

No book, particularly not a multi-author volume prepared for a conference, appears in a vacuum. The introduction to 'Fanning the Flame' sets some of the context with its account of previous NEACs and the growth and diversity within evangelicalism explored by other authors in this issue of Anvil. The decision to hold another NEAC was undoubtedly a risky one, especially when many saw the planning as too dominated by more conservative evangelicals. The original plan was to focus on the Bible and the cross as the central unifying emphases of evangelical Anglicanism. This, for all its strengths, was a major break with previous NEACs which – as their preparatory books show - had much broader concerns. Many were concerned that this twin focus was too restrictive and would be interpreted too narrowly and so the Church of England Evangelical Council was, relatively late in the preparations, persuaded to add mission as a third theme. If the contents of the book are any guide, that decision has radically changed the breadth and appeal of both this volume and the conference.

What, then, does this volume, tell us about the vision for NEAC and the wider state of Anglican evangelicalism ? That evangelicals retain a strong, intellectually defensible commitment to the authority of Scripture, the good news of salvation through the cross of the Christ, and the call to make Christ known in word and deed is one of the great encouragements of this volume. At a time when the media are representing evangelicalism as narrow-minded fundamentalism with an obsession about sex, it is important to show the breadth and depth of evangelical theology, spirituality and ministry. There is, however, a significant diversity among evangelicals within each of these areas and it is important to recognise and address this fact although, on the whole, the book fails to do so explicitly.

In relation to Scripture, the opening piece by Tim Ward demonstrates that those holding conservative views of Scripture with its language of inerrancy associated with Warfield and his followers must not be dismissed. They are not just repeating old shibboleths formulated in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century debates with liberalism. They are intellectually robust and engaging creatively with new currents in the philosophy of language, especially speech-act theory to formulate a biblical doctrine of Scripture for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A comparison with Edith Humphrey's stimulating piece confirms, however, that there are alternative evangelical approaches. It is perhaps important that, like Tom Wright whose work she draws on and John Goldingay whom Ward critiques,

Humphrey is a biblical scholar. Another biblical scholar, Chris Wright, also offers a stimulating missiological reading of Scripture in the opening essay in the mission section. A dialogue between his refocusing of Scripture on God's missionary action in the world so that 'the whole Bible itself is a missional phenomenon' (213) and Ward's account of Scripture as a divine speech-act would generate an exciting evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

Humphrey bases her account of Scripture not on a doctrine of the inspiration of the biblical text and a related doctrine of providence but rather on God's self-revelation. This means that instead of emphasising Scripture as God's Word because Scripture's ultimate author is God she writes that 'we call the Bible the Word of God because it witnesses (authoritatively) to the One who is the Word: its character as Word is reflected' (102). By stressing revelation as the primary category and something to which humans then bear witness, Humphrey also gives a stronger place to interpretation (the subject of Gardner's essay), Christian tradition, and experience because 'revelation occurs within the context of experience – especially, the common experience of the ekklesia' (102). She is also therefore much clearer than Ward on the role of other subordinate authorities and one of the few authors in the book to place her evangelicalism explicitly in the broader Anglican tradition.

Some of the implications of these different emphases are illustrated by comparing the essays by Fenton and Benn (working with more traditional evangelical understandings in relation to youth work and parish ministry) with that of Cray (who is more open and contextual in his theological method and practice as he looks at Scripture and truth in a network society).

The danger is that the different 'tribes' of evangelicals have opted for one or other of these approaches, view them as mutually exclusive, and tend to define themselves (sometimes polemically) over and against other evangelical approaches. The hope is that the conference will allow a real and respectful dialogue between these different evangelical theologies and a willingness to both learn from and critique different practical outworkings. Certainly for all their important differences, evangelicals must not forget how much they have in common in their attitude to Scripture and that their biblically based theology, practice and mission is a major gift they can offer the wider Church of England.

The second section on the cross is perhaps the one most likely to mislead readers about the real nature of Anglican evangelicalism. Its authors come from a

Submitted Review Article of "Fanning the Flame" (NEAC4 book) edited by Paul Gardner, Chris Wright and Chris Green. *Anvil* 20 (3):221-5.

fairly narrow range of evangelicalism and its strong defence and focus on a particular formulation of penal substitution bears the stamp of the recent volume *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet* (Paternoster, 2001). The lack of voices reflecting other evangelical views such as those found in an earlier evangelical symposium *Atonement Today* is a major disappointment.

Chris Green's opening piece claims the defining centre of any evangelical theology of the cross must be expressed in legal and juridical terms. Thus it is penal substitution and justification that are prioritised with the claim that, unlike other models (for example, a more personalist approach which would emphasise reconciliation and love) these are non-metaphorical (144) and that to speak of loving the sinner but hating the sin is too weak as 'God hates sinners even while he loves them' (145). Sadly these claims are given little detailed defence by Green, although Ackroyd does show the importance of this understanding within the Anglican tradition. Not only is there no real engagement with wider theological writing on the cross but even recent evangelical critiques of the biblical basis for focussing on penal substitution (e.g. by Joel Green) or the reformulating of the doctrine, in dialogue with Barth and others, (e.g. by Martin Davie) are ignored. Some of the dangers of a crude understanding of this model are evident in Rico Tice's piece with its assertion that God is 'holy even before he is love' (189) and its over-emphasis on God's wrath and human guilt.

Perhaps the fundamental problem here is that we are presented with a particular theory of atonement and not with a theology of the cross. Anyone reading most of the pieces would, for example, not guess that we were talking about an historical event in which an oppressive political power cruelly executed someone who spoke and acted in the way Jesus did according to the gospels. Andrew Cornes' piece is the most concrete and contains much valuable exposition of biblical material but even here the socio-political context is given little attention. Gerald Bray's study of contemporary evangelical worship is also more practical, helpfully highlighting the importance of worship in shaping evangelicalism and calling for the reintegration of the cross into church life but at times relies on anecdotal evidence to present a particular reading of contemporary evangelicalism.

Thankfully two essays in the mission section by Ida Glaser (on the cross in conversation with Islam) and Zac Niringiye (on the power and weakness of the cross from the experience of the church in Uganda) give a sense of alternative evangelical

viewpoints which realise that 'the cross is not an abstract idea but part of the history of God's life among his people' (250). There we discover, without denying traditional formulations, that 'communication of the cross...needs to be in the context of the whole story of Jesus' (250) and that engagement with different cultures in mission can lead us to appreciate different aspects of the cross and 'develop new insights into it' (253). In particular, we must turn to 'the understanding and experience of the gospel of the people who live in conditions of deprivation and dispossession – the vulnerable and the weak' (263). It is a shame that evangelical writers such as Graham Tomlin and Anthony Thiselton who have learned some of this in the secular West and related the theology of cross to the problems of power and mission in post-modernity were not able to contribute to the book's central section and so make its discussion of the cross more representative of current evangelical Anglican thinking.

The mission section is unbalanced in the opposite direction to that on the cross. Its emphasis, in the words of Ida Glaser, is that Christian theologians must relate the gospel story to our generation and so we look not only to Scripture in its context but 'also to the church and to the world' (256), especially if theology is to help mission. The contrasting approaches that follow in relation to Scripture (Wright) and the cross (Glaser and Niringiye) have already been noted. The final two pieces offer a helpful guide as to how to learn from Anglican contexts far from England (Phil Baskerville on organising parish field trips to Kenya) and a powerful reflection by Simea Meldrum de Souza (apparently the only ordained woman contributor) on social transformation by Anglicans living among the poorest of the poor on a Brazilian rubbish tip.

Perhaps at NEAC itself we can see how these visions and testimonies of the nature of mission relate to the sort of classic evangelicalism espoused by Chris Green which, while not denying the place for such witness, stresses that in Christian action, 'proclaiming the penalty-bearing, substitutionary, justifying death of the Lord Jesus is the defining centre' (146).

The longest and most heavyweight piece in the mission section is from CMS General Secretary Tim Dakin and seeks to develop a mission spirituality and ecclesiology drawing on lessons from CMS history and 1 Peter. It refers in passing to two wider discussions that can be taken out of the context of Dakin's application of them and used to shed light on the different emphases within evangelicalism represented in this book and different ways of being evangelical Anglicans today.

One is the distinction drawn by Nicholas Healy (based on that of Hans Urs von Balthasar his fellow Roman Catholic theologian and a major influence on our new Archbishop) between epic and dramatic theology. The former seeks to remove people from the drama of Christian life and give an external, almost God's-eye perspective. It develops what Healy calls a 'tidy' account of Christian doctrine and is found in 'those large-scale systematic theologies in which the Christian life is laid out as a whole, as if nothing further needs to be done or known'. This, whether in the 19<sup>th</sup> century form of Hodge or the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Grudem, is a well-established and important form of evangelicalism. The dramatic approach, in contrast, is done from within the drama and, Healy says, 'displays the tensive and conflictual nature of Christian existence, reflecting in its very form the ongoing dramatic struggle that constitutes discipleship'.

The other distinction Dakin draws from Miroslav Volf who relates it to the relationship between church and culture in his study of 1 Peter. Volf commends what he calls 'soft difference'. Volf contrasts this with a hardness that, faced with difference, fears for itself and its identity and 'always presents the other with a choice: either submit or be rejected, either "become like me or get away from me"'. Soft difference, according to Volf, only exists where people are secure in their God and so 'have no need either to subordinate or damn others, but can allow others space to be themselves'.

In relation to mission, and perhaps to relationships with fellow evangelicals and fellow Christians, soft difference 'takes the form of witness and invitation'. Following the path of Christ this approach seeks to win others without pressure or manipulation, convinced that being a Christian involves living one's own identity by joining together both belief in the truth of one's own convictions and respect for the convictions of others even when we believe they are wrong.

In conclusion, it is good to return to where we began. The other political backdrop to this book has been debates about inviting Rowan Williams to NEAC. The decision to do so and to reaffirm that in the light of some strong opposition is a sign of hope that 'soft difference' will mark the conference. As this book helpfully shows, there are indeed real differences among those invited to speak and those it is hoped will attend. Indeed, those differences highlighted here may simply be the tip of the iceberg. The task in Blackpool is for all the different 'tribes' or 'streams' not only to discuss these differences honestly but to recover our confidence in the God who

Submitted Review Article of "Fanning the Flame" (NEAC4 book) edited by Paul Gardner, Chris Wright and Chris Green. Anvil 20 (3):221-5.

speaks to us through Scripture, has made himself known and redeemed us by the cross of his Son, and sends us out in mission in the power of his Spirit. Only then can we act with 'gentleness and reverence' (1 Pet 3.16) as we meet the challenge of serving Christ in a changing church and world by fanning into flame the gift of God that is within us – the Spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.