

# Editorial

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the launch of *Anvil* and while the journal's focus is primarily on the present and the future, anniversaries offer an opportunity to look back and learn from the past. In relation to *Anvil* and Anglican evangelicalism, that task has been greatly assisted by the publication, at the end of last year, of Andrew Atherstone's Latimer Study, *An Anglican Evangelical Identity Crisis: The Churchman-Anvil Affair of 1981-1984*.<sup>1</sup> Originally commissioned with a view to publication in *Anvil* itself, the material grew to make publication as an article in the journal impractical, but I hope readers of the journal will buy and read a copy.

Atherstone's study makes for fascinating though rather depressing reading. Drawing on various archives, it will give new understanding and perspective on these important events in recent Anglican evangelicalism both to those who already know, or think they know, the story and those for whom it is simply a piece of history. It reveals the cocktail of powerful personalities, evangelical politics (surrounding the direction of Church Society and the nature of the Society's relationship with its journal *Churchman*) and theological and ecclesiological differences which led in March 1983 to Church Society sacking *Churchman's* editor (Peter Williams who returns as guest editor for the next issue of *Anvil*) and the reconstitution of the editorial board. Those events led, less than a year later, to the launch of *Anvil* with the support of the evangelical theological colleges and various leading evangelicals (although, illustrating the complexity of the issues, Atherstone reveals that Timothy Dudley-Smith, Michael Green and Oliver O'Donovan were among those who declined the invitation to endorse *Anvil* at its launch).

In many ways, the story feels like a very different world. One of the leading figures was David Samuel, appointed Director of Church Society in Nov 1982, who subsequently left the Church of England over the ordination of women and was consecrated a bishop in The Church of England (Continuing). His vehement anti-Roman Catholicism is just one of the features of the story that gives a sense of a very different evangelical Anglican culture.

## Personalities and the changing Church of England

In other ways, however, the world is like ours and the differences that arose then have continued to shape aspects of life among evangelicals today. There is most obviously the continuity of personalities and the different trajectories they have travelled over the last quarter century. Many of those behind *Anvil* at its launch have subsequently become bishops (including Pete Broadbent, David Atkinson, Ian Cundy, Colin Buchanan, and, of course, George Carey). Many of those supportive of Church Society's actions and involved in *Churchman* after the sackings (Gerald Bray, Roger Beckwith, Paul Gardner) have remained strong critics of the Church

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<sup>1</sup> Atherstone 2008. Copies can be ordered from [www.latimertrust.org](http://www.latimertrust.org)

of England's direction, becoming prominent spokesmen for conservative evangelicalism and associated with later developments such as the opposition to women's ordination and the launch of *Reform*. In marked contrast, the only bishop to be appointed from firmly within that perspective (apart from David Samuel!) is Wallace Benn who is reported by Atherstone as believing the sacked *Churchman* board had over-reacted in planning a new journal.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be denied that this aspect of the fallout from the falling out that led to *Anvil* continues to shape the attitudes and perceptions of different evangelicals to the Church of England and also the internal dynamics of Anglican evangelicalism.

For the majority, the recognition and utilisation of the gifts of these and other evangelicals by the wider church is the positive fruit of exactly the sort of engagement with the wider church begun at the Keele NEAC in 1967 and which Church Society in the 1980s was beginning to question. The growing number of mission-minded, biblically-based and theologically significant evangelicals among Church of England bishops (most recently *Anvil* Trustee, Steve Croft, appointed to Sheffield and former Ridley Hall Principal, Chris Cocksworth, appointed to Coventry) and archdeacons is undoubtedly one of the major changes between today and quarter of a century ago and perhaps one which *Anvil* can claim some credit in helping create.

For others, however, the increasing number of evangelicals in the hierarchy is only happening at the price of the weakening of evangelical distinctives, a major reason why Church Society in the early 1980s was becoming so unhappy with *Churchman*. The unsettling challenge from this perspective is that the appointments are not so much the beneficial fruit of Keele or *Anvil* but rather the continued implementation on a larger scale of the fascinating mindset revealed recently in the Prime Minister's Appointment Secretary's briefing about senior appointments from 1960. There Donald Coggan, then at Bradford and formerly prominent in the post-war Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now UCCF), was described as 'too big a man to have any definitive party allegiance, and has grown from an evangelical background into a central churchman. His evangelical background would provide a balance to Ramsey's tendencies in the opposite direction, and together they would be a truly representative pair of Archbishops'. The then bishop of Chelmsford was also marked for preferment as 'an evangelical now tending to central'. It is the challenge of conservative evangelical voices that it is predominantly similar evangelicals who have been appointed bishops in the last few decades and that far from reforming the church to be more gospel-centred they have instead fulfilled the establishment's intention of, in John Richardson's words, seeking to 'keep the Church of England moderate'.<sup>3</sup>

## Evangelical party politics

Not only is there continuity of personalities, there is, sadly, still some continuity in the pattern of the politics that caused so much pain. Reading the history in the context of more recent divisions among evangelicals, including conflicts over

<sup>2</sup> Atherstone 2008: 54.

<sup>3</sup> The document is online at [www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=68696](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=68696), John Richardson's

blog is at <http://ugleyvicar.blogspot.com/2009/01/how-state-kept-church-of-england.html>

NEAC5 and the representativeness of the Church of England Evangelical Council (the CEEC's largely passive and divided role in the *Anvil* history is another interesting element in the story), sadly confirmed the Preacher's assessment that 'what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun' (Eccles. 1:9). Although there are some signs of hope that there are alternative ways of engaging differences (for example, some of the private correspondence from John Pearce, Chair of Church Society Council quoted by Atherstone, and acknowledgments of failures), the overwhelming impression of the story is of a bifurcation into increasingly dogmatic partisanship, leading to the development of factions and the drawing up of battle-lines and so inevitable division. Twenty-five years ago that was expressed largely through personal correspondence, private meetings and letters to the church press. Today such destructive powers sadly also work through the much more rapid, public and permanent media of emails and websites and blogs. One of the major challenges arising out of *Anvil's* birth that sadly is still pressing today is whether and how we can find a way of engaging in evangelical controversy and politics that is truly evangelical – shaped by the gospel of reconciliation in Christ.

### **A different evangelical context**

Largely absent from all the politics in the story of *Anvil's* birth (and perhaps therefore a discontinuity that may be a sign of hope that things can now be different despite some of the similarities) is any significant presence of self-consciously charismatic Anglicanism. This is in part because in the early 1980s the charismatic movement was, certainly compared to today, still relatively small in the Church of England and among Anglican evangelicals (although there had been significant tensions in the 1970s prior to the Nottingham NEAC in 1977, leading to the Word and Spirit consultations). Furthermore, most of those involved with Church Society's leadership and *Churchman* were not involved and often hostile to (or at least suspicious of) these developments. The other factor is that then, as to a large extent now, most charismatic evangelicals have tended to steer clear of warfare among evangelicals (except of course when it was their own experiences of renewal that triggered a hostile reaction) and strategies for engaging official church structures. In the years since *Anvil* was born, this aspect of evangelicalism has, however, had a major impact on Anglican evangelicalism, especially through *Alpha* and, more recently, the New Wine Network. In recent years, one of the exciting developments has been its growing passion for theological study, reflection and training, including lay training, evident in such developments as the HTB School of Theology (now part of the new St Mellitus' College in London), the Westminster Theological Centre and the new Watford School of Leadership.

Together with those now at the forefront of the growing Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church movements, the charismatic movement is marked by being much less concerned about traditional evangelical shibboleths and party labels. Rather than risking controversy and division through focussing on particular doctrinal differences or contrasting ecclesiological stances, there is here more of a concern to engage with the Bible and work with all those open to the leading of the Spirit

and committed to evangelism and mission. For those shaped by this world – the overwhelming majority of the generation of missional and church leaders within the Church of England who were still at primary school or not even born when *Anvil* was launched - the heated differences behind *Anvil's* birth (such as whether it was right for an evangelical journal to publish James Dunn's strong polemical critique of Warfield's inerrantist doctrine of Scripture) are (sometimes perhaps too) easily seen as largely irrelevant and dangerous distractions. They are viewed as revealing a concern more with policing or provocatively transgressing the traditional boundary-markers of a particular party tradition, rather than discerning and serving the mission of God. The challenge here is how to maintain this welcome focus which rejects the destructive consequences arising from theological debates without thereby implicitly or explicitly down-grading doctrine and the importance at times of controversy in discerning the truth and ensuring faithfulness.

### ***Anvil*: Looking back and looking forward**

Thankfully, despite its birth out of such conflict, *Anvil* celebrates its silver jubilee able to look back on twenty-five years in which the journal has been marked not by such in-house conflicts but by resourcing Anglican theology and mission. Committedly evangelical, it has expressed those convictions through the adherence of editors and Trustees to the generous grace-centred CEEC Basis of Faith, and given space to writers across the range of evangelicalism and beyond. It has continued the early pattern found in early 1986 when Steve Walton (later *Anvil* Book Review editor and Chair of the Editorial Board) surveyed the two journals for CEEC and concluded in relation to *Anvil*: 'I cannot see any major strand within present-day Anglican evangelicalism unrepresented in the list of authors, whether it be Reformed, charismatic, kingdom theology, academic or whatever'. Its various editors have also continued the vision of Peter Williams, *Anvil's* first editor, who made clear that the journal sought input 'from the most conservative wing of Church Society to the most radical wing of Eclectics'.<sup>4</sup>

As *Anvil* begins its next twenty-five years, thankful to all those who have supported it (some of you faithfully for quarter of a century), that commitment to an evangelical Anglican generosity which provides high-quality practical and missional theology remains constant but it is clear that *how* we continue to fulfil this vision is going to change radically. It is not only the worlds of evangelicalism and Anglicanism which have changed since 1984. So have the worlds of publishing and providing theological materials! In recent years we've often had greater variety of length and form of articles. The reality, however, is that fewer and fewer of those whom *Anvil* now looks to resource think of subscribing to a quarterly print journal for articles and book reviews as the best means of being stimulated, challenged and equipped for mission and ministry today. We are, therefore, currently exploring alternative media – particularly online resources – praying and hoping that over the next quarter-century more and more people will benefit from *Anvil* even if they not only know nothing about its origins but also have never held a copy of *Anvil* in their hands!

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4 Quotes from Atherstone 2008: 66-7.

## **In the last issue – an explanation and apology**

Careful readers of the last issue will have spotted a major printing error in the book reviews on p308. Thank you to those who wrote to draw our attention to this problem. Due to a technical mishap, a one-off advert included in issue 4 of the previous year was reproduced over the text of the book reviews. This happened at the final stage of production and so was not spotted until after distribution. I'm very sorry for this error and any frustration this caused our readers and especially David Firth and Steve Walton whose reviews were incomplete. Those reviews are included in full in this issue.

## **In this issue**

This issue captures some of the breadth and emphases of *Anvil* in terms of both its authors and themes. The opening article, from Simon Vibert, combines the journal's concerns for Scripture and evangelism in an exploration of John's gospel and its accounts of Jesus' life-changing encounters with various individuals. The biblical focus continues in John Nolland's article which brings careful biblical scholarship to address the contemporary debates about sexual ethics through a study of Jesus' teaching in this area. *Anvil's* Trust Deed makes clear the journal's commitment to Anglicanism's Reformation heritage. The third article, by Andrew Atherstone, the author of the *Anvil* history, is based on his address to the recent *Reform* conference. It provides an historical and theological study of the motto *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* which challenges both conservatives and radicals in the contemporary church. Finally, Nigel Scotland's article offers an initial account and assessment of Todd Bentley and last year's Lakeland Outpouring which has had an impact in many Anglican and evangelical circles in this country.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Atherstone, Andrew. (2008). *An Anglican Evangelical Identity Crisis: The Churchman-Anvil Affair of 1981-1984*. London: The Latimer Trust.