 1919, 264.

Oxbridge common rooms than Methodist colleges and circuits. Peake has been described as a 'confident modernist', but that picture must be nuanced by his mystical spirituality and Christ-centred preaching.[43] Jackson was more firmly in the evangelical mainstream, and when attacked could count on the support of people like Samuel Collier and Gypsy Smith, whose connexional credentials were impeccable.[44]

Third, many Methodists were content to modify their evangelicalism to reach an accommodation with modern thought. We go seriously astray if we take the more recent bases of faith lovingly compiled and carefully honed to keep the most conservative of organisations doctrinally pure and then use them as a yardstick to assess the evangelical orthodoxy of Edwardian Methodists. The impression sometimes given that about 1910 Methodism awoke and groaned to find itself liberal is wide of the mark.[45] Most Methodists were committed to the authority and inspiration of Scripture – Bebbington's evangelical biblicism – but not to the criteria of infallibility and inerrancy that have so exercised, divided and perplexed mid-twentieth century conservative evangelicals. Many continued to emphasise the cross, without endorsing penal substitution.[46] Most urged and preached for conversion, while softening or omitting references to eternal punishment. And they certainly kept busy, while recasting evangelical activism in a theological framework that had less to say about

43 Ian Sellers, 'A.S. Peake reconsidered', *Epworth Review* 24/4 (October, 1997), esp. 84, 88.

44 Bebbington, 'Persecution of George Jackson', 423; Jackson was Collier's biographer.

45 Borrowing Jerome's celebrated comment on Arianism.

46 See, for example, W. Russell Maltby, *Christ and his Cross* (London, 1935).

eschatology, was frankly embarrassed by Adventist millenarianism and made much more of a this-worldly kingdom of God.[47] This is classical liberal evangelicalism. It was developing in the Church of England and in the Free Churches in the years immediately before the First World War, it was stimulated by the experience of Forces' chaplains during the War and it flourished in the inter-war period. One influential manifestation in Methodism was the Fellowship of the Kingdom, founded in 1919.[48]

Fourth, we should not underestimate the power of inertia and the strength of denominational cohesion in an age which was far less individualistic and fluid in its loyalties than ours. People might fire off outraged letters to the denominational press protesting at this, that or the other utterance of the academic theologians, and editors then as now printed such letters because they made good copy, but it was quite another thing for a member to leave their local church, for an officeholder to resign a post, for a Local Preacher to stop preaching or for a minister to abandon home and livelihood on a point of doctrinal principle or interpretation. Moreover, I judge that there was a stronger sense of connexional identity and common discipline in 1920 than there is today, certainly among the ministers. Liberal evangelicals like Russell Maltby, Newton Flew and Leslie Weatherhead shared 'the brotherhood of the ministry' with centrists like Sangster and conservatives like Samuel Chadwick and

47 The 1919 *Minutes*, for example, advertise a series of pamphlets on 'Watchwords of Methodism'. The first is Lidgett's *The Kingdom of God*, the third Maldwyn Hughes' *The Meaning of the Atonement*.

48 On Anglican developments, see my *Evangelicals Embattled* (Carlisle, 2003). On FK, see Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences. A study in the spirituality of English evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle, 1999), chapter 5.

Dinsdale Young. Swanwick and Southport, FK 'quests' and Cliff College campaigns could co-exist under the same connexional discipline. To the moderate majority occupying the middle ground, what mattered most was keeping together. After a few years of enduring the Wesley Bible Union's annual attacks on other ministers, the Conference turned on the W.B.U. leaders and threatened them – interestingly – with a charge of 'unbrotherly conduct', and that meant something more than rocking the boat. It was a failure in fellowship, a betrayal of the ethos of the connexion.[49]

49 The charge was not brought: E. Morton and D. Dewar, *A voice crying in the wilderness. A memoir of Harold Christopherson Morton* (London, 1937), 39. The Conference of 1922 censured Morton's methods of controversy as 'calculated to destroy the Brotherhood of the Methodist ministry and the peace of the Connexion': Journal of Conference, 1922, 98. For a comparative study emphasising the importance of the centre ground, see David N. Livingstone and Ronald A. Wells, *Ulster-American Religion* (Notre Dame, 1999), 53.

Twentieth Century Developments

I want to turn finally to some twentieth century developments, first in the wider evangelical world and then in Methodism.

The story of twentieth century evangelicalism may be told very briefly.[50] The tensions we've just outlined between the 1900s and the 1920s produced a movement in which liberal, conservative and centrist streams co-existed, sometimes amicably, sometimes uneasily. The 'fighting fundamentalists' largely marginalised themselves, leaving 'mixed' denominations and setting up their own exclusive organisations instead. Less militant conservatives often continued to plough their own furrow within the denominations; and liberal evangelicalism made the running and set the tone in many churches. There remained, however, a middle ground of moderate conservatives, moderate liberals and denominational loyalists open to wooing and sensitive to changes in the cultural climate. A number of networks continued to nurture an articulate conservative response to modern thought. Some of these were denominational groups. Some were non-denominational, the most significant of which strategically was the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, formed in the 1920s.

The IVF sustained conservative evangelicalism in the universities between the wars and gradually built up a cadre of conservative scholars and authors. Post-war conditions after 1945 favoured the conservatives, and their morale was boosted by the Billy Graham crusades in the early 1950s. By the 1960s liberal evangelicalism

50 See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, chapters 7 and 8, for a summary of this period.

was beginning to look tired. Its theology and spirituality had moved from common sense to commonplace. It was out of sympathy with the theology of the Neo-Orthodox and the ecclesiological preoccupations of post-war ecumenism. It surrendered the championship of 'progressive' modern thought to a new radicalism – John Robinson and 'South Bank' religion. Meanwhile conservative confidence grew, exemplified by the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in 1967, stiffened by the revival of Reformed theology, associated with Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Jim Packer, and underpinned by thirty years of increasingly effective IVF work in the university Christian Unions.

Charismatic renewal, another mutation of evangelicalism and tending to be conservative theologically, began to affect traditional churches and to create new ones. The last quarter of the twentieth century saw many of these trends continue, with conservative evangelicalism growing and liberal evangelicalism fading fast.

And what of Methodism?

Methodism at connexional level shared in the liberal evangelical consensus from the 1920s to the 1960s. By 'connexional level' I mean the broad outlook of the theological colleges, text books for Local Preachers, training material in general and the climate of opinion among the theologically articulate and influential.[51] For staunch conservatives, this consensus was often perceived and experienced as far more liberal than evangelical. It is not uncommon to find people reminiscing that conservative views were dismissed or ridiculed in the colleges, and those who sought to organise a conservative group in the 1930s found that prospective members were too nervous to join.[52] On the other hand, what may strike us is the strength of the evangelical aspect of the consensus. A commitment to evangelism was taken as read, with a whole series of innovative approaches to communicating the gospel in a changing society. The vocabulary of conversion was still present. Leslie Weatherhead, no favourite among the fundamentalists, warmly endorsed the Billy Graham crusade in 1954.[53] And Methodist hymnody, with its loyalty to the corpus of Wesley hymns, continued to provide a drip-feed of evangelical theology into the liturgical and devotional experience of the Methodist people. It has been observed that this was an evangelicalism of ethos and experience, rather than of explicit teaching and creedal confession, and this point is

51 See, for instance, the theology textbook prescribed for Local Preachers, Greville P. Lewis (ed.), *An approach to Christian Doctrine* (London, 1954).

52 John H.J. Barker, 'Fifty Years a Conservative Evangelical', *CEIM Newsletter*, Summer 1973, 8-12.

53 John Travell, *Doctor of Souls. Leslie D. Weatherhead 1893-1976* (Cambridge, 1999), 205.

well made.[54] It may be suggested, further, that both experience and ethos were vulnerable when new currents in theology and a new cultural climate challenged the long unexamined assumptions of the liberal evangelical world-view. The consensus in its Methodist manifestation, as in other denominations, was hard hit by the 1960s.

The impression of connexional consensus must be nuanced in a couple of ways:

First, there was an enduring conservatism at grassroots level. Stephen Dawes' evocative phrase for this is 'folk fundamentalism',[55] which begs some questions about what we mean by fundamentalism, but the phenomenon was surely there. It represented a stream within evangelicalism which ignored or avoided the debates of the early twentieth century. It had its shibboleths, as one young minister discovered to his cost when he preached in a Northamptonshire chapel in the mid-1930s and made it clear that his theology had little room for the 'shed blood'. On leaving the pulpit after the service he was seized by the lapel, given a good shake and told, 'Don't come here with that rubbish again.'[56] The persistent demonising of A.S. Peake, 'the man who brought modernism into Primitive Methodism', was another example of the same phenomenon.[57] At a less militant level, we might instance the anxiety expressed at the introduction of *Partners in Learning* in the 1960s on

54 Howard Marshall, *Headline*, Winter 2001-02, 12.

55 Stephen B. Dawes, 'In honesty of preaching: 3. "Mind the Gap"', *Expository Times* (Edinburgh), 111/9 (June 2000), 294.

56 Interview with Mr Eric Lawrence, Wappenham. The minister in question was H.D. Pointon.

57 Recollection of the Revd Dr John Newton; cf. Sellers, 'A.S. Peake', 83.

the grounds that the new material was insufficiently Bible-based.[58] Of course there was an even less conscious conservatism which took a traditionalist world-view as normal and normative because it had never encountered anything else.

Second, conservative outlooks were nurtured through the twentieth century and given greater articulation by certain networks and institutions. Some fine work has been done on this in relation to American fund-amentalism and neo-evangelicalism and there is a comparative study on the British Baptists, but as far as I am aware, no similar exercise has been undertaken for Methodism.[59] We wait for the new history of Cliff College to see if it sheds light on this topic, and I wonder too about the role of the Southport Convention in maintaining a brand of conservative evangelicalism in a distinctive Methodist idiom. Methodists were certainly involved in non-denominational groups like the IVF[60] and the EA, and they might subscribe to conservative periodicals and attend conventions. Moreover, the second half of the twentieth century saw a number of new organisations come into being to act as a focus for confessedly evangelical, or conservative evangelical, Methodists. The first was the Methodist Revival Fellowship, formed in 1952, with an accent on prayer for revival and a founding

58 John Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998* (Peterborough, 1998), 72.

59 Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive us again. The reawakening of American fundamentalism* (Oxford 1997); D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptists and Fundamentalism in Inter-War Britain', in Keith Robbins (ed.), *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America, c.1750-c.1950* (Oxford, 1990).

60 See, for instance, Barker, 'Fifty Years a Conservative Evangelical', 8; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 260 (Howard Belben); Brian Hoare, 'Profile: Donald English', *Epworth Review* 25/2 (April 1998), 28-9.

constituency overlapping with some of the hardy conservatives of the 1920s and 1930s.[61] Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism, a group with a more doctrinal and ethical agenda, was established in 1970 following a conference at Cliff College.[62] By this stage the Church was beginning to use the language of pluralism, recognising that the liberal evangelical-centrist consensus had disintegrated under the pressure of conservative revival, charismatic renewal, ecumenical exploration, radical revision and, not least, cultural revolution. By the time MRF and CEIM merged in 1987 to form Headway, the group was acknowledged as one dialogue partner in connexional debates. Conservative evangelicals had no need to portray themselves as 'a voice crying in the wilderness'.[63] They might still be misunderstood, but they had moved back from the margins to a place in the mainstream.[64]

For much of the period we've surveyed in this lecture the history of evangelicals in Methodism has been the history of Methodism itself. The Wesleys' Methodism was a powerful stream within the broad current of the Evangelical Revival. Nineteenth and twentieth century developments played out on the Methodist stage

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61 Peter Barker, 'Look to the rock from which you were cut', *Headline*, Spring 2002, 5-6. Henry and John Barker both served on the committee of the British Bible Union, successor to the WBU, in the 1940s and 1950s (archive now held by the Prophetic Witness Movement International).

62 Robert J. Kitching, 'The conservative-evangelical influence in Methodism 1900-1976', Birmingham M.Phil. thesis, 1976, chapters 4 and 5. I am very grateful to the Revd Bob Kitching for giving me a copy of his thesis.

63 The apt title chosen for H.C. Morton's biography.

64 And were urged to stay there: see, for instance, Howard Belben's CEIM Lecture, *The Evangelical Methodist* (Cliff College, 1978), esp. 41-2, and Donald English, 'Our Task as Evangelicals', *Headline*, June 1987, 2-4.

reflected many of the tensions apparent in the Evangelical movement as a whole. It seems to me that there were two important periods of transition. One was the era around the First World War – between, say, 1890 and 1920 – when the predominant response to 'modern thought' transposed Methodist evangelicalism into a broadly liberal evangelical key. The other was the period of the 1960s and early 1970s, when the liberal evangelical consensus collapsed and Methodism became frankly pluralist. Both would be interesting periods to look at in more depth, but that would take another lecture! I conclude with a quotation from Donald English, arguably the most articulate and eirenic evangelical of his generation, reminding conservative evangelicals of their place and responsibility within the pluralist spectrum of the Methodist Church; the words, though, surely apply to us all: 'The reason for our belonging to one another is not large scale doctrinal agreement: it is being in Christ. That is the ground of our accepting one another … Once we can accept that, the real theological discussion and action can begin.'[65]

65 English, 'Our task as Evangelicals', 3.

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Mrs Hazel Harwood
1 Linden Avenue, Woodseats
Sheffield S8 0GA

The Rev. Dr. Martin Wellings was born in Buckinghamshire and studied at Oxford before training for minstry at Wesley House, Cambridge. His research on evangelicals in the Church of England has been published as *Evangelicals Embattled* (Paternoster Press, 2003). He is a minister in the Oxford Circuit and Chair of the Methodist Archives and History Committee.

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