



Communicating a biblical view

William Orange Memorial Lecture - 2001

Current Issues

About Us

- [Become a Partner](#)
- [Become a Member](#)
- [Latimer Fellowship](#)
- [Annual Orange Lecture](#)
- [President's Lecture](#)
- [William Alfred Orange](#)
- [How to Contact Us](#)
- [About Our People](#)

Comment

Publications

Reviews

Resources

Links

Evangelical : a forgotten wor(I)d?

Preliminary remarks

Privilege

As someone who in the 1950s benefited directly and strongly from the forerunners of Latimer, and from Canon Orange and from one of his most ardent students in particular, I feel privileged to give this address.

Topic

I have been asked to look back at what this society was and forward to what it might or should be, as I see it. My association with the society began in Wellington in the mid fifties and continued in Christchurch, Melbourne, Nelson and Blenheim.

In order to make a usable contribution to discussion I have to make choices and omissions. The picture is therefore severely limited. What I say can be likened to a caricature which does not purport to be the whole reality, but in which the reality is nevertheless recognisable. I have also prepared this paper in non-technical language in order to be as inclusive as possible for all church folk.

Provisos

May I make two provisos.

- 1) Everything I say should be taken with the introductory clause, "It seems to me".
- 2) I am more interested in finding "the Truth out there" than in being proved right; so I will value your comments at the conclusion.

Speaking of a "Truth out there" identifies me with those who are at odds with the concept popular in today's thinking, that truth is not an objective reality but is a variable thought or feeling as experienced by a given individual at a given time. My response is that if there is no truth there is no God. But as there is a God, then there is a truth which may be experienced and should be discussed by humans. I make no apology for this stance.

Loss of a word

Words affect our thinking. I can't assess how much they affect it; but the recognition of the value of select words is seen, for example, in the efforts of advertising agencies to choose vivid and memorable words for their clients.

In my time with the society it has lost a significant word from its banner: the word evangelical. What started as Evangelical Churchmen's Fellowship was changed to Anglican Evangelical Fellowship to include the church concerned and both genders. The word Evangelical was maintained. The gifting of Canon Orange's estate opened a new chapter in our mission; with it a Library and a full time Warden. We wanted both Library and Warden to be available and used as widely as possible. It was deemed appropriate to take a new name, one which might leave behind the somewhat negative impressions of Evangelical and gently indicate our genre without the risk of any "in-your-face" overtones. I will not criticise the intentions or the wisdom of those responsible for the change. Their intentions were

honourable and their integrity unquestionable. However, in hindsight, I think something definitive was lost. Something of the cutting edge of former years has gone. I realise that a simple comparison of historical times is fraught with difficulty. But all my faculties tell me something important is slipping away. It's not simply the loss of a word which has caused this; of course other factors are involved. But the absence of the word has meant that its prophetic value has been missed. (Please remember that "prophetic" refers to the outspoken word of God to a contemporary situation as much as to the foretelling aspect of the word.)

Central to Evangelical thought

To form an exact definition of Evangelical is not easy. Not the least in that it is used differently in various parts of the world. Let me see if I can pin-point the distinctive feature of evangelical at least as I understand it.

Evangelical and Evangelist

We must distinguish between Evangelical and Evangelism or Evangelist. As evangelicals we understand that God is hurt by people's rejection of Him, and that He longs for them to turn back to Him as a good parent agonises for the return of a wayward child. On the one hand the yearning in the heart of God for His people, and on the other hand the perilous existence of those outside the kingdom of God, lead us into serious evangelism - telling the good news of Christ in a way which encourages a positive response from them. That is evangelism. An evangelist is someone specifically charged by God to carry out this proclamation.

In the 50s the preaching of the saving grace of Christ, and the Reformation's sola fide was hardly heard apart from in churches of the evangelical persuasion. Consequently, inside evangelical parishes there was a thrust which some interpreted as encouragement for all members to be evangelists. Outside these parishes there grew the mistaken belief that evangelical equals evangelist. It was essentially the evangelical clergy and parishes which saw the need to support Billy Graham's missions thoroughly. The rest wished he would go away.

In a sermon in St Martin's, Spreydon, in the early 70s when I was vicar there, Brian Carrell made a significant statement: "Not all Christians are called to be evangelists, but all are called to be witnesses." The sermon developed this thought with clarity, and I have long been grateful for this expression of Biblical truth. You don't have to be an evangelist to be an evangelical. We are each called to exercise the gifting that God has given us. Nor, I have discovered, do you have to be an evangelical to be an evangelist.

Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical

Going further in our pursuit of the heart of evangelical, what distinguishes Evangelical Anglican from Anglo-Catholic Anglican? I've chosen the Anglo-Catholic genre because in the 50s it appeared to many that this was at the pole furthest away from Evangelical. I am aware that there were members of each camp which wondered how those of the other could possibly be Christian. A shocking mistake, if ever there was one. Anglo-Catholics can and do have Christ at the heart of their lives as much as evangelicals claim to have. And salvation by grace through faith is by no means contrary to Anglo-Catholicism.

By way of illustration: When I taught at College House in the latter half of the 60s, a committed Anglo Catholic scholar from Oxford was appointed to the staff deliberately so that the students would get a fair

balance of Anglican thinking: Stephen Haddelsey. There were a few initial awkwardnesses, but a strong bond of respect and love in the Lord grew between us. Christ was truly at the centre of Stephen's heart. I've never known a less worldly person. Nor one more vigorously committed to the defence of the Gospel. As representatives of our schools of thought we had our differences; but those differences were not in our definition of Christian or our love for Christ.

The heart of evangelical as I know it

The distinctive principle of evangelical is the supremacy of Scripture for our belief and behaviour.

Anglo-Catholics would place Scripture and Tradition on an equal footing; so-called Liberal Christians would value Reason equal with or above Scripture; but the Evangelical would say that Nothing may have the exclusive place of Scripture in Christian thinking.

I will later return to the vexed question of the interpretation of Scripture. At this point I am concerned only to affirm the distinctive tenet of an evangelical -

the centrality and supremacy of Scripture through which God has definitively revealed Himself.

Corollaries of our trust of Scripture

As a corollary we believe that the Creeds are the catholic authoritative statements of Biblical Christian belief because they are the most concise and universally recognised summaries of the essence of Biblical Christianity. I can recall a major debate at Christchurch Synod at the time of the controversy associated with the Bishop of Woolwich. It was proposed that the Synod give clear guidance to Anglicans by affirming its belief in the Nicene Creed. Some, unwilling to commit themselves to this, argued it was better to affirm our belief in the God to whom the creed bore witness. Evangelicals were strong in their support of the motion. I thank God it was affirmed.

Closely related to this in the fifties and sixties was our wedded-ness to the Prayer Book. We knew that the BCP (1662) was based on the work of scholars whose thinking regarding the place of Scripture was our model. Next to the Bible and Creeds we valued the Prayer Book.

Bound with the Prayer Book were the Thirty-nine articles to which every Anglican clergyman was required to give assent. Article Six was a favourite: Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

The study of the articles is a whole topic in itself; immense books have been written on them. Those who know about them will realise that they were not intended to be a full coverage of Anglican Christianity, but were responses to certain important questions at particular times. I'm not going to chase that one here; nor would I try to justify every Article in the light of Scripture. However, with the advent of the NZPB the Anglican Church in NZ intentionally distanced itself from the Articles. Evangelicals of my younger days would have recognised this development as the thin edge of an insidious wedge.

Back on track: John Stott in his *I Believe in Preaching* published a favourite pulpit prayer of his which sums up well our attitude in the fifties and sixties:

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your Word be our rule, your Spirit our guide, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Some resulting conflicts

Yes, there were conflicts, and yes we did make mistakes. We often argued about minutiae as if they were the measure of life. At times we played God when we judged who were in and who were out of the kingdom. (Some of our best brains were on the mission field, and we sorely missed them.) But I think that as we soldiered on, praying for wisdom and understanding, we achieved a modicum of success in church life which would have been so much poorer without us.

Add

Other weaknesses included an inability to work with non-Christians, a lack of involvement with politico/social policy, and a general suspicion of anything 'modern'.

An abiding weakness

There was one particular aspect of evangelical life as I knew it which contributed severely to lack of evangelical influence in our church. It was the disinclination of evangelical clergy to be involved with diocesan and provincial administration and leadership. When I joined the Christchurch diocesan Standing Committee at the beginning of the seventies folk couldn't remember any evangelical clergyman to do this in recent years. I later spoke about this lack at a Latimer Clergy Luncheon, and other members took up the challenge and contributed significantly to the church's leadership. But that has passed, and we are again without sufficient clerical voice in diocesan leadership. I regard this as a major weakness, and something that must be addressed.

All the evangelical clergy I have known have wanted to get on with the job to which they are called - the preaching of the gospel and the nurture of their parishioners. This is vital, it is very demanding and takes up all our time, and it has a warm component of job-satisfaction. I can understand clergy sticking to it and saying they are not called to diocesan leadership. But that's not good enough. The effects of this policy are severe.

- a) The evangelical contribution in policy making is missing.
- b) We get a reputation for being unwilling to work with clergy from other parishes. It is thought that we have little attachment to the church.
- c) It seems to me that the application of our theology of the church is thrown into serious question. If the church is the body of Christ as the scripture indicates, why do we so firmly withdraw from it? Do we not really know the significance of this word of God? Or do we know it and fail to do it?

If you take nothing else from this paper, I hope this challenge will remain with you. It is a running sore in the side of the evangelical corpus. The church needs the full contribution of its evangelical wing. It's up to us to maintain it.

Back to the imperative of the centrality of Scripture

You may think that the authority of Scripture is so fundamental in the church that it can be taken for granted. Nothing is further from the truth. I have no desire to fight the battles of yesteryear, as some claim this is. But Satan is ever active, and as we loosen our vigilance things which do violence to

Scripture creep in unchallenged. [If examples are needed - Aotearoa's reportedly serious consideration of the reality of Maori gods is a prime example. The Invocation of Saints as practised in some of our congregations is another.]

St. Peter's As long as I am in the flesh I will remind you of these things. (2 Peter 1:13+-) is as necessary today as it ever was.

The Interpretation of Scripture

Scripture is supreme: but it is of no value unless it is interpreted wisely. Hermeneutics, the study of methods of interpretation is an immense and complex subject; we can but touch on it here. In the fifties and sixties we got hung up over a number of ideas; Inspiration, Infallibility, Inerrancy were words bandied about and widely misunderstood. The authority of Scripture seemed to be compromised if a text was lost or modified in transmission, if the hand of editors was seen in the final version, if the Bible's writers assumed the earth was flat, or if it could be proved that the mustard seed was not the smallest of seeds, or never grew to be a big tree in which birds nested. It was a worrying time.

We battled through it, and some strong principles of exegesis were achieved. We maintained that the Scripture's message has come from the heart of God as He has adequately expressed Himself through the lives and words of specially appointed people. We realised the folly of taking a text out of its context, or interpreting a verse in a manner contrary to the whole emphasis of scripture. We recognised the purpose of the Bible story as theological, moral, ethical rather than scientific. We admitted that the Bible doesn't answer every question we may ask of it; but gives us the principles from which to answer most known questions about life. We learned to use scholarship as a means of interpretation rather than a monster to be slain. Fortunately the books published by some superb English-speaking scholars gave us the necessary balance.

The statement from my student days which has helped me best is that of Leonard Hodgson in his Gifford Lectures, "For Faith and Freedom". He said we should ask:

What must the truth have been, and be, if men who thought and spoke as they did saw it and spoke of it like that?

My experience has been that with this question in mind we can engage 'with' (not necessarily 'against') the best minds in the field and come to a satisfying conclusion.

The use of Scripture

Evangelicals were at pains to insist that we should submit to being used by Scripture for God's purposes rather than using Scripture for our own ends. Whilst recognising that evangelicals are fallible humans themselves, and have frequently slipped in their application of this important doctrine, I believe that to have this intention constantly in mind is itself a safeguard which prevents the worst abuses and leads to greater light for our minds and hearts.

There has always been a strong temptation to use Scripture to justify our own thinking. All honest preachers are be aware of this. I have had to re-write a number of sermons when I have realised that they were based on incorrect exegesis. (e.g. After a Bishop had waffled all over the place and failed to answer a crucial question the church was facing I furiously grabbed the text If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who can prepare for battle? Wonderful, crunchy stuff! I'm still convinced that my

criticism was utterly valid: but the text would not support what I derived from it. That sermon was never preached!)

This problem confronts every generation. Let me give you examples from my experience. You may recall what you have encountered. I begin with what seemed at the time and still seems today, a ridiculous application of Scripture.

a) At the time of the liberation of abortion legislation a senior dignitary of our church took me aside and said "Look, David, Scripture supports my stand for abortion." He went on the quote Job's unforgettable agony at his misfortunes: May the day perish wherein I was born . . . may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn . . . Why did I not perish at birth . . . Why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child?

I thought he was teasing me; he was not; he was deadly serious, and feeling justified. He could not (would not) see that you can't use a man's expression of utter misery (something many have felt) as a doctrine of the faith.

b) I had been a guest on a farm, hosted by genuine and loving Christians on whom the local church depended heavily. I went to help with the feeding out of hay. It was mid-winter and the ground was solid. Standing on the back of a trailer behind a tractor, cutting the bales for the animals, I was aware of the risks involved doing this. Inside, thawing out, I commented how worried they must be when they had to do it in worse conditions. "Oh, no problem," I was told. "We simply pray, and none of our family will get hurt. "

I didn't want to argue, but I knew of many similar situations where someone had been seriously hurt or killed. Thinking to broaden their understanding of prayer, and to cushion any future disappointment, I mentioned a couple of instances of prayerful people being hurt. They were adamant that it would never happen to them. I hoped not.

A week or so later I wrote them a note covering the issue and suggesting that the book of Job had something to say about terrible loss despite model uprightness and faithfulness in prayer. The answer was "Oh, that's Old Testament. We are New Testament believers; the Old has nothing to do with our faith."

I truly honour and admire those people; but their sweeping renunciation of the Old Testament, called The Scriptures by Jesus Himself, and thoroughly supported by him, is not a faithful use of Scripture. Yet it is all too common among Christians, some of whom are ignorant of the OT content, and some reject it out of hand; others interpret it contrary to the New.

Articles vi and vii of the Thirty-nine are instructive. vii begins The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man

c) When Bishop Richard Holloway, Primus of Scotland, addressed a Christchurch Clergy Conference in the late nineties we were treated to a moving, but, I maintain, irresponsible use of Scripture. It was moving because he spoke eloquently of the plight of the son in Jesus' parable, and equally eloquently of the anguish of the father in the absence of his son. He showed how the father's behaviour in watching for his son, let alone running to meet his son, broke all the canons of contemporary custom. We could feel the heart of God yearning for estranged children.

Then came the climax of Bishop Holloway's address. When the father received the son he said absolutely nothing about what he expected the son's behaviour to be back in the father's house. Nothing at all. So far so good; but the bishop went on to draw the mighty conclusion from this silence that there are no rules and regulations expected of us from God when we return to his family! This was the 'Situation Ethics' of the sixties being repeated.

The bishop was grossly in error. He was arguing from silence, and when Jesus told the parable it was to show the anxiety of the father, and also the lack of understanding of the elder brother. Mention of any rules or regulations was not on Jesus' agenda at that moment. In any case, given the social code of the time, it was naturally assumed that the son would automatically conform with the patterns of the household. Had the removal of ethics been Jesus' intention, he would have been forced to counter this natural assumption. The son had sought one form of freedom and found it to be bondage; he was now returning to what he had formerly thought of as bondage, but by experience had come to recognise as freedom.

Further: the bishop would have to accuse St Paul of not understanding the nature of the liberty Christ brings, for St Paul spent much time attending to misbehaviour in the church. Is it likely that 2000 years later we understand the intention of such a parable better than someone who was contemporary with Jesus? (When questioned at one stage during his series of addresses the bishop declared that "Jesus was mistaken" about a particular matter and thereby has misled us in this matter. In the light of this, I don't doubt he would take on St Paul.)

Here we had brilliant oratory, an ability to stir the imaginations of the audience, resulting in a charged emotional atmosphere; a dangerous mix into which to slip an unwarranted use of Scripture. I think the magic of the moment which the bishop had conjured up stunned the critical faculties of the clergy. Just one example of what is frequently experienced by audiences throughout the world. And something which evangelicals should be wary of and resist.

d) I could mention many other examples.

The old chestnut of using John 3 No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit, as justification on the one hand for baptism and on the other for the necessity of a second blessing often referred to as The Baptism of the Spirit.

In some circles, Paul's experience on the Damascus Road is taken as a paradigm of all conversion. Unless you can name a date and time when you were converted, then you are not born again.

The Lectionary for Sunday readings leaves out much of value, and is inclined to choose readings to fit themes. At times it misses out vital sections of the Biblical passages, at the serious risk of distorting the message.

The famous Crystal Cathedral ministry which does such notable work, speaks unashamedly of 'The Gospel within the Gospel' and thereby seriously affects the balance of Scripture. Robert Schuler has written, ". . . the most serious sin is the one that causes me to say 'I am unworthy'. . . ". This gospel of self-esteem sidesteps the Biblical doctrine of the justification of sinners by the unique atoning work of Christ. Self-esteem is an important psychological need for healthy living; I wouldn't deny it for anyone. But it is not 'the Gospel of Christ', and, interestingly, some of the most potent of saints have had little self-esteem

The transforming power is God's

Praise be to God that he picks up these errors and uses them to his purposes . . . something which staggers us . . . But we should not let God's great redeeming actions make us careless in our theology and our use of His Word.

Some major challenges which face us today Tripartite Scripture, Tradition, Reason

It is frequently claimed that Scripture, Tradition and Reason is the firm three-legged stool on which the Anglican church is based. The Bishop of Christchurch is but one eminent church leader who has stated this categorically. Evangelical thought firmly rejects this popular trinity. I have already spoken of the unique place of Scripture in God-given revelation. Let me mention the other two items in turn

Tradition

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was, amongst other things, an effort to rid the Western church of the burden of traditions which were proving an ungodly burden to the souls of the people. The reformers sought, not to rid the church of tradition, but to rid it of those traditions which were contrary to God's Word written. In its counter-measure to the teachings of the reformers, the Council of Trent insisted, *inter alia*, that tradition is of equal authority to that of Scripture. This is still an obstacle between Roman Catholic and Protestant understanding of divine revelation.

A reading of the Prefaces to the 1552 [yes, 1552] and Article xxxiv will show the place of tradition in the minds of our Anglican forebears. Anglican thinking is not dismissive of tradition, but accepts its value provided it is in line with Biblical truth. We differ from evangelicals in some other Protestant churches over this matter. Many of these are deeply suspicious of tradition. (However, I doubt if any church exists which has not some tradition in its current practice, even if it's only the tradition of denying tradition any value!)

Eugene Peterson, a contemporary Presbyterian theologian, has pointed out that tradition is a vital way in which past generations contribute to our contemporary debate. He's right. We must not lose sight of what our forebears have found. Likewise, signs and symbols which have spoken eloquently may still convey powerful strength today (cross, fish and dove for example) To ditch them would be to lose something very precious.

Nevertheless, tradition ought not to be taken as of equal standing with Scripture.

If we are to know anything of Jesus Christ it is primarily what the four canonical gospels tell us. Anything running contrary to this portrait of Christ must logically be rejected if it is to be Christianity. Our Lord gave specific teaching to the Twelve who were selected by him as his witnesses to establish his church. What we call our New Testament is part of the immediate fulfilment of their work. Unless God is the Supreme Joker (if I may use that crudity), He is not going to produce a different, unwritten, gospel in subsequent times. Consequently, that which is contrary to the written word cannot be called Christian. (Remember this as a response to the hidden teachings of gnosticism?)

Added to this essential theological argument against the equal status of tradition is the highly practical question of 'Which Tradition?' All sorts of traditions can be found from the earliest church life through to that of the twentieth century. And as many reasons can be postulated for those traditions. As an example of a change comparatively recently made, we no longer refuse to bury suicides in consecrated

ground. And whilst Rome insists on the necessity of a Priest for marriage to be valid, Protestants have long ago accepted other rites of passage for marriage to be valid.

Other traditions I see as contrary to Scripture include the Invocation of Saints, the doctrine of Purgatory, the Sacrifice of the Mass, the doctrine of Apostolic succession in the consecration of bishops. All of which, I am afraid, find footholds in the Anglican church.

There are other ones not so devastating, but which might well be questioned today. The need for an ordained person to consecrate the elements at Holy Communion is one. Scripture does not demand it, and so long as things are done decently and in order we should not be afraid to change it. The whole question of what ordination means is in need of careful review. Not many years ago the Doctrinal Commission of our Province failed to produce an adequate understanding of what ordination to the Priesthood is.

If I were compiling new Articles to supplement the Thirty-nine, I would want some direction in the church's working relationship with other major faiths, its understanding of the role of science, of human responsibility for the care of nature and its resources, of our commitment to handle poverty and promote justice.

Which leads us to look at Reason.

Reason

Mindless Christianity is a contradiction in terms. Nowhere in Scripture is faith contrasted with reason. Everywhere people are urged to use their minds in the service of God. One of my favourites is from Isaiah where God says Come, now, let us reason together . . . The great command is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. And without the use of our minds we would be incapable of responding to St Peter's injunction Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have.

In the fifties and sixties we were never allowed to forget this: we all had copies of T.C.Hammond's 'In Understanding be Men'; a brilliant book in which the whole gamut of Christian belief was set out. The title, of course, is a reference to St Paul's urgent In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking grow up! [1 Cor. 14:20]. In the sixties and seventies evangelicals engaged in a number of the church's large issues, with carefully thought out policies and statements. The great debates concerning Church Union, the Marriage of Divorced People, the Ordination of Women, and the Admission of all the Baptised to Holy Communion required a huge mental effort on part of all concerned, not the least the evangelicals.

It is essential to make these points today when there is much anti-intellectualism rife in Christian circles. John Stott in a recorded lecture in Warsaw in 1994 was constrained to say "The fullness of the Holy Spirit and anti-intellectualism are incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth."

Nevertheless, the human mind suffered in The Fall, as did every other part of our being. The mind is imperfect, corrupted by evil. Those who put it on a pedestal and make reason a faculty on a level with Scripture are consciously or ignorantly following the Enlightenment's [18th century] error of the deification of the human mind. Our evangelical forebears did not fall into this trap. We should vigorously oppose any equation of Reason and Scripture.

However, I sense that in today's climate where any claim for truth independent of the human mind is

treated with suspicion, and where narrative is replacing rational argument, many Christians are putting their minds into limbo while worshipping or seeking God's guidance, being persuaded that this is pleasing to God. On the contrary: to reject the use of our minds is dishonouring a precious gift of God.

One more comment on this matter. There is value in healthy debate over issues. Lone thinkers do not have their ideas tested. Corporate application of the mind is something we evangelicals need to discover again today. Will Latimer executive please take note!

Scripture and Experience

A new danger is among us today. Experience has taken the place otherwise claimed of reason and tradition in the beliefs of many. "I have had an experience; therefore" The Bible is searched to 'confirm' the experience.

Three examples I can put occasion to are:

a) The young woman who told me she had never felt so free as when she gave up Christianity! Her experience was real; but according to Scripture was deceptive.

b) The priest who, when elevating the chalice at Holy Communion, caught a glimpse of the church cross reflected in the wine, thought "He's in the cup". A lovely, warm, devotional experience. Something we might call a serendipity. Thank God for it. But this cannot be used to argue an unbiblical equation of the wine with the blood of Christ.

c) Then there are the frequent occasions where a dramatic conversion or a moment of special blessing has given credence to claims that all must experience such an occasion, citing specific formulae for conversion or glossolalia for the fullness of the Spirit as sine qua non's of Christianity.

It's not easy to counter claims from experience. People crave an absolute certainty. We can't blame them. There are so many indefinites in life. However, it is necessary in love and honesty to affirm and explore the experience in the light of the God-given revelation we have in Scripture, and not put the experience on that same level. God give His saints the grace to do this.

Summary and Conclusion

I have argued that the Evangelical school of Christian thought has at its base a doctrine which is vital to the existence and the effectiveness of the Church. That is, the central place of Scripture in our understanding of God and the world, and of God's requirements for Christian life and action. The application and defence of this belief is an inheritance which has been handed on to us by our evangelical forebears.

I have argued that there is continuing urgency for us to apply our communal mind as thoroughly and honestly as possible in our interpretation of Scripture and our defence of its place in the Church's life and ministry. Paul's deeply moving words to Timothy Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you were taken seriously by NZ evangelicals of the mid twentieth century. They would be disappointed if we let it slip. I believe that the need for this application and apologetic is as critical today as ever it was.

I have indicated that this God-given task will be severely hindered if we continue to deprive the legislative and administrative structures of our church of significant evangelical input and fellowship. This is something we should learn from a lack in a past generation of evangelicals.

I have suggested that an examination of today's self-confessed evangelicals might reveal some serious lacks in faithful application of Biblical truth. Our fallen nature inclines us to use Scripture rather than to

be used by it.

One of the questions I used to put to candidates for ordination when I interviewed them may be a suitable place to conclude. I would ask them Where is Christ in your life? Some floundered. Some gave moving testimony. I honour them all. Just occasionally a brave soul suggested that the question was the wrong way round; it should be not Where is Christ in my life?, but Where am I in Christ's life? I would urge evangelicals to ask not What use do I make of Scripture?, but What use does Scripture make of me? Only then can we hope to provide the Church with the vital trace element known as Evangelical.

[← back](#)

[top of page ↑](#)

[Current Issues](#) | [About Us](#) | [Comment](#) | [Publications](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Resources](#) | [Links](#)
