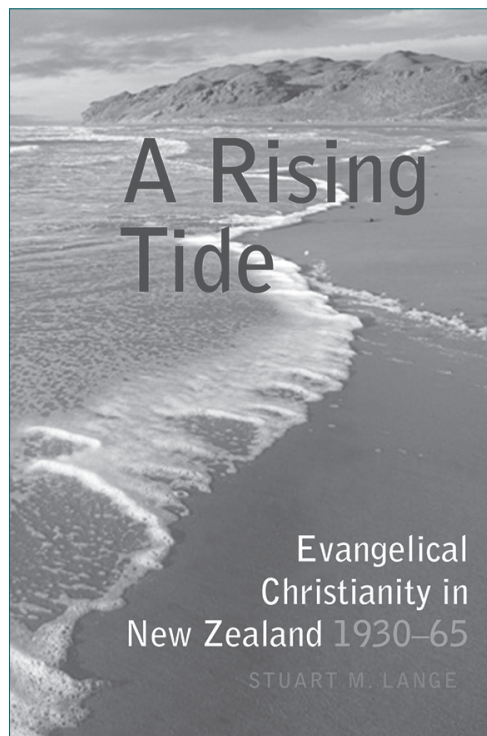




A Rising Tide Reviewed

Rt. Rev. Brian Carrell

In the last issue of *Latimer Focus*, Stuart Lange was interviewed about his new book, *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand 1930-65* (Otago University Press, 2013). Here Bishop Brian Carrell, as one familiar with many of the people and events mentioned in the book, offers his review.



This is a book that deserves a place on the study shelf of every serious reader who has an interest in the story of Christianity in this land, particularly in the mid-20th century.

Admirably presented, well illustrated and easy on the eye, the book is in the broad-brush, yet accurate, meticulously researched and referenced. It is the kind of book that can as readily be kept aside for occasional dipping into to check information or taken up and read completely as a whole for enjoyment.

It tells in two parts the story of the remarkable resurgence of evangelical Christianity in New Zealand over the 35 year period, 1930-65. First it outlines the people and processes that brought about a 'turn of the tide' through the years 1930-45,

then the increasingly 'rising tide' of evangelical ministry that took place within the Christian scene in this country over the following two decades.

For many older readers of this magazine who were born and very likely nurtured in their faith within these years by this resurgence, *A Rising Tide* will evoke many appreciative memories. Stuart Lange introduces us to well remembered individuals, events and movements at the forefront of this phenomenon, men such as John Laird, Thomas Miller and his family, William Orange and his 'Pips', Roger Thompson and Harry Thomson, groups such as the university Evangelical Unions and the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, Scripture Union with its Crusader groups and CMS with its League of Youth, the Bible Training Institute and the Latimer Fellowship itself (initially known as The Evangelical Churchmen's Fellowship). The account all rings very true, particularly to those who were themselves part and parcel of this fresh wave of Christian commitment and service spanning the decades either side of World War II.

The story focuses principally on what was happening within two major denominations over this period, the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches. It shows the considerable overlay of mutual identity and cross-border involvement between evangelical Presbyterians and evangelical Anglicans that facilitated this rising tide of biblical ministry with a consequential breaking down of denominational barriers that in turn drew in many Baptists and Brethren. It can be argued that these years produced in New Zealand an alternative unstructured and unheralded functional ecumenism that in its longer-lasting effects has outshone the efforts of the higher profile National Council of Churches of that time and the negotiations for Church Union.

From an Anglican perspective the author majors on the spring tide of evangelical ministry occurring

to varying degree in four dioceses—Christchurch, Nelson, Dunedin and Wellington. (In comparison, for Presbyterians the greatest impact took place initially in Otago-Southland and then South Auckland.) The impact of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade is examined, and what is described in this book as a ‘generational windshift’ in evangelical Anglican outlook that was beginning to take place as the period under survey drew to a close and a younger leadership began to emerge as part of this ‘rising tide’.

One-third of the book is taken up with end-notes, a bibliography and index reflecting the origins of this meticulously detailed and referenced study as a PhD dissertation. But do not be put off by this. There is much gold to be mined and insights to be garnered even in these appendices. All together these make this a ‘go to’ reference book for generations to come, introducing readers to forgotten figures, forces and factors that helped shape the New Zealand Church in the middle of the 20th century.

Occasionally there are patches that stretch credulity or do inadequate justice to others. At St Martin’s Church Spreydon, for example, was there really an average Sunday School attendance of 520 in 1965, at the end of the period surveyed? Also, in the helpful Glossary at the end, the Anglican term ‘High Church’ is defined as ‘any catholicising tendency in the Church of England’. This overemphasises a later development. In its 18th and 19th century origins the term indicated any person holding a ‘high’ view of the Church and its importance in the economy of God over against the power and pretensions of the State, rather than sympathy with more Catholic features of worship and ritual.

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Not all High Church sympathisers at the time of the Canterbury Settlement, for example, were ritualists. It was only in the mid-19th century following the rising tide of first the Oxford Movement and then Anglo-Catholicism that ritual dress and practice became more closely associated with an elevated view of the Church. But these are minor peccadilloes when seen in context of a book that both richly informs as well as deeply inspires.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue as the author looks at evangelical Christianity in New Zealand beyond 1965. Here his contribution is descriptive rather than prophetic, an outline of the disparate and largely unanticipated course Christianity has taken since 1965 in the context of a rapidly changing and markedly more secular Kiwi society. If in fact ‘the rising tide’ still continues, it is in a much less visible and more diffused way. What the reader is left looking for is a much more visionary ‘glimpse into the future’ as to where and in what form Christianity is heading in 21st century Aotearoa New Zealand. But that was not the purpose or brief of this valuable book. Is this a challenge that The Latimer Fellowship itself now needs to take up?