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The Problem of English Evangelicals and Homosexuality: A Girardian Study of Popular English Evangelical Writings on Homosexuality 1960-2010

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Abstract

The Problem of English Evangelicals and Homosexuality:

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Mark Vasey-Saunders

English evangelicals in the period 1960-2010 have been marked by their negativity and violence towards gays. However, they have also consistently condemned homophobia during this period (and often seemed unaware of their own complicity in it). This thesis draws on the work of René Girard to analyse popular English evangelical writings and the ways in which they have implicitly encouraged violence against gays even whilst explicitly condemning it. This analysis of evangelical writings on homosexuality is placed in its historical context by drawing on the work of relevant historians and social scientists. It is further contextualised by reference to an analysis of evangelical writings on holiness during the same period.

The thesis argues that English evangelical violence towards gays is a byproduct of internal conflicts within English evangelicalism. Gays are seen as prototypical liberals and treated as scapegoats for an evangelical identity crisis. Homophobia and fundamentalism are discussed and rejected as alternative explanations. It is argued that the crisis in English evangelicalism in the period 1960-2010 has had a distorting effect not only on approaches to homosexuality, but also to other areas of English evangelical spirituality. Finally, evangelical atonement theology is examined, and found to contain both elements that legitimise sacred violence and resources to help evangelicals resist it.

The Problem of English Evangelicals and Homosexuality:

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Mark Richard Vasey-Saunders

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy following research within the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University 2012

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List of Abbreviations

Girard's Works

I follow here the abbreviations adopted by Chris Fleming in his *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), with additional abbreviations in the same style for works published since then.

BE – Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoit Chantre

CTWF – Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue

   [with Gianni Vattimo]

DD - Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure

EC – Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture

IS – I See Satan Fall Like Lightning

J – Job, the Victim of his People

RU – Resurrection from the Underground

S – The Scapegoat

TE – A Theatre of Envy

TH – Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World

VS – Violence and the Sacred

Other

CT - Church Times

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

Introduction

> Christian communities often find it hard to acknowledge, most of
> all among other Christians, the existence of malevolence and false
> witness, even in its milder forms of callousness and superstitious
> ignorance… The trouble is antagonists and protagonists have a
> vested interest in overlooking the human and spiritual costs they
> may be extracting from their adversaries, to avoid accusations of
> heartlessness and callous arrogance to say nothing of intolerance
> and impatience.

> - Richard Kirker, 2008[1]

The Problem of Evangelicals and Homosexuality

There is a problem with English evangelicals and homosexuality. I am
not referring to the most commonly-held evangelical position on
homosexuality: that homosexual sexual activity is incompatible with Christian
discipleship. Whether that is based on adequate biblical scholarship, or whether
their interpretative work in applying scripture to contemporary culture is
justifiable, are questions I will not address in this study. Indeed, I will assume
that the stated evangelical position may well be a reasonable one, based in good
scholarship, and representing a faithful attempt to apply scripture to
contemporary context. I wish to focus on a rather different aspect of the
problem, namely that whatever their stated views on the subject in an abstract
sense, English evangelicals have demonstrated an antipathy towards gays on a
collective level that has provoked accusations of homophobia. As has been

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[1] In Peter Francis (ed.), *Rebuilding Communion: Who Pays the Price?* (Hawarden: Monad Press, 2008), 54-5.

pointed out by evangelical ethicist Andrew Goddard, despite that fact that

evangelical positions are not homophobic in any straightforward sense, and

evangelical leaders have often condemned homophobia explicitly, evangelical

communities can nurture a climate of fear and distrust of gays and a reluctance

to support the civil rights of gay people.[2] It is generally recognised that English

evangelicals have on a number of occasions, including most notably the 'vicious'

campaign against the appointment of the partnered gay (yet celibate) Jeffrey

John as bishop of Reading in 2003, expressed a rejection and condemnation of

gays that is out of all proportion to their stated views.[3] Giles Fraser, who would

go on to help found Inclusive Church, concluded from the Jeffrey John affair that

'the Church of England is institutionally homophobic.'[4] Goddard himself, who

was an active part of the evangelical campaign, stated 'I am painfully aware that

in the eyes of many people I had, as it was recently put to me in conversation,

participated in a "witch-hunt" which was inherently homophobic.'[5]

The existence of a problem is therefore widely acknowledged on both

sides of the debate. Liberal critics like Fraser tend to assume a connection

between evangelical beliefs and evangelical behaviour – if evangelical behaviour

appears homophobic then their beliefs, even if they appear superficially

reasonable, must also be homophobic. Evangelicals like Goddard tend to argue

for a disconnection – their beliefs are not homophobic, and if some of their

behaviour has at times appeared homophobic then this is human weakness, not

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[2] Andrew Goddard, 'Homophobia' [2006], http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/newsletter07.cfm?doc=107 (April 10, 2012).
[3] Simon Sarmiento (of Thinking Anglicans) used the term in his contribution to Peter Francis (ed.), *Rebuilding Communion*, 5.
[4] Giles Fraser, 'The bullshit before the but', *The Guardian*, [June 20th, 2003], http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jun/20/gayrights.religion2 (April 10, 2012).
[5] Goddard, 'Homophobia.'

wrong belief. I will argue that there is some truth in both perceptions. There is a connection between evangelical belief and homophobic behaviour, but it is not a straightforward one, and evangelicals are sincere in their protestations that as a body they are not consciously homophobic. It is my contention that English evangelicals have acted with a disproportionate severity and aggression towards gays, and that the roots of this unacknowledged violence can be found in the unstated and the implicit within evangelical writings.

The problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is a problem of fear and hidden violence within a community of love and acceptance. Evangelical churches pride themselves on being communities of love who are committed to reaching out to the world with a message of God's love, yet Goddard, drawing on his own experience, speaks of 'whispering campaigns against gay Christians, suspicions and concerns about close same-sex friendships in congregations, over-reactions to even a single case of sexual sin in this area, the use of derogatory language about homosexual people, and the assumption gay and lesbian people are a threat to young children.'[6] The gay clergyman Richard Kirker, as an outsider to the evangelical community, speaks of his experience of 'being exorcised by Church leaders and evicted by a Church court…condemned as a pornographer, paedophile and blasphemer, accused of being amoral, an agent of the devil and an antichrist, as well as having my methods compared to that of the IRA by a Church columnist'.[7] The fear and violence within evangelical communities in relation to homosexuality is a hugely damaging issue, not only for any gays unfortunate enough to encounter it, but also for evangelicals

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[6] Goddard, 'Homophobia'.
[7] In Peter Francis (ed.), *Rebuilding Communion*, 54.

themselves. It is my intention in this study to identify the roots of this fear and violence, to establish how and why they have come to distort contemporary English evangelicalism in the way that they have, and to point to some ways in which evangelicalism can escape their influence.

Finding a Methodology

In this study I am seeking to identify powerful yet unrecognised influences at work within contemporary English evangelicalism that conspire to build a perception of the gay community as uniquely dangerous in some unspecified manner, and lead to outbreaks of fear and violence against particular individuals, like Jeffrey John. It is part of the force of these influences that they are unrecognised, and indeed that they are adept at leading otherwise admirable and moral people into deceiving themselves as to the intent and consequences of their actions. As unrecognised influences form such a central role in this study it is important that I begin by establishing those influences on myself that I can recognise, in order to alert the reader to the presence of any influences that I do not recognise. As Norman Denzin makes clear, it is a dangerous illusion to pretend that any researcher is unaffected by their location and history: 'Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between- the observer and the observed.'[8] I write as a participant observer of contemporary English evangelicalism, being an evangelical Anglican clergyman. On the issue of

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[8] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (London: SAGE Publications, 3rd ed., 2008), 29.

homosexuality I would align myself broadly with the Church of England's stated position in *Issues in Human Sexuality*, and the biblical understanding of the issue outlined there and in what might be termed the evangelical 'consensus position' expressed in such documents as the Evangelical Alliance's *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* or the St Andrew's Day statement.[9] Although I would situate myself within the evangelical grouping which I will (in chapter 2) identify as progressive evangelical, I do so in regard to homosexuality largely on the basis of my conviction that it is not a first-order issue, and my respect for the Christian integrity of those who conscientiously take a different position than mine.

The sort of study I have outlined - tracing implicit and unstated influences within a diverse community over a period of several decades - imposes certain methodological constraints. The main methodology employed is a literature survey of popular evangelical writings over the period. As the intent is to garner something of the influences on English evangelicalism on a broad grassroots level, the texts examined are generally not those from the most original evangelical writers, but those which have been most influential at a popular level. Level of influence is evaluated by the numbers of copies sold or by the significance of the author within evangelicalism (their membership of, or leadership within, particular groupings). Thus John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* is examined, but Oliver O'Donovan's *Resurrection and Moral*

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[9] General Synod of the Church of England, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (*Issues*)(London: Church House Publishing, 1991); Acute, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* (London: Acute, 1998); The St Andrew's Day Statement published in Timothy Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward?: Christian voices on Homosexuality and the Church* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2nd ed.,2003), 5-11.

Order is not.[10] Occasionally, less well-known works are examined (as in the case

of Grove booklets) to give some sense of what was considered legitimately

within the bounds of an evangelical position at particular points in time (Grove

booklets are particularly interesting in that they are intended to address topics

not widely discussed elsewhere and are primarily read by evangelical leaders.)

The strengths of this methodology lie in the access it gives to naturally-

occurring empirical materials over a variety of time periods. This allows

developments in thought to be seen, and evades any (conscious or

subconscious) tendency on the part of contemporary evangelicals to elide or

rewrite such developments.[11] It also takes seriously the significance and role of

texts within English evangelicalism of this period. As Paul Atkinson and Sara

Delamont argue: 'documentary analysis is significant insofar as a given social

setting is self-documenting and important social actions are performed in that

setting. Texts deserve attention because of their socially organized and

conventional properties and because of the uses they are put to in their

production, circulation, and consumption.'[12] Late twentieth and early twenty-

first century English evangelicalism is undoubtedly a self-documenting setting,

in which significant social actions are performed through texts. Many of the

texts I examine (eg *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*) were written as conscious

attempts to define or change the beliefs and character of English

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[10] John Stott, *Issues facing Christians today* (London: Zondervan, 4th ed., 2006); Oliver
O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester: Apollos, 2nd ed., 1994).
[11] Anssi Perakyla, "Analyzing Talk and Text" in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and
Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 351-374.
[12] Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont, "Analytic Perspectives" in Denzin and Lincoln (eds),
Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Data, 285-311.

evangelicalism.[13] The central ethical debates of the period (including

homosexuality) occurred largely textually, through reports and conference

statements rather than speeches. As we will see, the publication of Church of

England reports or more liberal books on the subject provoked the publication

of evangelical statements or books in response. In addition, bookstalls were an

important feature of evangelical churches throughout the period, and books

formed a vital part of the basis for the normalization of a common English

evangelical identity in this period.

The methodology may, of course, be criticised for its lack of grounding in

wider sociological research. It is hard to be sure how representative the findings

of such research are, whether a substantial group of evangelicals actually held

the views I identify as implicit in the literature. I address this concern by

situating the literature survey within its historical context, referencing major

studies of British religious life in the period, and further situating it within the

wider patterns of evangelical spirituality of the period.[14] My own status as a

participant observer of English evangelicalism likewise allows me a means of

situating the findings of the literature survey in the lived experience of being a

part of English evangelicalism during this period. In addition, I have over the

years had conversations about the material covered in this thesis with a wide

variety of people – evangelical and non-evangelical, lay and ordained, gay and

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[13] Acute, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*.
[14] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989); Rob
Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966-2001* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007);
Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2009), Peter
Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nose Dive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing* (London: Christian
Research, 2006); Kelvin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera: Conflict and Conviction in the Church of
England's Parties* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since
1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

straight, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Free Church. Whilst not being

conducted as formal interviews, these have given me a wider perspective within

which to set my observations. Of course, my status as a *participant* observer is

one that potentially brings its own biases. Although not directly involved in the

events I describe here, I am not entirely disinterested. I am a self-identified

evangelical, studying a controversial period in the recent history of English

evangelicalism during which evangelicals (and especially Anglican evangelicals)

have been widely condemned for their perceived bigotry. Despite my best

efforts to remain objective, it may be suspected that the desire to excuse or

defend evangelical conduct would remain an unconscious motive. The reader

will have to make their own judgement as to whether I have avoided this pitfall.

A Girardian Study of the Problem of English Evangelicals and Homosexuality

The final key aspect of my study is the use of the work of René Girard as

an analytical tool. For almost forty years, Girard has been writing about the

theme of hidden violence and its role in shaping communities. It is his work that

has allowed me to build an interpretative framework for understanding the fear

and violence that seems hidden within evangelical communities. In chapter 1, I

examine Girard's work in detail, demonstrating how it illuminates the Jeffrey

John affair, and explaining the key concepts I make use of in the rest of the

thesis. In chapter 2, I examine contemporary English evangelicalism in the

period 1960-2010. Drawing on the work of historians and sociologists I explore

the ways in which it has been shaped by wider cultural changes within

modernity. I argue that in Girard's terms English evangelicalism is locked into a

crisis of undifferentiation, in which its very identity is under threat.
Homosexuality is a focal point for this crisis, so that debates on homosexuality
within evangelical communities are also debates on evangelical identity.

In chapter 3 I present a literature survey of popular evangelical writings
on homosexuality in the period 1960-2010. I trace the history of the formation,
consolidation, and fragmentation of the evangelical consensus position on
homosexuality. I argue that little change has occurred in basic biblical
understanding, but that the application to the life of the church has varied
considerably. I trace the way in which specific positions on homosexuality
reflect conflicts and changes within evangelicalism, meaning that gays become
potential scapegoats for internal evangelical crises. In chapter 4 I set my study
of evangelical writings on homosexuality in a wider context by examining
evangelical understandings of holiness and sin over the same period. I
demonstrate the way in which the shifts in position on homosexuality can be
linked to deeper shifts in spirituality. I identify problematic trends in all
contemporary strands of evangelical spirituality, where they have been
distorted by evangelicalism's internal conflicts.

In chapter 5 I examine the two most common alternative (and simpler)
explanations for the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality: homophobia
and fundamentalism. I demonstrate the limitations of both approaches, and the
extent to which their deeper insights point towards the validity of a Girardian
approach. In chapter 6, I address the differences between my approach and the
more rigorous critique of evangelicalism offered by Girardian critics James
Alison and Walter Wink. I examine evangelical atonement theology to

determine whether this central aspect of evangelical spirituality and identity is irredeemably contaminated by sacred violence. Finally, I argue that evangelicalism contains within itself resources to resist sacred violence.

The problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is a very real one, manifesting itself in the climate of fear, suspicion and disproportionate reaction observed by Goddard and in the persecution and barely suppressed loathing experienced by Kirker. It is a problem of sacred violence – violence seemingly inherent in and generated by a religious community which explicitly condemns the very violence it appears to generate. My hope is that by using the work of Girard to illuminate this apparent paradox, evangelicals can be encouraged to confront and overcome their own violence.

Chapter 1

René Girard's Mimetic theory - A Tool for Exploration

> I concluded that violence really is at the heart and secret soul of the Evangelical position on homosexuality, and there are those who very genuinely wish me emotional (if not physical) harm. Page after page of reporting and commentary detailed the invective directed towards gay and lesbian Christians, and revealed to me the highly contagious nature of the aggression and scapegoating that surround the way this issue is handled by certain Evangelicals in the Church.
>
> – Revd G. W. Williams, Vice-Principal of St Michael's Theological College Llandaff, letter to the *Church Times* 20th June 2003.[1]

1.1 Introduction

My argument in this thesis is that contemporary evangelicalism contains an implicit rhetoric of violence towards gays (and more widely towards those identified as liberals) that is at odds with and acts to subvert the explicit rhetoric of love and welcome. The stated evangelical position on homosexuality (the 'consensus position', the development of which I will trace in chapter 3) identifies only a very specific group of homosexual behaviours as sinful, condemns homophobia and calls evangelicals to love of neighbour. This gap between actuality and stated theology cannot simply be dismissed as moral failure. Intelligent and devout evangelicals sincerely hold to the consensus position and seem unable to see that any of their behaviour or attitudes might go against it. This leads me to suggest that deeper and wider influences are acting upon contemporary evangelicalism to subvert its stated position. I will

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[1] Revd G.W. Williams, 'Letters', *CT*, June 20, 2003, 11.

explore the wider cultural and political influences on evangelicalism in chapter 3, and the deeper themes in evangelical spirituality that shape them in chapter 4. In order to construct an explanation of these forces that have been shaping evangelical attitudes towards homosexuality I turn to the analytic approach and theories of René Girard.

René Girard is a Catholic French-American writer and lecturer who has over many years developed a body of work examining hidden violence in society. His academic work has been produced whilst he lived and worked in the US, though he writes mainly in French, and he has achieved a high level of recognition as a public intellectual in France. His academic training is in literature, and his first work in mimetic theory, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (*DD*), is essentially a work of literary criticism, as are other more recent books.[2] However, his exploration of the ideas he first began to uncover in literature has led him to also write in the fields of anthropology, psychology, theology, and most recently even touching on military theory.[3] In all of these works, Girard sets out the same basic insights, which he now refers to as mimetic theory. He gives his most recent systematic exposition of the theory in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (*IS*), and I will draw mainly from the terminology employed in the

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[2] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (*DD*), trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *A Theatre of Envy* (*TE*) (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000).
[3] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (*VS*), trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (*TH*), trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); *The Scapegoat* (*TS*), trans. Yvonne Freccero (London: The Athlone Press, 1987); René Girard and Benoit Chantre, *Battling to the End – Conversations with Benoit Chantre* (*BE*), trans. Mary Baker (Michigan: Michigan State University, 2010).

English translation of this work in my discussion.[4]

Beginning with his analysis of classic novels in *DD*, Girard began to articulate a theory of human desire and conflict that illuminated the human condition. He then began with *Violence and the Sacred (VS)* to explore the way that violence is contained by ritual in primitive society, advancing the theory that religion (understood as the containment of unbounded violence through ritualized violence) has been the foundation of civilization, something spoken of in coded ways through mythology. From *TH* onwards he began to write explicitly of Christianity as a force for revelation in human history, which has shaped the modern age, even where it is at its most secular, and which offers an alternative to apocalyptic violence. Mimetic theory has been found to be relevant in many different fields, often being developed in ways that Girard himself would never have anticipated, such as its use in neuroscience and biology.[5]

It must be admitted at the outset that alternative (and considerably simpler) explanations of evangelical violence are possible. The most common are homophobia (evangelical theology and behaviour have been corrupted by deeply-held prejudice) and fundamentalism (evangelical theology and behaviour express a primitive and spiritually immature religious tradition). I will examine both of these alternatives in chapter 5, once my own argument has been established. My intention in adopting Girard's theory (which could be seen as an overly-complex explanation for an apparently simple phenomenon) is not

[4] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall From Heaven* (*IS*), trans. James G. Williams (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001).

[5] René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (*EC*) (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 4.

to suggest that this is the only possible explanation, but rather that it is an interpretatively fruitful one, bringing insight and, importantly, a way forward for evangelicalism that does not entail disowning its own tradition and identity. Most of the alternative explanations offered for evangelical violence towards gays (like homophobia and fundamentalism) are to one degree or another attacks on evangelicalism itself, and are often offered in a pejorative or at least polemical context. This point is not lost on evangelicals, who are therefore understandably reluctant to accept whatever truth such explanations might offer, something that sharply limits the utility of such explanations as tools for solving the problems they expose. In using Girard's mimetic theory, I am employing it as a tool for exploring a problem, not seeking to uncritically endorse his work in its entirety.[6] Mimetic theory is used here simply as a tool capable of producing a fruitful analysis of an obscured field, the effectiveness of which can be judged by the quality of the analysis produced.

Summarising Girard's carefully nuanced and wide-ranging thought, developed over several decades and a dozen books, is best done by applying it.[7] I therefore turn to examine a paradigmatic incident: the Jeffrey John affair. I will interweave a historical account of events with an exploration of the work of Girard, demonstrating the relevance of his work as it illuminates them.

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[6] Girard's Catholicism leads him to defend some positions I have no wish to endorse – including Papal infallibility. *BE*, 197.
[7] Helpful summaries of Girard's thought can be found in the introduction to *IS* and Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

1.2 The Jeffrey John Affair

  The Revd Dr Jeffrey John is an Anglican clergyman and theologian, particularly

well known as a founder member of Affirming Catholicism, the liberal catholic

grouping within the Church of England, and for his advocacy of the ordination of

women and the acceptance of permanent, faithful and stable gay relationships

as a legitimate Christian expression of sexuality.[8] In 1998, following the

Lambeth conference of that year, he had made an angry speech to an Affirming

Catholicism conference in which he attacked the Church of England's position

on homosexuality as hypocritical, the situation which its policy created as 'evil',

and in the process revealed that he was in a long-term same-sex relationship.[9]

The address was not widely known, but was later to be circulated widely by

evangelicals.[10] In 2003, he was Canon Chancellor and Theologian at Southwark

Cathedral.

       On 20 May of that year, his nomination was announced as the new

Bishop of Reading, Suffragan to the Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries.[11] Within

ten days a letter of opposition had attracted 120 signatories from within Oxford

diocese stating: 'From within the Oxford diocese we wish to put on record our

astonishment that someone can be entrusted with the responsibility of a bishop

in the church of Christ when they have so strongly and consistently opposed the

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[8] Jeffrey John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Relationships* (London: DLT, 1993).
[9] Jeffrey John, 'The Church and Homosexuality – some post-Lambeth reflections' [1998], http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/2010/07/05/the-church-and-homosexuality-some-post-lambeth-reflections-jeffrey-john/ (December 4, 2010). Interestingly, the principal place the speech can now be found is on Anglican Mainstream's website.
[10] John S Peart-Binns, 'Inside track on the road to Anglican schism', *The Times* [3 March 2007], http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article1464489.ece (December 4, 2010).
[11] Ruth Gledhill, 'The rise and fall of Dr Jeffrey John…', *The Times* [7 July 2003], http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1148858.ece, (December 4, 2010).

Church's moral teaching in relation to same-sex unions.'[12] Richard Harries

publicly restated his support for Jeffrey John at a diocesan synod meeting, and

met privately with twelve evangelical clergy on 10 June, after which Philip

Giddings, a prominent Anglican evangelical layman who had been involved in

the appointment process, went on record as stating that between forty and fifty

parishes in the diocese might ask for alternative oversight and withhold funding

from the diocese.[13]

On 16 June, nine diocesan bishops, almost all evangelical, signed an open

letter drafted by the evangelical Bishop Graham Dow of Carlisle, objecting to the

appointment. They expressed the view that although now celibate, Dr John

expressed no repentance or remorse about the history of his relationship, that

they had reservations about his teaching on the issue (throwing doubt on his

declaration that he would abide by *Issues*), and that the appointment would

prejudice the outcome of the church's reflection on these matters.[14] Responding

to the concerns raised, Jeffrey John published a personal statement that

although he was homosexual in orientation, in a long-term partnership of over

twenty years standing, and critical of *Issues*, he had lived a celibate life since its

adoption as the "official line" of the Church of England by the House of Bishops,

and would continue to abide by it if made bishop.[15] On 21 June, eight diocesan

bishops sent a public letter to Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury,

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[12] Peart-Binns, 'Inside track...'.
[13] Staff Reporter, 'Cash threat to diocese over gay bishop', *CT* [June 13, 2003], http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=20604 (December 12, 2010).
[14] Graham Dow and others 'Bishop's Statement about Dr Jeffrey John' *CT* (June 20, 2003).
[15] Gledhill, 'The rise and fall...'; Jeffrey John, 'Personal statement by Dr Jeffrey John' *CT* (June 27, 2003), 2.

supporting the appointment.[16] Two days later, Rowan Williams wrote a

carefully nuanced letter to all diocesan bishops attempting to calm the

situation.[17] It was too late.

The Evangelical Alliance released a statement, that its members 'were

deeply disappointed' with the Archbishop's statement which seemed to 'express

no fundamental concern' with the appointment. Rod Thomas, spokesman for

Reform, said Rowan Williams (whose own appointment they had opposed on

the grounds of his views on homosexuality) had 'not given the leadership we

were hoping for.'[18] Archbishops of other Anglican provinces began to make

statements on the issue, with Peter Akinola, the Archbishop of Nigeria and Peter

Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney, being the most vocal opponents of the

appointment.[19] The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, ignoring Rowan

Williams's plea for calm reflection, organized a meeting in Oxford attended by

leaders of Anglican evangelicalism worldwide, issuing a statement that they

would refuse to acknowledge Jeffrey John's episcopal authority or that of any

bishop supporting him, arguing that the appointment flouted settled Anglican

teaching.[20] On 4 July, a letter with 254 signatures of both clergy and leading lay

Anglicans from the diocese was sent to the Archbishop, stating that 'we believe

this crisis threatens the unity and mission not simply of our diocese, but the

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[16] Letter published in *CT* (June 27, 2003), 2.
[17] Letter published in *CT* (June 27, 2003), 3.
[18] Rachel Harden, 'Welcome and disappointment greet Archbishop's statement', *CT* (June 27, 2003), 3.
[19] Stephen Bates, *A Church at War* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004), 170. Liberals became highly suspicious of the involvement of both, arguing that they had been brought into the country by opposition groups in an attempt to escalate the crisis. This may be true in the case of Archbishop Akinola, but is unlikely to be the case for Archbishop Jensen, who was in the country on a speaking engagement arranged some time before.
[20] Bates, *A Church at War*, 171.

Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion.'[21] The next day,
following private meetings for both Richard Harries and Jeffrey John with
Rowan Williams, Jeffrey John gave a public statement that he was asking for his
name to be withdrawn. It was later reported that Rowan Williams, known to be
a personal friend of Jeffrey John and sharing his views on homosexuality, had
made his decision because of the depth of opposition from wealthy evangelical
parishes within the diocese and the disruptive effects on the wider
Communion.[22]

Those opposing the appointment were rather amorphous, not
conforming exactly to any known grouping. Indeed they were at pains to
present themselves as representatives of a majority who felt compelled to speak
out, rather than as an organised pressure group, an understanding critics
dismissed as disingenuous. Whether the protests were carefully organised and
stage-managed or ad hoc and piecemeal, it is clear that those involved felt the
need soon afterwards to form an ongoing organisation. The key figures in the
protest (most notably Philip Giddings) announced the formation of Anglican
Mainstream at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC) in Blackpool
later that year.[23] Although the name and the rhetoric made it clear that an
attempt was being made to claim the group represented a broad Anglican
churchmanship, the key individuals, the venue for the announcement, and the
group's basis of faith established that it was essentially a group representing
conservative evangelicals and fellow-travellers amongst the traditional catholic

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[21] Peart-Binns, 'Inside track...'.
[22] Gledhill, 'The rise and fall...'.
[23] Bates, *A Church at War*, 195.

wing of Anglicanism. The group's inability to act as a force for unity within the Church of England was demonstrated almost immediately. Fulcrum, an open evangelical grouping, announced its formation at the same conference as Anglican Mainstream. Inclusive Church had formed as a liberal Anglican grouping a month earlier.[24]

Jeffrey John himself was later appointed Dean of St Albans in 2004, an appointment that attracted evangelical criticism, albeit on a smaller scale than the earlier protests. His name has since been speculatively linked to a number of appointments to bishoprics: Bangor in 2008, and Southwark in 2010.[25] Each time evangelical opposition has been raised, mobilised by Anglican Mainstream.

1.3 A Girardian Analysis of the Jeffrey John Affair

1.3.1 Mimesis and Desire

In order to understand how the Jeffrey John affair occurred, it is necessary first to understand a little about the mimetic nature of human beings and of human desire. The basis of mimetic theory is the insight that human beings are essentially imitative in nature, learning and developing through imitating another who acts as our model. The model is immensely, magnetically attractive, and we are compelled to imitate them. In childhood this would generally be a parent or sibling, though as our social horizons broaden other figures would also function as models for us, and we often have a multitude of

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[24] Bates, *A Church at War*, 190.
[25] Ruth Gledhill, 'Gay priest Jeffrey John could become a bishop in Wales', *The Times* [September 2, 2008], http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article4656617.ece, (April 20, 2011); Jonathan Wynne-Jones, 'Gay cleric in line to become bishop in Church of England', *The Daily Telegraph* [July 3, 2010],
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/7870158/Gay-cleric-in-line-to-become-bishop-in-Church-of-England.html (April 20, 2011).

models rather than just one.[26] Mimetic desire acts to bind all of humanity together in a vast culture-producing organism. The centrality of mimetic desire gives the lie to the myth of autonomy. None of us are truly autonomous individuals, and desires do not reveal something essential and unique about us. This common belief is a romantic delusion that masks the truth that human beings are radically interdependent. Far from being an expression of our private, unique, innermost selves, our desires express how connected we are to everyone else. Our sense of identity is formed through mimesis. The more we proclaim our individuality, the more we demonstrate how profoundly we are bound up with each other. We are truly interdividuals – only ultimately comprehensible in relation to each other.[27]

Girard has stressed this positive vision of mimesis in his later writings – it is mimetic desire that makes us human, that separates us from animals. It creates culture, it makes change possible. It is the driving force behind civilization. It is important to recognise Girard's insistence that mimetic desire is in itself a good thing, because so much of his writings are taken up with discussing its negative consequences.[28] These flow naturally out of the mimetic relationship with the model, and always exist as a risk within all mimesis. Desire has a triangular structure – the subject, the object and the model. According to mimetic theory, the primary relationship is always with the model, from whom we learnt to desire the object, not with the object of desire itself.[29] This relationship is intense and can easily become a rivalry. The sharing of desires

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[26] *IS*, 15-16.
[27] *IS*, 137.
[28] *IS*, 15; *EC*, 58-78.
[29] *IS*, 58-9.

between subject and model can be harmonious as long as they exist in different social spheres, so that the things desired by the model are not accessible to the subject. This is called external mediation, and is more common in pre-industrial societies with more rigorous social stratification. It also exists, however, in the family, where the things desired by the parent are not accessible to the child, limiting the possibility of destructive rivalry (at least until the child becomes an adult.) If the subject and model exist in the same social sphere, then the model becomes a rival for the goods once the model's desire is shared and the seeds are sown for conflict. The shift from model to rival is one Girard has discussed by reference to the New Testament usage of the term *skandalon*. He draws attention to the fact that Jesus uses this term (which may be translated 'scandal' or 'stumbling block') to refer to negative mimesis. [30] This is called internal mediation, and is omnipresent in democratized modern society.[31]

With this understanding of mimetic desire in mind, the Church of England, its various 'parties', and Anglican evangelicalism within it, must all be seen as intimately interconnected. Within a community like the Church of England, it is nonsensical to see apparently 'separate' groupings like evangelicals and liberals as completely distinct from each other, however much they might prefer to see themselves in this way. Indeed, the greater rivalry that appears to exist between them the more inter-connected they are, as rivalry indicates shared desires, and therefore shared models. Bluntly, mimetic theory makes it clear that the more rivals see themselves as different, the more similar they are. If mimetic theory highlights the underlying unity amongst those

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[30] *IS*, 16-19, 33.
[31] *EC*, 57, 61.

apparently most deeply divided, it also highlights the division and potential

rivalry between those apparently strongly unified. Those who share the same

models and the same desires will always have a great potential for rivalry.

Despite presenting an outward appearance of unity, Anglican

evangelicals were already deeply divided prior to 2003, something that had

been dramatically demonstrated by the debate over women priests, where

evangelicals were prominent on both sides. Reform had come into being

principally as a grouping for conservative evangelicals opposed to the

ordination of women. Women And The Church (WATCH), the principal group

supporting the ordination of women following the vote in favour, was headed by

Christina Rees, a prominent evangelical laywoman. Despite the serious

differences between these groups, however, since the 1960s there had been a

strong culture of unity within Anglican evangelicalism, a desire to recognise the

common faith held by all evangelicals despite differences in emphasis – a

culture that had been created and safeguarded by its most revered figure: John

Stott. A Girardian reading of the Jeffrey John affair must begin from this basic

understanding – that there were serious mimetic rivalries at work within both

the Church of England as a whole and within Anglican evangelicalism itself.

1.3.2 Scandal, the Monstrous Double and the Crisis of Undifferentiation

Once a relationship with a model develops into a rivalry, it has become

scandalized, beginning to spiral into a destructive mimetic cycle. Although in

theory this is a rivalry over a good desired by both, in fact it is the relationship

with the model/rival that is the all-consuming passion, as the good desired soon

becomes peripheral in the conflict between the two rivals.[32] This is dramatically

illustrated in the Jeffrey John affair by the totemic significance that Jeffrey John

retained even after his withdrawal of consideration for a bishopric.

Conservative evangelicals continued to obsessively oppose him when he was

appointed Dean of St Albans, not a post ever regarded by evangelicals as having

the same degree of significance. Although one party in a conflict nominally

'started things', Girard argues it is symptomatic of such conflict that both parties

will always see the other as the one primarily at fault. Counter-intuitively he

states that it is the aggressor who is the one who wants peace, striking pre-

emptively in a bid to create it, where the defender wants war, disposing

themselves to endure conflict. Both are to blame. Thus evangelicals would make

clear that the intent of their intervention was to prevent greater division and

conflict should the appointment go ahead – they wanted peace and so acted

aggressively. Liberals would point to the pre-emptive attack of the evangelicals,

seeing their own actions and statements as simply responding to aggression.

Such distinctions soon become meaningless in any event, as insult mimetically

reproduces insult and blow mimetically reproduces blow. There is an escalation

to extremes, where the horrors perpetuated by the rival justify the

contemplation of actions still more horrific in order to punish and overcome

them.[33]

The process of mimesis accelerates in such conflicts, as each antagonist

increasingly mirrors the other, creating the phenomenon of the monstrous

double. Each perceives the other to be a monster, requiring that they take on

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[32] *TH*, 297; *BE*, 31.
[33] *BE*, 15-18.

monstrous attributes in order to overcome them.[34] From within the conflict, all

is difference – each is thoroughly convinced that they are opposed to a force

that is monstrously, utterly unlike themselves, and which they must defeat or be

destroyed. From without the conflict, both are the same – each adapting

instantly to the tactics of the other so that no observer can tell them apart.[35] The

mimesis and escalation are dramatically illustrated in the Jeffrey John affair by

the letters to the Archbishop from groups of bishops. The letter opposing the

appointment from nine bishops was soon followed by a letter supporting it from

eight bishops. The mirrored escalation continued after the end of the Jeffrey

John affair. The formation of Anglican Mainstream was mirrored by the

formation of Inclusive Church (and Fulcrum) as a liberal grouping. Although

initially launched as a simple petition of support for inclusivity, it soon came to

mirror Anglican Mainstream as a permanent grouping, releasing press

statements, holding conferences, and having connections to other parts of the

Anglican Communion worldwide. Just like Anglican Mainstream, it portrays

itself as standing for the traditional position of Anglicanism, and those taking

opposing positions as representing dangerous innovations that threaten the

cause of the gospel.[36]

Such scandals erupt constantly around us all. It is part of the human

condition that we are always caught up in a number of them at any time,

inasmuch as we form our identities through relationships of internal mediation

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[34] *TH*, 299.
[35] *VS*, 79, 235; Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis*, 46.
[36] 'Inclusive church website', http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/Home-811745f (January 17, 2011).

with a succession of models who will inevitably become rivals to some degree.[37]

These scandals vary in significance and level of violence, and many will remain

simply low-level sources of frustration for us, whereas some may become all-

consuming.[38] However, scandals are contagious. Everyone has a tendency to

draw others into their scandals, to share their sense of injustice or moral

outrage at the actions of their model/rival.[39] The more people are drawn into a

scandal, the more significant it becomes, becoming 'opportunistic': swallowing

up minor scandals in its wake, increasing the sense of injustice and frustration

whilst making it even harder to resolve as it now incorporates a variety of

different antagonists and situations. The more people who are drawn into such

a scandal, the more disruptive it is to society at large.[40] The Jeffrey John affair

was such an 'opportunistic' scandal, as became particularly apparent as

evangelicals across the country (and even from other countries) became drawn

into it.

The most significant scandals literally threaten to tear society apart.

Scandalized people lash out at those around them, possessed of a sense of rage

and injustice that is incredibly powerful yet unfocused. It is this contagious

violence that creates mobs, a vast mass of humanity driven to a destructive rage

by their sameness, yet conscious only of the monstrous difference of those

around them. Girard calls this the crisis of undifferentiation, because this is how

the crisis is experienced by those going through it, as is made clear in

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[37] *IS*, 16-18.
[38] *TH*, 288.
[39] *IS*, 22-3.
[40] *IS*, 23-4; *EC*, 64, 82.

persecution texts that describe such crises.[41] For those within a crisis of undifferentiation it is a time of cultural eclipse, the order of the world is breaking down around them, identities and traditions are dissolving, and all that separates the community from the monsters at the gate is being undermined. It is the recognition that there is no difference between ourselves and the monsters, without the corresponding revelation that none of us are by nature monstrous. Instead, the crisis creates the fear that everyone is monstrous, which constitutes the primal fear of society as expressed by Hobbes: the war of all against all.[42] The fear of this level of contagious violence is what gives power to taboo in primitive society – taboo is applied to those things that can prompt mimetic violence.[43]

The rivalries within Anglican evangelicalism had reached this point of crisis at the point when the Jeffrey John affair occurred. The appointment of the liberal catholic Rowan Williams to succeed the evangelical George Carey as Archbishop of Canterbury had exposed open division within evangelicalism. Conservative evangelicals were strongly opposed to the appointment, whereas open evangelicals welcomed it. The exposure of these deep divisions of opinion precipitated a crisis of undifferentiation – the monsters were inside the walls, anathematising their own Archbishop or welcoming the triumph of heresy (depending on your point of view), and the monsters were us. Anglican

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[41] *TS*, 1-23.
[42] *VS*, 56; *EC*, 64; *BE*, 48.
[43] *TH,* 76-7.

evangelicalism was on the verge of tearing itself apart.[44]

In the Girardian reading of the Jeffrey John affair that I am constructing there are two levels of mimetic rivalry in view, two scandals, which interact with each other throughout the events I have described. The wider rivalry is that within the Church of England (and indeed the Anglican Communion as a whole), which pits evangelicals against liberals, vying for control over the identity and theological destiny of Anglicanism. The Jeffrey John affair formed an important part of this struggle, as I have argued, providing the background to the formation of Anglican Mainstream and Inclusive Church. Jeffrey John himself, as a key figure within Affirming Catholicism, is an individual who has become prominent within this rivalry, and Rowan Williams has shifted role within it as a result of his actions in the Jeffrey John affair. Having initially been a hero of the liberals, his role in Jeffrey John's humiliation has made him a far more ambiguous figure.

The second rivalry is that within Anglican evangelicalism, between the groupings conventionally described as conservative and open evangelicals, each seeking to control the Anglican evangelical 'party' and thus inherit the benefits of the increasing evangelical dominance within the Church of England. This rivalry has played itself out through a succession of scandals, and was largely responsible for the Jeffrey John affair, re-drawing battle-lines that had already been established by different reactions to the ordination of women and the appointment of Rowan Williams. Confusingly, both rivalries have developed

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[44] Francis Bridger and Christina Rees, 'Evangelicalism and a lesson in seismology', *CT* (August 11, 2002), 8. Notably, despite outlining the 'cracks' within Anglican evangelicalism, Bridger and Rees argue that irreconcilable division is not inevitable.

into scandals centred around the issue of homosexuality (though each have wider areas of conflict). I will explore the reasons why homosexuality should have emerged as the key issue in this scandal in chapter 3. The overlap creates a blurring between the boundaries of the two scandals, and indeed there are some signs that the wider scandal, between conservatives and liberals, is opportunistically swallowing up the narrower one. Conservatives increasingly see the two struggles as identical, and open evangelicals (like Fulcrum and Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham), who are opposed rivals to the conservatives in the second rivalry but their allies in the first, increasingly find themselves under intense pressure to choose which camp they sit in. For the purposes of this analysis, however, it is mainly the second rivalry, between open and conservative evangelicals, that is significant.

1.3.3 The Scapegoat

According to Girard the natural progression from mimesis to rivalry to destructive contagious violence was effectively a limiting factor on the development of society. However, a means of averting it was found: the single victim mechanism, a means of transforming the war of all against all into the war of all against one, thereby saving society at large.[45] The key lies in the essential sameness of all those caught up in the mimetic crisis. At the point where the crisis is at its height, the participants (society as a whole) are essentially identical – and all identically monstrous. This makes them interchangeable, and means that one can act as a substitute for all. At the crisis point, driven by the need to let out the violence and frustration generated by the

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[45] *IS*, 22.

conflict, the mob seize upon a single victim and kill them in an act of collective murder.[46] The English term 'single victim mechanism' is actually a translation of the French 'mechanisme victimaire' and does not necessarily mean that the mob is fixing upon a single individual. A group may be made a scapegoat.[47]

The surrogate victim becomes a scapegoat for the entire crisis – they are held to be responsible for the contagion that has gripped society at large.[48] Girard notes that the very usage of the term 'scapegoat' (making reference to Leviticus 16) in colloquial language indicates the heightened awareness that our culture has of this sort of mechanism (due, as we will see, to the impact of the gospel).[49] The murder of the surrogate victim is always a unanimous, collective action – whoever throws the first stone, the mob will all mimetically follow and responsibility for the murder is shared – no single individual can be held to be responsible.[50] It is also vital to recognize that the victim is in fact innocent – not necessarily in the sense that they are completely blameless (it is indeed likely that they have themselves been caught up in the contagion of violence and are as guilty as everyone else), but in the sense that they are innocent of that for which they are punished: causing the mimetic crisis and its contagious violence (as Girard makes clear, the mimetic crisis is caused by collective, not individual action).[51] The scapegoat is killed for the sins of society. Although the innocence of the scapegoat is key to mimetic theory, it is a truth that is too terrible for

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[46] *VS*, 2, 79-82; *TS*, 146; *IS*, 25; *EC*, 65-6.
[47] *IS*, 35.
[48] *VS*, 79; *TS*, 38-42; *IS*, 155.
[49] *TH*, 33.
[50] René Girard, *Job: the victim of his people*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 13; *VS*, 79; *IS*, 28.
[51] *VS*, 4; *TS,* 24; *EC*, 66-7.

society to accept. So the mob believes implicitly in the guilt of the scapegoat.[52]

In Girard's understanding the fact that in the modern West victims are often not killed and may not suffer physical violence at all, despite being a sign of progress, does not negate the fact that they are victims caught up in the same mechanism.[53] Thus Jeffrey John can be understood as a victim in Girard's terms, despite not suffering any physical violence. He was the one chosen to dispel the tensions of the crisis of undifferentiation by his 'death'. Although he was clearly a key participant in a wide-ranging mimetic crisis within the Church of England and Anglican Communion centred around the issue of homosexuality (and indeed, his role in this crisis appears to have been what brought him to evangelical attention), it is the crisis occurring within evangelicalism that was more significant in determining his fate.

As I have discussed above, Anglican evangelicalism was at the point of crisis, its various factions caught up in contagious violence. It was about to tear itself apart. The single victim mechanism pushed it towards finding a scapegoat in a collective act of violence. Evangelical opposition to Jeffrey John was a unanimous, collective action, in which it was curiously difficult to identify leaders. Philip Giddings was the clearest individual figure associated with it, and he was a layman and not at the time a recognised spokesman for any pressure group. Statements made by evangelical spokespeople at the time, if taken at face value rather than assumed to be disingenuous attempts to claim broader

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[52] *TS*, 41; *EC*, 85; *BE*, 118.
[53] *IS*, 77. He is also clear that 'violence' in the sense he uses the term is not necessarily physically expressed at all, but is a dynamic within all social relationships that desires reciprocity for perceived insults. Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, ed. Pierpaolo Antonelli, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A dialogue* (*CTWF*), trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 24.

support than they actually possessed, reflect the sense that they were speaking collectively, not expressing views as individuals. David Banting of Reform commented 'we feel we represent the silent majority of the church, who are still essentially orthodox, conservative, and not always very articulate.'[54] Rod Thomas similarly remarked 'what happened in the case of Jeffrey John was much more like a groundswell than a campaign.'[55]

Respected Anglican evangelical spokespeople were remarkably slow to speak out on the subject, suggesting both unease and an unwillingness to break the growing sense of unanimity. John Stott never gave any public comment on the Jeffrey John affair, though his position on homosexuality was well known. When he referenced it in the fourth edition of his *Issues Facing Christians Today* in 2006, he confined himself to restrained reportage of the response of others: 'many felt that there was no real evidence of repentance over his previous lifestyle, nor was there sufficient confidence that he would be able to support orthodox teaching as a bishop, given his own personal views.'[56] Holy Trinity Brompton (home of the Alpha Course) said nothing about the Anglican crisis over homosexuality (attracting some criticism from other evangelicals) until eventually Sandy Millar condemned Gene Robinson in a sermon on the day of his consecration.[57] Stephen Bates's research shows that evangelicals who were reluctant to join the condemnation were put under considerable pressure to do

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[54] Bates, *A Church at War*, 177.
[55] Nicholas Pyke and Andrew Johnson, 'Gay bishop row descends into chaos as Synod is halted', *The Independent* [July 13, 2003], http://www.st-francis-lutheran.org/independ030713.html (January 1, 2010).
[56] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, revised by Roy McCloughry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 4th ed., 2006), 447-8.
[57] Bates, *A Church at War*, 29.

so, something he sees as evidence of a highly organised political campaign.[58]

Girardian theory suggests rather that evangelical statements that this was a

'groundswell' of feeling be taken seriously – this was the single victim

mechanism, seeking to create unity around a victim.

The charges brought against Jeffrey John were unanswerable. It was

impossible for him to prove his innocence. Initially, attacks focused on his

theological liberalism, but swiftly moved to include his sexual behaviour, his

Christian integrity, and his honesty in declaring he would abide by the church's

teaching if consecrated bishop. Attempts were made to justify all of this as

entirely reasonable, but in fact there was no way that John could allay

evangelical fears. The nine bishops opposing him declared that they

commended abstinent same-sex relationships, yet went on to cast doubt on

John's assurances that his relationship was abstinent. The need of a bishop to

uphold the teaching of the church on homosexuality was affirmed, but John's

declaration that he would do so if consecrated was seen as doubtful.[59]

Some simply shifted the goalposts, noting that John had not declared that

he would also abide by other Church of England statements on homosexuality.[60]

(The most prominent other 'official' Church of England statements on

homosexuality are firstly the so-called 'Higton motion', affirming that

homosexual genital acts fall short of the ideal and are 'to be met with a call to

repentance and the exercise of compassion', and secondly Resolution 1.10 of the

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[58] Bates, *A Church at War*, 168-9, 222.
[59] Graham Dow et al, 'Bishops's statement about Dr Jeffrey John', *CT* (June 20, 2003), 2.
[60] Mark Burkill, 'The Appointment of Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading', [Reform briefing paper written before John's withdrawal], http://www.reform.org.uk/pages/bb/JeffreyJohn.php (January 20, 2011).

Lambeth Conference in 1998, which affirms that homosexual practice is incompatible with scripture, and advocates abstinence for all not called to marriage.)[61]

Nothing less than the death of Jeffrey John's career as a Christian leader was acceptable, because only that way could he become a scapegoat to bring unity. It is Jeffrey John's becoming a scapegoat to bring unity that makes it clear that the Jeffrey John affair, although also interacting with the wider rivalry between evangelicals and liberals, is principally a scandal generated by and within an internal Anglican evangelical rivalry. The 'death' of Jeffrey John could not bring unity between evangelicals and liberals – it simply signalled the victory of the one group over the other – but it had the potential to bring unity between conservative and open evangelicals.[62]

The death of the scapegoat dispels the crisis of undifferentiation. Whilst gripped in mimetic rivalry, the essential sameness of the rivals, so apparent to those outside, is incomprehensible to those inside. They are gripped by a conviction of their essential difference from their monstrous rival, and find any hint that the rival is similar to be terrifying. Indeed, they perceive the crisis as a crisis of undifferentiation in that the vital and important barriers and demarcations that safeguard their identity as different from their rivals appear to be under threat.[63] The crisis for those caught up in it is one in which this

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[61] The House of Bishops Working Group on Issues in Human sexuality, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A guide to the debate* (*Some Issues*) (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), 26-31.
[62] Interestingly, the Jeffrey John affair did play a key role in marking out Rowan Williams as a potential scapegoat who could bring unity between evangelicals and liberals, distancing this former liberal hero from many of his former supporters and lending him the ambiguous, marginal status necessary to become an effective scapegoat.
[63] *VS*, 56-67.

spectre of underlying sameness (which only becomes more powerful as the mimetic cycle accelerates) must be dispelled at all costs. The single victim mechanism allows the sameness of the rival to be embraced, by identifying a single victim as ultimately the source of the contagion, the true monster. The rivals can be united in collective action against this victim, killing them, and thus preventing the monstrousness of the community from being revealed.[64]

The victim, although innocent of the charges against them, is therefore not picked entirely randomly, as they must fulfil a distinct role. They must be a marginal figure - both insider and outsider - enough of an insider to be blamed for spreading the contagion within society, and enough of an outsider to be identified as the source of difference. In some cases they are those within society seen as exceptional or different in some way.[65] With the victim's death at the hands of the united rivals, the crisis of undifferentiation comes to an end. The sameness of former rivals is no longer a threat, indeed it has become a miraculous means of salvation, by which monstrous difference has been destroyed.

Jeffrey John fitted the criteria to become a scapegoat for the Anglican evangelical mimetic crisis. He was a marginal figure for Anglican evangelicals, an outsider inasmuch as he was a gay liberal catholic, an insider inasmuch as he was a priest in the same church, and would, if consecrated, be a bishop to whom those within the diocese would have to swear canonical obedience. As a liberal theologian, he could plausibly be seen as emblematic of what conservatives saw

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[64] *BE*, 48, 72.
[65] *VS*, 12-13, 39; *IS*, 26, 67-9.

as the root cause of the crisis of undifferentiation: a creeping liberalism that was 'infecting' evangelicalism, dissolving the certainties and absolutes that kept it true to the gospel. Even more significantly, John was a moderate liberal, who argued from scripture. Ironically, his major writing on the subject of homosexuality was a decidedly moderate and un-radical argument for fidelity and stability within homosexual relationships, seeking to persuade more radical liberals that a pattern of life modelled on marriage was more in accord with scripture and tradition.[66] He was exactly the sort of liberal who was influential with progressive evangelicals.

1.3.4 The Founding Murder

Much of Girard's work has focused on anthropology and the study of mythology. His understanding of the single victim mechanism is bound up with his understanding of the origins of human culture and civilization. Broadly, he argues that in pre-historic societies, now only half-remembered through myth, the single victim mechanism was the means by which emergent civilizations were saved from seemingly inevitable self-destruction.[67] The murder of the scapegoat by the community purged the contagion, and civilization was born. The victim, seen as the monster responsible for the crisis, became a divine figure who saves through their death.[68] Ritual murder as a means of saving society became the basis of religion, and the foundation-stone of culture, from which modern means of regulating violence through systems of justice

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[66] John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable.*
[67] *TS*, 36-8, 76-85.
[68] *TS*, 42-44; *IS*, 70-2.

eventually emerged.[69]

This aspect of Girard's work is less relevant for our purposes (not least because, as we will see, he is clear that the 'divinization' he identifies as occurring in mythology is no longer a possible outcome of the single victim mechanism), but three points of significance should be drawn from it. First, Girard adopts the New Testament language of Satan, the demonic, and the principalities and powers when describing the way these processes shape us as individuals and as a civilization. Both the demonic and the Powers that protect against it may be understood as Satan. Girard argues that the gospels use 'Satan' as well as 'scandal' as a term to describe mimetic rivalry. Following this usage, he refers to rivalrous contagion up to and including the single victim mechanism as 'Satan' or 'satanic', using the term to denote the cycle as a whole or any stage within it. Thus humanity is in bondage to Satan who has provided a satanic means of creating order and defending itself against the contagious violence that he himself is responsible for. Satan casts out Satan in human culture, based on the single-victim mechanism.[70] Satan is the seductive desire to transgress prohibitions in imitation of a rival. Satan is the accuser who becomes a stumbling block to create scandal. Satan is the cycle of reciprocal violence that becomes contagious and threatens to destroy the world. And Satan is the promise that violence can be used to defeat violence – that in destroying others we can bring reconciliation and peace.[71]

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[69] *VS*, 10, 21-4, 93-101; *TH*, 76-79; *IS,* 79-83; *EC*, 198-9.
[70] *TS*, 187-8; *IS*, 43-5.
[71] *IS,* 33-5; *BE*, 46.

Human civilization has evolved from the founding murder as a sinful and satanic compromise with violence, yet ultimately it is only the satanic use of violence to contain violence in cultural institutions that protects us from the demonic forces that would otherwise tear us apart. The ambiguous status of the Powers in New Testament writings reflects this compromised and compromising heritage. The Powers are institutionalised violence to protect us from violence – ultimately opposed to the kingdom, but all that prevents contagious violence being unleashed on all of us.[72] Indeed, Girard is clear that many of our cultural institutions are genuinely morally superior to their predecessors and to the prospect of unconfined contagious violence, but he is equally clear that they are not and can never be the kingdom of God.[73] Indeed, creative and redemptive violence is a satanic delusion. Girard's understanding here forms the basis for the work of New Testament scholar Walter Wink, who developed a social ethics from a close reading of the Powers as presented in the New Testament. Wink (who acknowledges his indebtedness to Girard), describes them as simultaneously institutions and spiritual realities that create a domination system that imprisons humanity in a cycle of violence.[74]

The second point of significance is the ambiguous status of religion. Religion, on this understanding, is itself one of the Powers. Indeed, it is the first and greatest amongst them. Although Girard is clear that the Christian gospel has a distinctly different origin, he is also clear that the church continues to take

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[72] *IS*, 95-8; *EC*, 247.
[73] *EC*, 198-9; *BE*, 108.
[74] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

the form of religion, and is in itself sinful compromise with satanic violence.[75]

The third point of significance is the role of *pharmakoi*. Girard describes the role of *pharmakoi* within Ancient Greek society - a group of potential scapegoats maintained at public expense in order to be sacrificed when the community reaches a point of crisis.[76] This was an early stage in the development of institutions of justice. The idea of a group within society having been marked out as potential scapegoats is a fruitful one in understanding the effects of evangelical rhetoric. As I will describe in chapter 3, as a gay Christian, and especially as a gay liberal Christian, Jeffrey John was marked out by the evangelical community as *pharmakos* – a potential scapegoat. His nomination as a bishop was all that was required to bring him to the attention of the community.

1.3.5 Revelation in Human History, Apocalypse, and the Need for Conversion

Mimetic theory holds that humanity has, since before recorded history, been in thrall to Satan, and yet has always deceived itself about this, refusing to acknowledge its complicity in violence or see the innocence of its victims. Girard argues, however, that the Bible has slowly been revealing the truth of the single victim mechanism to humanity, a process that begins with Old Testament texts in which violence is condemned and the innocence of victims is asserted, and which comes to fruition in Christ and the gospel accounts of his death.[77] This

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[75] *EC*, 259; *BE*, 141; *CTWF*, 29, 69.
[76] *IS*, 51, 76.
[77] *Job*; *TS*, 101-5; *TH*, 153-8, 421; *IS*, 82-5; Raymond Schwager, *Must there be scapegoats?: Violence and redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), 53.

has made it impossible for the single victim mechanism to retain its effectiveness in Western culture, which has been profoundly affected by biblical texts and Christian tradition.[78] This is discernable in examining historical texts. Pre-Christian myths concealed the reality of actual victims that lay behind them, but after the gospels passed into cultural history, persecution texts (for example accounts of Jewish pogroms) could not do this so effectively. The murders are apparent, and divinization is no longer possible. The writer is unaware that what he is describing is scapegoating, but it is apparent to the modern reader.[79] This is because the modern reader has been sensitized to the possibility of scapegoating and the existence of innocent victims through the cultural influence of the Christian revelation. Mimetic theory itself is a product of this cultural diffusion of revelation, being partly derived from the insights of key modern writers like Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky.[80] Girard understands the cultural influence of Christianity as having had wide-ranging effects on Western society, even manifesting itself in places where it is apparently absent, such as in secularist critique of religion.[81]

Girard's understanding that modern Western society has become highly aware of the reality of scapegoating and the innocence of victims should not be taken to mean, however, that modern Westerners are free from the influence of mimetic rivalry, or indeed the single victim mechanism.[82] Rather, Girard argues that mimetic rivalry is as potent a force as ever, and the single victim

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[78] *IS*, 142, 154; *EC*, 205-6.
[79] *TS*, 8, 24.; *TH*, 127-9.
[80] *TS,* 101; *IS,* 142; *DD*; *TE*; René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).
[81] *TH*, 226, 399; *IS*, Ch 13; *EC*, 236, 257-8.
[82] *TS*, 201; *IS*, 154-5; *EC*, 254.

mechanism continues to operate, albeit in a far less effective form. The death of a scapegoat no longer results in divinization, the single victim mechanism cannot create new cultural forms, and contagious violence cannot any longer be kept in check. The modern world is therefore more dangerous and violent than earlier periods, despite our increased awareness of the innocence of victims. In fact, increased awareness of and concern for victims has become a means of unleashing further violence. Standing up for the victims has become the moral position of choice in acts of scapegoating, and persecution of innocent victims the invincible accusation. In the modern world, it is only permitted to scapegoat others by demonstrating that they themselves are scapegoaters.[83]

The coming of Christ has dethroned the Powers, but it is these Powers and the single victim mechanism that they are built upon that have been holding off the threat of contagious violence. The gospel has a corrosive effect on these Powers, and this leaves society increasingly open to an escalation to extremes, and ultimately the threat of complete destruction. Girard describes the social institutions and processes that hold off destruction as *katechon* (a word taken from 2 Thessalonians 2:7 – those 'holding back' the power of lawlessness) and warns of the consequences of their being too swiftly stripped away.[84] The mimetic cycle accelerates with nothing to hold it back, and humanity now has the capacity to completely destroy itself.[85] It is this possibility - of the self-destruction of humanity as a whole as it gives free reign to its mimetic rivalries -

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[83] *IS*, 158, 165, 180-1.
[84] *EC*, 247-9. In *EC* the spelling *kathechon* and *kathechetic* is used, but this is a misspelling of the Greek which is corrected by Michael Kirwan in his *Girard and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 96.
[85] *EC*, 235; *BE*, 20-3, 79-80, 105, 198.

that lies behind the apocalyptic warnings of Jesus. The imminent apocalypse is, however, rushing upon us just as the kingdom reveals itself more and more strongly.

We are in the best and worst of times, where both destruction and redemption are ever-present possibilities. This is not simply a reversion to the war of all against all, but an age of all or nothing.[86] The apocalypse presents humanity with a harsh choice: rivalry and violence or discipleship and peace, Satan or God, destruction or the kingdom. Girard is emphatic that humanity is headed for destruction and is unable to save itself – not through any sense of fatalism, but rather simply because we are inescapably mimetic and none of us have the ability to resist alone.[87] To prevent destruction, we would need to develop a positive mimesis that moves from reciprocity to reconciliation, but this is impossible without Christ, a model who is not a rival. It requires more than resistance to violence, it requires conversion: a move from reciprocity to relationship.[88]

Thus a Girardian reading of the Jeffrey John affair not only explains why and how an attempt was made to make a scapegoat of Jeffrey John, but also why it failed to bring the unity it attempted to achieve. It also goes on to offer a perspective from which to understand liberal attacks on evangelicals following the Jeffrey John affair. The single victim mechanism has become remarkably ineffective as a means of dispelling violence and conflict, because as a culture, guided by the gospels, we have become adept at recognising victims. Some

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[86] *BE,* 68, 72, 105, 111, 118, 131.
[87] *BE*, 74, 100-3.
[88] *TH*, 400; *EC*, 10-11, 173, 203-5; *BE*, 109.

evangelicals, despite feeling the power of the single victim mechanism and its pull towards unity, recognised that in Jeffrey John they were scapegoating an innocent victim. Mimetic theory shows not only that the failure of the single victim mechanism to bring unity was inevitable, because the influence of the gospel on Western civilization has created an extraordinary awareness of and empathy with victims (so that ironically secular critics of evangelicalism were here demonstrating the Christian roots of their values), but also that its use is inescapable. Even in condemning its use, those branding evangelicals as bigots fall into the grip of it.

1.4 The Jeffrey John Affair – a Girardian Reading

Taking the above into account, then, a thorough-going Girardian reading of the Jeffrey John affair can be constructed. Anglican evangelicals were caught up in a mimetic crisis centred upon their identity. I will expand on this more in the next chapter, but for now it will suffice to note that conservatives felt that evangelicalism was becoming diluted by the influence of liberalism within the Church of England, whilst progressives felt the need in response to justify their claim to an evangelical identity despite their broader theological base.[89] Both sought to show that they represented authentic Anglican evangelicalism, and that the attempts of the other to widen or narrow that identity were mistaken. The appointment of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury had pushed the crisis to the verge of open conflict.

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[89] David Holloway, 'The background to, and the need for, Reform', http://www.reform.org.uk/pages/bb/backgroundandneed.php (January 20, 2011); Graham Kings, 'The Founding of Fulcrum', http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/newsletter09.cfm?doc=137 (January 20, 2011).

Anglican evangelicals needed a scapegoat – someone they could unite in opposing. Jeffrey John became prominent at just the right time. He was orthodox enough that conservatives could feel he was exactly the sort of churchman responsible for the crisis – the sort that liberal-leaning evangelicals might give credence to. He was liberal enough that progressives might feel uneasy about supporting him. Jeffrey John's rise to prominence was in part due to his role within a wider mimetic rivalry, within the Church of England (and, indeed the Anglican Communion) as a whole, between conservatives (whether evangelical or catholic) and liberals. As a founder member of Affirming Catholicism, John was a figure willing to stand up and be counted as an articulate advocate of a moderate liberalism, which situated itself within a firm doctrinal orthodoxy. It was this marginal position theologically – neither insider nor outsider – that made him an ideal victim.

With Jeffrey John as victim, the Anglican evangelical community closed ranks against him. The condemnation was collective, not led by individual evangelical leaders. It represented the single victim mechanism in action, not a carefully orchestrated campaign. The subconscious force of this drive to murderous unity was such that even established evangelical spokespeople were reluctant to speak out against it. The charges brought against Jeffrey John were unanswerable. Despite the outward appearance of reasonable, reasoned objection, there was a deeply intrusive exposure of his private life, a relentless questioning of his integrity and honesty, and a determination that the process would end with his 'death' as a Christian leader. Not only did evangelicals seek

to bar him from becoming Bishop of Reading, they wanted to prevent him being appointed to any position of prominence in the future.

The attempt to make Jeffrey John a scapegoat did not have the unifying effect that the single victim mechanism is intended to produce. Far from dispelling the tensions within Anglican evangelicalism, the divisions became ever more rancorous. The very public split between conservative and open evangelicals signalled by the formation of Anglican Mainstream and Fulcrum at NEAC 4 at Blackpool later that year was only the start of a spiralling and destructive crisis. The influence of the gospel on Western culture has been such that the single victim mechanism is no longer capable of bringing unity. It was too obvious to too many people that Jeffrey John was being made a scapegoat, prompting some to then turn on evangelicals and make them scapegoats as homophobic bigots. In turning to the single victim mechanism, evangelicalism was demonstrating how thoroughly it had failed to follow the light of the gospel, and the degree to which it had become complicit with satanic violence. The fact that it failed to find the unity it sought does nothing to remove the truth of this judgement. Indeed, Girard's work suggests a truly terrifying coda to this analysis. The failure of the single victim mechanism represents the failure of the last cultural means of preventing the spread of contagious violence throughout the evangelical community. In turning to Satan to cast out Satan, evangelicalism has entrusted itself to one whose power was broken by the cross. In seeking to save its life, evangelicalism has lost it. There is nothing now that can be humanly done to prevent the mimetic crisis within Anglican evangelicalism from tearing it apart.

1.5 Criticism of Girard

Girard's theories have been criticised on many grounds. Michael Kirwan provides a helpful overview of the critiques in his *Girard and Theology*.[90] Beyond the many critics who simply express a distaste for the totalizing feel of some of Girard's writing (which he sees as representative of a widespread misunderstanding of Girard's tone and intent) he identifies two broad areas of serious critique: the failure of historical Christianity to model the non-violence it supposedly reveals to the world, and the paucity of Girard's incarnational and Trinitarian theology, especially in regard to soteriology.

The first criticism is essentially of the credibility of Girard's work, though it includes those who argue on more theoretical grounds that Girard's Christian particularism critically undervalues the achievements of non-Christian individuals and cultures and overstates the non-violence of Christian culture. It is certainly the case that historically Christianity has not always shown itself to be conscious of being centred on any sort of revelation of non-violence. Indeed, Christianity has at times been complicit with and engaged in theological justification of violence for its own ends. Girard himself has addressed these sorts of concerns, notably in *BE*, where he frankly acknowledges that he was wrong in *TH* to assume the existence of some sort of essential, non-sacrificial Christianity and speaks instead of the 'failure' of historical Christianity.[91] However, he robustly defends his presentation of the transforming influence of the gospels on Western culture. If the claim that historical Christianity contains

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[90] Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 132-42.
[91] *BE*, 196.

within it a transformative revelation of non-violence is separated from any

supposition that it has ever successfully modelled this in Christian culture, then

it becomes a considerably stronger claim. Kirwan notes critics have often failed

to realise that Girard's approach here is essentially postmodern: he is engaged

in a Foucaultian exercise of archaeology to allow the excluded voice of Christian

revelation to be heard.[92] Girard's understanding assumes, in fact, that Christian

revelation has never been clearly proclaimed – it has been suppressed by the

satanic powers whose authority it challenges.

The second area of criticism is a stronger one and more far-reaching for

the purposes of this study: Girard's understanding of incarnation and Trinity is

deficient, because he is so focused on a human understanding of Christ and the

salvation he brings. It is unclear why Girard's Christ must be divine, beyond

granting him the extraordinary ability to resist and expose mimetic rivalry. In

regard to soteriology, it is often hard to discern what role the other two persons

of the Trinity might play. This weakness in understanding the nature and

importance of incarnation and Trinity leads to a failure to truly understand the

atonement. Evangelicals would share the concerns of the Catholic theologian

Hans Urs von Balthasar, who critiques Girard for his downplaying of the concept

of divine justice and his insistence that God did not want the crucifixion.[93] By

contrast, certain Girardians, notably the gay Catholic theologian James Alison,

argue that theologies committed to a penal substitutionary understanding of the

atonement are typical of what Girard described in his earlier works as

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[92] Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 136.

[93] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV: 'The Action'* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 309-10, originally published (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980). Cited in Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 139.

'sacrificial Christianity', that form of the Christian faith that has become fatally corrupted by ultimately satanic ideas of sacrifice and righteous violence.[94] Like von Balthasar, many evangelicals would argue in turn that such theologians have not sufficiently understood God's desire for justice and the seriousness of sin which are central to such approaches. This study provides a very practical opportunity to examine this debate by examining the relationship between evangelical scapegoating and violence and the sort of atonement theology critiqued by Alison. In chapter 6 I will respond to Alison's critique in more detail, exploring evangelical atonement theologies and the extent to which they are compromised by sacred violence. I will note at this point, however, that not all forms of Girardian approach are as weak on this point. Indeed some, like Raymond Schwager, make an understanding of incarnation and the relationship of Jesus to his Father's mission central to their theology.[95]

1.6 Conclusion

Girard's mimetic theory is a tool for a deep understanding of English evangelical attitudes towards homosexuality. Although other simpler explanations are available, it is my belief that they offer only partial insight into what is a complex phenomenon. The validity of a mimetic approach will ultimately be established by the quality of the insight it brings, and its utility in helping point to a way forward. An analysis of the Jeffrey John affair has already demonstrated the potential of this approach. I turn now to examine the history

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[94] James Alison, *On Being Liked* (London: DLT, 2003), 17-31; *TH*, 180-4, 224-8.
[95] Raymond Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption,* trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999). Notably, Schwager's work is in dialogue with both Girard and von Balthasar.

of English evangelicalism over the period 1960-2010, to put the Jeffrey John

affair into a wider context.

Chapter 2

The Crisis of Undifferentiation - English Evangelicalism in Late Modernity

> Large alternatives always present themselves in petty choices... We must first of all, therefore, take seriously the fact that homosexuality has become a dividing issue among us. There is no point in expressing scornful wonder...we must ask what great issues this apparently 'little' issue mediates, how what is fought over can have become the question of strange gods. But if we press forward resolutely along that path, we may begin to untangle the knot of associations, identify the strange gods, flush them out of their cultural hiding places and leave the question of homosexuality disenchanted of them, ready to be seen precisely for what it is and not as the bearer of some wider cultural decision.[1]
>
> Oliver O'Donovan

2.1 Introduction

The analysis of the Jeffrey John affair offered in chapter 1 argued that by 2000, English evangelicals, and Anglican evangelicals in particular, were caught up in what Girard describes as a 'crisis of undifferentiation'. The very foundations of the community were shaken, its boundaries apparently unable to offer protection against the threat without, whilst scandalous rivalries and contagious violence within had seemingly brought it to the edge of complete dissolution. The nature of evangelical identity – what it meant to call oneself an evangelical – was increasingly disputed, making the boundaries of the community uncertain. It was this situation that prompted the turn to the single

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[1] Oliver O' Donovan, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 48.

victim mechanism as a means of restoring unity and dispelling violence.

Establishing the validity of this interpretation is especially important because it

is at odds with a common view (buoyed by statistics suggesting evangelicalism's

comparative immunity to decline) that the 1990s saw evangelicalism in a

position of increasing strength in England.[2] Alister McGrath, writing in 1996, is

typical in predicting (despite an awareness of a tendency towards factionalism)

that 'the future of Christianity seems to belong to the [evangelical] movement',

noting numerical growth, increasing influence within the Church of England, its

attractiveness to young people, and signs of increasing academic and

intellectual sophistication and credibility.[3] However, only a short time into the

new century it was clear that this was far from accurate. English evangelicalism

was characterised by deep and increasingly acrimonious public splits, and the

most recent statistics suggested that evangelicals were now no longer holding

their own but actually beginning to show signs of late-onset decline.[4] Although,

as I shall show, English evangelicals were becoming relatively more significant

within a declining church, their increasing divisions made it impossible except

on a few occasions to translate their numbers into political power. Rob Warner

demonstrates the way in which the rhetoric of success was a tool employed by

evangelical leaders in the 1990s to increase their political influence when the

evidence was that growth had plateaued and in some cases decline had set in.[5]

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[2] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 270; Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out* (London: Christian Research, 2000).
[3] Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2nd ed., 1996), 2, 191-3.
[4] Brierley, *Pulling Out of the Nosedive*.
[5] Warner, *Reinventing*, 87-114.

This study focuses specifically on English evangelicalism. Much of what is discussed will equally be characteristic of evangelicalism in other contexts, and occasionally it will be necessary to discuss non-English evangelicals who have exercised influence on the English context. However, I am rooting my study in the examination of texts produced by English evangelicals to give it a specificity and depth. The paucity of sociological studies of specifically English evangelicalism necessitates the use of studies of American evangelicalism in my discussion of Modernity in this chapter. The cultural context of England is (particularly in regard to secularisation) markedly different from that of the US, but there is also much common ground. Evangelicalism is (and to a great extent has always been) a transatlantic and pandenominational movement.[6] The struggle over evangelical identity is not unique to England, and has many of the same underlying dimensions.

This study also concentrates to some degree on Anglican evangelicalism, especially in its account of the events surrounding the Jeffrey John affair. This is so partly because of the numerical dominance of the Church of England within English Protestantism during this period (and therefore also the dominance of Anglican evangelicals within English evangelicalism), partly because of the national significance of key Anglican evangelical leaders and writers within the late twentieth century (John Stott, J.I. Packer, Michael Green, David Watson, and Nicky Gumbel to name but a few), and partly because some of the tensions

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[6] Ian S. Rennie, 'Fundamentalism and the varieties of North Atlantic Evangelicalism', in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk (eds.), *Evangelicalism: Comparative studies of popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 333-350.

behind the Jeffrey John Affair and related events are peculiarly Anglican.[7]

In this chapter, I will examine the crisis of undifferentiation in English evangelicalism and explain how it came about, examining the vexed question of what evangelicalism means in this period, discussing the cultural shifts that occurred, and then tracing the history of the internal conflicts within English evangelicalism from 1960 to 2010. This provides three windows into the crisis, and enables me to define the key terms of my study before examining evangelical literature in detail.

2.2 Defining Evangelicalism

The terms 'evangelical' and 'evangelicalism' are highly contested terms. Indeed to claim that evangelicalism was caught up in a crisis of undifferentiation is precisely to say that this was a period of extraordinary uncertainty and fear in regard to evangelical identity, where the right to define that identity was highly contested. Evangelicals were afraid that their identity was becoming porous, that external influences were leaking in, and their distinctives were leaking out. Those who had always been sure of their place inside evangelicalism felt in danger of slipping out. At the extremes, some felt the need to draw ever tighter boundaries, whilst others preferred not to use the label at all. In studying evangelicalism in crisis, then, clarity as to what I understand 'evangelicalism' to mean is vital before proceeding. I will spend some time surveying attempts made to define evangelicalism during the period 1960-2010, both by evangelical groups and academics. As will become apparent, this not only enables me to

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[7] Warner, *Reinventing*, 49; David Wells, 'On being Evangelical: Some theological differences and similarities', in Noll et al., (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 389-415.

define my terms but also provides a way in to understanding the nature of the crisis of undifferentiation.

2.2.1 The Polemical Use of Definitions of Evangelicalism

Examples of the polemical use of definitions of evangelicalism are not difficult to find. One would be Reform leader David Holloway's 'What is an Anglican Evangelical?'[8] Holloway, drawing on the work of George Marsden, the American religious historian, argues that evangelical identity has three distinct senses: assent to a set of doctrines, association with a historical tradition, and membership of evangelical parachurch organisations. Difficulties arise when people are not evangelical in all three senses. Clearly Holloway has in mind here open evangelicals who are members of evangelical organisations, associate themselves with an evangelical tradition, and yet would not hold to tightly-defined sets of evangelical doctrinal beliefs such as those in the Reform Covenant. This is typical of attempts by conservative evangelicals to establish definitions that make open evangelicals into non-evangelical liberals. Although the relative conservatism of charismatic evangelicals makes it harder to 'disinherit' them in this fashion, conservative evangelical definitions tend not to emphasise spiritual experience, spiritual gifts, or the expectation of revival, all key components of a charismatic identity, giving the impression that charismatics are therefore a variant of evangelical who hold to some unusual beliefs in addition to standard evangelical doctrine. Given the strong emphasis on spiritual experience in early Methodism, this understanding is at the least

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[8] David Holloway, 'What is an Anglican Evangelical?' in Melvyn Tinker (ed.), *Restoring the Vision: Anglican Evangelicals speak out* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1990), 15-37.

misleading.

Open evangelical definitions tend, by contrast, to be wide enough to include any who describe themselves as evangelical, creating the impression that conservative evangelicals are artificially imposing restrictions on a term whose objective content is broad. An example of the polemical use of a wide definition would be Graham Kings' watercourses analogy, in which he sets out three groups – the river (open evangelicals), canal (conservative evangelicals, and rapids (charismatic evangelicals). [9] The incidental aspects of his analogy betray the polemical intent – the rapids are powerful but perhaps dangerous, and certainly not for all, the canal is direct but narrow and unyielding, whereas the river is broad and natural, following the contours of the world around it. Open evangelicals, far from an aberration, are therefore presented as the 'natural' form of evangelicalism, with conservatives implicitly seen as an innovatory development from it.

2.2.2 Bebbington's Quadrilateral

One simple way of attempting to avoid polemical definitions is to deploy a historical definition, using a more general categorisation to trace a historical movement that can be fairly non-controversially described as evangelical. Evangelicals are therefore those who can be connected to the tradition. Unsurprisingly, this approach has characterised much academic study of evangelicalism. The most widely-used of these definitions is that developed by David Bebbington in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, typically referred to

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[9] Graham Kings, 'Canal, River and Rapids: Contemporary Evangelicalism in the Church of England', in *Anvil* 20:3 (2003), 167-184.

as the quadrilateral: activism (principally in evangelism), biblicism (the Bible as the source of authority), conversionism (the need for a personal conversion), and crucicentrism (a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross).[10] On this basis Bebbington identifies evangelicalism with a network of Protestant Christian movements arising from the eighteenth century in Great Britain and its colonies.

Clearly a historical definition like this is very congenial to more open evangelicals, who can identify their heritage within a historical tradition, and less so to conservative evangelicals like Holloway, for whom this satisfies only one of his three linked identifiers of evangelicalism. Unsurprisingly, then, Bebbington's historical definition has been challenged explicitly and implicitly for polemical reasons.[11] Others wish to stress the continuities between evangelicalism and earlier Protestantism in far less polemical fashion. J.I. Packer has always emphasised the Puritan heritage of evangelicalism, though without seeking to efface the distinction Bebbington has established between the two.[12] John Stott makes the bold claim that evangelicalism is essentially New Testament apostolic Christianity, though he does so in the cause of ecumenism, softening the apparently exclusivist claim by generously acknowledging that other traditions are equally Christian, sharing many of the same traditions, and that evangelicalism contains no truths as its own exclusive possession.[13]

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[10] Noll et al. (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 6; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-19.
[11] Gary J. Williams, 'Was Evangelicalism created by the Enlightenment?' *Tyndale Bulletin* 53:2 (2002), 283-312.
[12] J.I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An analysis* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1978), 5-6.
[13] John Stott, *Evangelical Truth – A personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 10-11, 16-18. Martin Davie notes that the claim as stated is self-evidently false given

The quadrilateral has also been criticised in academic circles for omitting or misrepresenting certain evangelical distinctives.[14] Mark Noll offers a rather more fluid definition in his essay 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Society', where he gives a description of the movement's characteristic emphases that meets many of these criticisms. He describes evangelicalism as a form of biblical experientialism expressed in a bias against inherited institutions, an extraordinary flexibility in regard to ideas concerning intellectual, social, political and economic life, and a practice of discipline, leading to a conviction that the gospel requires social healing and personal holiness.[15] He notes that there has been considerable diversity within evangelicalism, making precise doctrinal formulations suspect, but that it has always been characterised by a looking to scripture as the bedrock of authority and a conviction that true religion required active experience of God. This description of the existential stance of evangelicalism includes within it reference to much that Bebbington defines as biblicism, activism, conversionism and crucicentrism and clearly emphasises evangelical concern with a transformed life and willingness to overlook denominational difference in the cause of the gospel (bias against inherited institutions) whilst downplaying the significance of particular doctrinal formulations.

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the pluriform nature of contemporary evangelicalism unless Stott is also arguing that NT Christianity is pluriform. Davie, 'Evangelicals and their heritage ', in Iain Taylor, (ed.), *Not Evangelical Enough! – The Gospel in the Centre* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 1-28.

[14] George M Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix-x; John G. Stackhouse (ed.), *Evangelical Futures: A conversation on theological method* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 42. Randall & Hilborn make a similar point, as well as noting an evangelical tendency to separatism. Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The history and significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).

[15] Mark A. Noll 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence', in Noll et al (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 113-136.

In the sociology of religion an important distinction is made between substantive and functional definitions of religion.[16] Substantive definitions establish what religion is, whilst functional definitions establish what religion does. Substantive definitions focus on the content of a religion, providing sharp dividing lines as to what is or is not religion. Functional definitions focus on the social functions and consequences of religion, providing a far broader understanding of a religion that is able to recognise its presence in areas that would not traditionally be perceived as religious.

The definitions employed by Bebbington and especially by Noll could be seen as predominantly functional – they emphasise the social functions of evangelicalism more than the content of their beliefs, how evangelicals operate as a community, how they interact with other communities and what it means to be part of that community. Where there is specific content in terms of what evangelicals believe, this is presented in the broadest possible terms, to encompass a wide variety of possible formulations. It is a key part of Bebbington's analysis of evangelicalism in modern Britain that evangelical distinctives, whilst remaining constant if viewed in more abstract terms, have been expressed in different and sometimes contradictory patterns of behaviour in different periods as evangelicalism has transformed itself to express its distinctive tradition in different cultural modes.[17] Noll's statement that evangelicalism expresses itself in 'extraordinary flexibility' in regard to intellectual, social, political and economic life gives this aspect of evangelicalism

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[16] Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (London: Wadsworth Publishing, 4th ed., 1997).

[17] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.

considerable prominence. Such an approach is potentially very helpful in

interpreting periods of cultural upheaval such as the present, where different

evangelical groupings may be guided by the same sociological distinctives to act

in very different (sometimes contradictory) ways, a phenomenon that can easily

be misinterpreted as one grouping ceasing to be evangelical.[18] However, it can

also be problematic for this very reason. A functional definition, by its very

broadness, makes it difficult to establish when a grouping has genuinely ceased

to be evangelical. The lack of objective content can make such a definition

insufficiently incisive. This leads inevitably to the need to engage with a more

substantive definition that includes some reference to doctrine in interpreting

evangelicalism.

2.2.3 Bases of Faith and Other Doctrinal Definitions

Bases of faith, such as that of the Evangelical Alliance (EA) or the

Christian Union movement, the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship

(UCCF), are the best known forms of evangelical self-definition. The intention of

such doctrinal definitions is to define evangelicalism in contradistinction to

other traditions of Christianity. Some of these definitions are made rather

narrow for polemical reasons, and effectively 'disinherit' many who would

describe themselves as evangelical. Warner's extensive study of bases of faith

throughout the period makes it clear how doctrinal definitions are battlefields

of internal warfare in evangelicalism between liberal and conservative:

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[18] This sort of confusion may lie behind Hunter's apparent misdiagnosis in the 1980s that
American evangelicalism was disintegrating under the pressures of modernity. James Davison
Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

> in the post-liberal context of the late twentieth century, progressive and neo-conservative evangelicalism increasingly defined themselves over against one another... Each to the other has become the enemy within, to be disputed if not disowned.[19]

Caution must be exercised here, then, in turning to such evangelical self-definitions as a tool of analysis, lest they pre-determine the outcome of any study by drawing its boundaries in a way that coincides with the vision of one side or the other. Doctrinal definitions offered by non-evangelical commentators are sometimes less than incisive, however. American social scientist James Davison Hunter, for example, suggests biblical inerrancy, the divinity of Christ and the salvific efficacy of Christ's death and physical resurrection as doctrinal distinctives, which is both too narrow (not all evangelicals are inerrantist) and too wide (many non-evangelicals, especially Catholics, hold both other doctrines).[20]

However, given the difficulties with more functional definitions, some element of doctrinal definition seems unavoidable if a workable definition is to be found, one that seeks to define the centre of an evangelical tradition rather than rule that certain groups are not 'true' evangelicals. J.I. Packer offered a fairly non-controversial doctrinal definition in the 1970s, which can helpfully be nuanced by reference to Stott's point that these are doctrines that while not exclusively held by evangelicals have always been held by them in this combination even when other traditions have de-emphasised certain elements of them.[21] Packer identifies four 'general claims' of evangelicalism about the Christian life: that it must be practical (it is a lifestyle of discipleship), pure (it

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[19] Warner, *Reinventing*, 149-233, 228.
[20] James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandry of Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 7.
[21] Packer, *Identity Problem*; Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 11.

consists of an essential gospel truth that cannot be added to without

diminishing it), unitive (all Christians may unite through their common

commitment to this truth regardless of what else divides them) and rational (it

is essentially a belief held, not something experienced); and six 'particular

convictions': the supremacy of Scripture, the majesty of Jesus Christ, the

lordship of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of conversion, the priority of

evangelism, and the importance of fellowship. Packer's basic doctrinal definition

has been taken up with minor modifications by both McGrath and Stott, giving it

some pedigree as a centrist and relatively non-polemical definition.[22] It is rather

broader a definition than those found in some doctrinal bases, as is apparent if

we focus on two areas of current doctrinal sensitivity: the nature and scope of

biblical authority and the atonement.

Packer's rather generalist statement of scriptural authority sees the Bible

as being 'both sufficient and self-interpreting (theologically, that is) as a guide

from God on all matters of faith and practice', where the Reform Covenant

speaks of 'The infallibility and supreme authority of "God's Word written" and

its clarity and sufficiency for the resolving of disputes about Christian faith and

life.'[23] It should be recognised that Packer would not flinch to use the terms

'infallible' and 'inerrant', being involved in the drafting of one of the most

trenchant twentieth century evangelical statements of inerrancy in the same

year.[24] His understanding of these terms as given elsewhere is essentially that

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[22] McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 51; Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 26. Notably all three register some discontent with narrower doctrinal definitions.
[23] Packer, *Identity Problem*, 20; 'The Reform Covenant', Reform Website, http://reform.org.uk/about/reform-covenant (January 25, 2012).
[24] 'The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy' [1978], http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf (January 25, 2012).

they affirm the reliability (in the scope of its reference) and the trustworthiness (in the truthfulness of its assertions) respectively of scripture.[25] However, he here displays a commitment to gracious inclusivity, giving a considerably less narrow definition. Although both statements avoid the term inerrancy and appear to restrict sufficiency to matters of Christian faith and practice, Reform's use of infallibility is meant to imply inerrancy in line with the statement in their explanatory notes that 'in everything that it [scripture] is seeking to say it will not err or make a mistake.'[26]

Packer's description of the atonement is broad, seeking to establish what evangelicals believe without ruling out any alternative interpretations. Despite the fact that the language he uses is recognisably penal substitutionary (and that elsewhere he insists on the importance of the doctrine), he never uses the term, let alone specifying what form of it might be authentically evangelical. He states that evangelical belief is that Jesus' death is 'a sacrifice which covers sin, averts God's judicial anger, reconciles us to him and so delivers us from spiritual bondage and jeopardy.'[27] (Stott, interestingly, here demonstrates a rare polemicism, tightening up the definition by explicitly disavowing N.T. Wright's new perspective on Paul, which would sit comfortably within Packer's definition, and asserting that evangelicals must hold to penal substitution

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[25] Warner, *Reinventing*, 193-4.
[26] Mark Burkill, "The What and Why of the Reform Covenant" [1998], http://reform.org.uk/resources/media-downloads/src/publication/25/title/the-what-and-why-of-the-reform-covenant-mark-burkill-1998 (January 25, 2012).
[27] Packer, *Identity Problem*, 20.

alone.)[28]

There are a few areas where Packer's definition is marked by polemicism, in particular in regard to social justice and the charismatic movement, and these are subtly corrected in Stott's adaptation of it in his own doctrinal definition.[29] Stott stresses regeneration rather than conversion, and thus the ongoing work of the Spirit in the believer, giving an emphasis on the heart rather than rationality.[30] Stott's other correction to Packer's position, unsurprisingly, given his prominent role in the recovery of evangelical social activism at Keele and Lausanne, is his insistence that evangelism is not the sole primary commitment for evangelicals and that a commitment to social justice is complementary to this.[31]

2.2.4 Tribal Evangelicalism and Other Cartographical Definitions

Although a doctrinal definition allows precision in identifying evangelical tradition in whatever form it may manifest itself, it is less helpful as an analytical tool to understand contemporary evangelicalism, particularly evangelicalism in crisis, because it purposefully identifies commonalities between different forms of evangelicalism. Warner advances a significant

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[28] Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 71 (here explicitly referencing the UCCF doctrinal basis), 89, 156. This diverges from his position in *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 2nd. ed., 1989), where he acknowledged the legitimacy of other models of the atonement – see discussion in chapter 6.
[29] Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 28.
[30] Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 105-6, 110. Clive Calver and Rob Warner similarly seek to introduce charismatic emphases in suggesting that an emphasis on revival is an evangelical distinctive. Calver and Warner, *Together We Stand* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), 99.
[31] Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 123-4. The National Evangelical Anglican Congress held at Keele in 1967 and the later International Congress on World Evangelization held later in Lausanne in 1974 were key moments in shaping the identity of evangelicalism in the Twentieth century, as I will discuss later in section 2.4.3 of this chapter.

critique of Bebbington's quadrilateral in this regard.[32] He notes that

Bebbington's definition, in common with most of the forms of definition we

have so far examined, acts as a static statement of values, not a theological

matrix. By setting out to define evangelicalism over-against other groupings, it

de-emphasises distinctions and conflicts within evangelicalism itself. Drawing

on Marsden, Warner argues that the core values of evangelicalism as identified

by Bebbington and others act as competing priorities, being elaborated and

combined in different ways by different groupings, creating internecine

rivalry.[33] He therefore proposes what might be described as a cartographical

definition – mapping out the internal landscape of evangelicalism around these

competing priorities in belief and practice, highlighting tensions and diversity

and allowing interaction, alliances, splits, mergers and conflicts between

various 'tribes' to be discussed with ease.

Warner follows in the tradition of the sociologist Max Weber in speaking

of distinct historical traditions within evangelicalism that have created the

contemporary map, and in particular in the footsteps of James Davison Hunter

who used Weber's categorisation of traditions of Protestantism in his study of

evangelicalism.[34] Warner argues that historically the emergence of particular

movements and reaction to them has merged and drawn apart these traditions,

creating a varied and fragmented situation by the end of the twentieth

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[32] Warner, *Reinventing*, 19-20.
[33] George Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).
[34] Max Weber, trans. Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 95-154; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 7-9; Warner, *Reinventing*, 239-243.

century.[35] For ease of analysis, Warner then groups the seven most mainstream of these into three 'meso paradigms': progressives, cautiously open conservatives, and exclusivists, which should be understood as a continuum, moving from liberal to conservative in regard to doctrine. J.I. Packer and D.A. Carson would be good representatives of the exclusivists, John Stott or Nicky Gumbel would be good representatives of the cautiously open conservatives (notably both in their ministries are more focused on activism than matters of doctrine), and although there is no single dominant voice, figures such as Steve Chalke, Graham Cray or N.T. Wright would be representatives of the progressives.[36]

Having made this primarily historical/cartographical classification, Warner then gives it depth by uniting it with his 'competing emphases' approach to Bebbington's quadrilateral.[37] This allows the distinct emphases of each tradition to become clear, making the tensions between them more apparent. He identifies two competing axes: the first is a conversionist-activist axis, which has become focused on organisations, programmes, and developing an entrepreneurial approach aimed at securing measurable success. This grouping, which he describes as 'charismatic entrepreneurialism', is marked by pragmatism and a pan-evangelical vision, and has been the primary force behind the growth of the Evangelical Alliance, Spring Harvest, and Alpha. Its origins lie in anabaptist, holiness and conversionist traditions.[38] The second is a

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[35] Warner argues that there are now seven distinct 'micro-paradigms' sharing a pan-evangelical identity. Warner, *Reinventing*, 240.
[36] Warner, *Reinventing*, 229-30.
[37] Warner, *Reinventing,* 234-243.
[38] Here Warner is adapting the classification of evangelical traditions advocated by Hunter in American Evangelicalism to a UK context.

biblicist-crucicentric axis, which has become focused on doctrine and engaging with theological challenges and is suspicious of the pragmatism and fixation on success that marks the other axis. Following Keele this axis has split between progressive and exclusivist groupings. Its origins lie in the Reformed tradition. Warner argues that the biblicist-crucicentric axis dominates the extremes of his liberal-conservative continuum, characterising both progressives and exclusivists, whereas the conversionist-activist axis dominates the centre to centre-left, characterising the cautiously-open conservatives.

Although the axes dominate these sections of the continuum, they are not identical to them – there are conversionist-activists at both ends of the spectrum and Biblicist-crucicentrics in the centre. My study confirms this - in particular, as I will show in my later discussion, there is a significant group of biblicist-crucicentric evangelicals centred around John Stott within the cautiously-open conservatives, whose commitment to a pan-evangelical centrism has prevented them from being co-opted entirely by either progressives or exclusivists. [39] The rich analysis provided by Warner suggests a fragility in contemporary evangelical groupings and alliances.

Warner is not the only one to have advanced a cartographical definition, though others have often done so for more polemical reasons: avoiding the divisiveness of doctrinal definitions by simply mapping out the relationship between all those who describe themselves as evangelical. I have already made

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[39] Warner's analysis also explains the increasing marginalisation of Stott in English evangelicalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – Stott and the Lausanne-influenced mainstream are clearly part of the biblicist-crucicentric axis, and disinclined to identify with the charismatic centrist conversionist-activists, yet are increasingly torn between progressives and exclusivists, wary of the liberalism of the progressives yet repelled by the conservatism of the exclusivists. Warner, *Reimagining*, 229.

reference to Graham Kings's watercourses analogy, which is a cartographical

definition displaying this weakness, effectively acting to simply baptise all

extant groupings as legitimately evangelical. Such definitions can also be far too

static when they contain no reference to the historical traditions that produced

the current groupings they describe, lacking a depth that renders them

vulnerable to becoming swiftly outdated. [40] For example, the church historian

John King's cartographical definition in the 1960s referenced 'the Rwanda

movement' amongst other groupings. None of his categories seem particularly

adequate now.[41]

2.2.5 Definitions of English Evangelicalism - Conclusion

Examining definitions of evangelicalism in this period shows

evangelicalism's crisis of undifferentiation at its most acute point: various

evangelical scholars and groupings fighting over symbolic boundaries of

identity. In some there is a clear sense of crisis – boundaries must be clearly

marked (and policed) because evangelical identity is under threat. In others

there is a strong need to assert the broadness of those boundaries in conscious

distinction to other evangelicals who are drawing them more narrowly.

For the purposes of this study, I will adopt Warner's cartographical

definition of contemporary evangelicalism, avoiding the familiar but imprecise

conservative, charismatic and open terminology I have employed thus far for

convenience in favour of his doctrinal continuum of exclusivists, cautiously-

open conservatives, and progressives, noting that conversionist-activists (a

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[40] See also Gabriel Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 22-3.
[41] John C. King, *The Evangelicals* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 54-62.

category that includes most charismatics) dominate the centre and biblicist-crucicentrics (a category that is mainly comprised of non-charismatics) dominate the two extremes. Bebbington's quadrilateral is assumed within Warner's categorisation, but I also note Noll's definition of evangelicalism as biblical experientialism. The emphasis on evangelical flexibility and transformation in different cultural settings is particularly valuable in understanding evangelicalism's relationship to modernity, which I will discuss in the next section.

Where it is necessary to assume a doctrinal content to evangelicalism I will either implicitly or explicitly use the formulation of Packer as modified by Stott, with the exception of Stott's narrowing of the understanding of the atonement. In adopting a doctrinal definition that avoids mandating inerrancy or infallibility in regard to scripture and penal substitution in regard to atonement (a position that would be explicitly rejected by exclusivists) I draw on Warner's research into evangelical bases of faith which demonstrates that penal substitution and biblical inerrancy cannot historically be justified as evangelical distinctives.[42] For the purposes of establishing a basic doctrinal definition (and thus preventing a more polemical definition being adopted by stealth) I therefore understand evangelicalism as expressing these convictions about Christian belief and practice which, whilst not its exclusive possession, are always characteristic of evangelicalism:

> Evangelicalism makes the four 'general claims' that it must be practical (it is a lifestyle of discipleship), pure (it consists of an essential gospel

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[42] Warner, *Reinventing*, 228.

truth that cannot be added to without diminishing it), unitive (all Christians may unite through their common commitment to this truth regardless of what else divides them) and is both rational and emotive (it is a way of life that is experienced yet has a content of rational belief); and six 'particular convictions': the supremacy of Scripture, the majesty of Jesus Christ, the lordship of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of conversion and a transformed life, the need for activism in evangelism and social action, and the importance of fellowship.

2.3 Modernity

Examining the contested nature of evangelical identity in the period provides one means of approaching the crisis of undifferentiation. A second is to consider the cultural context in which these struggles over identity take place. Late modernity is a period of considerable cultural change in England, particularly for religious groups coming to terms with widespread secularisation, and evangelicalism is no exception. One way of understanding the crisis is to see it as a struggle between different evangelical responses to these cultural shifts, constituting a dialogue within evangelicalism and between modernity and various evangelicalisms (which are themselves expressions of modernity). A number of scholars have examined evangelicalism's relationship to modernity in this period (albeit largely in an American context). I will discuss a number of these approaches culminating in an examination of Girard's approach, which I believe gives a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of the inter-relationship of the two than any of the others.

2.3.1 Modernity and Secularisation

The term 'modernity' and its cognates 'late modernity' and 'modernisation' derive from a series of linked sociological and anthropological theories: the distinction between modern and pre-modern or primitive societies, and theories of development (or 'modernisation'), and secularisation (a process sometimes seen as synonymous with it.)[43] The most significant for our purposes is the secularisation thesis, because it is the most prevalent explanation for the greatest cultural shift evangelicalism has been faced with in the period 1960-2010: rapid decline in church attendance and allegiance.

Secularisation as a theory has several different forms, ranging from the thesis that religion will completely disappear in modernity, through various theories of its influence being weakened, or confined to the private sphere.[44] It is now challenged as a blanket overarching theory by those who argue that it may characterise only certain cultures (specifically noting that secularised Europe appears to be exceptional in that the equally modern US has not experienced a comparable decline in religiosity), that detraditionalization (the tendency to pursue religious belief without belonging to a religious group) is non-identical to secularization, or that the opposite – sacralisation – may be observed to occur in certain circumstances, with institutions becoming re-

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[43] Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Religion in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 4.
[44] Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion in Modern Times*, 307-8; Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1969); *The Social Reality of Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2009); Steve Bruce, *God is dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Brian Wilson, 'Secularization: The inherited model', in P.E. Hammond (ed.), *The Sacred in a Secular Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 9-20.

enchanted as religion finds a new public role.[45]

However, for our purposes these wider debates can be largely ignored. It is the fact of decline in religious adherence that has shaped the cultural environment in which evangelicalism found itself during this period, and in this most measurable form, secularisation (at a precipitous speed) seems impossible to deny. The English church census shows that in 1979, 11.7% of the population went to church. In 1989 it had dropped to 9.9%, in 1998 it was 7.5%. By 2005 it was 6.3%.[46] Statistician Peter Brierley's analysis of these figures suggests the decline is largely through death of elderly churchgoers rather than attenders leaving due to loss of faith, meaning that the decline is generational – a younger generation are not following their parents' religious habits.

The cultural historian Callum Brown, whose work supports this conclusion, estimates that in 1950 around a third of the adult population in Britain could be counted as fringe members and occasional attenders at church. By the end of the twentieth century they had simply dropped away, creating a chasm between regular attenders and the rest of the population.[47] Going to church has become a rather eccentric pastime in late modern Britain. Brown argues that far from representing a gradual decline due to creeping modernisation since the Enlightenment, secularisation represents a sudden and

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[45] Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion in Modern Times*, 429-432; Peter Berger (ed.), *The Descularization of the world: The resurgence of religion in world politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999); Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (London: Chicago University Press, 2nd ed., 1994); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*; David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[46] Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*,12.
[47] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 4.

abrupt cultural shift that occurred in the 1960s.[48] His analysis shows that prior

to this, church attendance was strong, even amongst the working classes and

within cities (places where traditionally secularisation has been concentrated).

He traces the decline to changes in the role of women, who (encouraged in part

by the discourse of evangelical literature) had previously been key to

maintaining religious faith within their families. Other historians and

sociologists dispute this, with some maintaining that church decline has been

occurring at least since the nineteenth century, and perhaps back to the

Reformation.[49] Brown's argument that secularisation is in essence a late

twentieth century phenomenon may be overstated. It is certainly the case that

the cultural shifts in the role of women that he identifies as the cause of decline

in church attendance have their roots in far earlier cultural movements which

can trace their origins back at least to the Enlightenment. However, on the basis

of the figures above, it is impossible to deny that at the least a significant gear-

shift in the process of secularisation occurred in the 1960s, producing a swift

decline in religious adherence that was a constant background throughout the

period. It is also the case that works like Brierley's brought these statistics to

the attention of evangelicals (and especially evangelical church leaders) during

our period. Whether decline had been happening earlier or not, now everyone

knew about it.

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[48] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*. Brown's emphasis on the 1960s is shared by Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[49] Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A history of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

We will see later the effect that the cultural changes of the 1960s have had on evangelicalism. The relative fortunes of evangelicalism amidst this decline are also significant, however. Initially, evangelicals appeared to be successfully resisting decline. The English church census did not measure churchmanship until 1989, meaning that the first census in which it was possible to calculate the relative fortunes of evangelicals was the 1998 census. This indicated that although there was a slight decline in evangelical church attendance over the period (-3%) it was much less than the average (-22%), and the decrease was largely in the numbers who described themselves as 'broad' or 'liberal' evangelical, with 'mainstream' evangelicals actually growing.[50]

By the next census in 2005, however, late onset decline had set in. All categories of evangelical were now in decline (though the broad evangelicals were still declining much faster, and on average evangelicals were still declining slower than the average rate of decline for all churches and traditions (-9% as opposed to -15%)).[51] The late onset of evangelical decline and its lesser rate when compared to other churchmanships had created a situation where despite declining in absolute terms, evangelicals were proportionately growing. In 1989, evangelicals accounted for 30% of all churchgoers. By 2005 this had increased to 40%. They were becoming comparatively bigger fish in a smaller pond.

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[50] Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out*, (London: Christian Research, 2000), 50-55. Brierley uses only 'charismatic' and 'broad' as qualifying adjectives for evangelicalism, counting all those who do not use these or who insert some alternative adjective as 'mainstream'. The significance of shifts between different categories of evangelical is therefore hard to assess. The key point here is that a significant proportion of evangelical churches actually experienced growth in this period.

[51] Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, 50-58.

This is especially significant in churches with mixed churchmanship, like the Church of England. Research conducted separately by Kelvin Randall and Gordon Kuhrt shows that, significantly, the proportional increase is even greater amongst ordinands – who generally come from the larger more successful churches - suggesting that in the future the Church of England's leaders will be largely evangelical.[52] This resulted in a lived experience for evangelicals during the period of being surrounded by great external pressure, in the form of surrounding secular culture, which was having a visibly corrosive effect on the church, yet their growing dominance within the churches produced a sense of strength even in the face of actual decline. Evangelical resistance to decline (and liberal susceptibility to it – declining by -11% from 1989 to 1998, and accelerating to -30% from 1998 to 2005) created a sense that evangelicals, by holding firm to their convictions, could overcome the world and inherit the church.[53]

The experience of secularisation, then, reinforced for evangelicals the sense that the secular world was corrosive of faith, and that liberals were more vulnerable to its effects than themselves (and should perhaps be avoided as a corrupting influence), but also that the world was drifting further away from the church, meaning that extraordinary efforts would be required to reach out to it with the gospel.[54]

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[52] Gordon Kuhrt, 'Evangelical Theological Colleges in the Church of England and Ordinand Numbers 1963-2003', *Anvil* 24/1, (2007), 41-45; Kevin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera*, 71.
[53] Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out*, 51; *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, 53.
[54] Hence the importance attached to initiatives like the Decade of Evangelism or the Alpha Course.

2.3.2 Modernity and Evangelicalism

Modernisation and secularisation are not simply theories concerned with decline in religious adherence and the outward signs of religiosity. They suggest that the conditions of modernity re-form people's lives and selves, creating far-reaching effects that even those who continue to hold to a religious faith are not immune to. Brown's argument outlined above is essentially that declining church attendance is, at root, linked to cultural changes in the social role and expectations of women, and their own self-perception, changes that other writers would not hesitate to ascribe to modernisation, even if he tends not to use the term. The withdrawal of religiously-legitimated social controls over women that led to a decline in church attendance is at root the same cultural change that led to calls for the ordination of women, something that many would see as having strengthened the churches. Modernity is therefore affecting the churches as well as the secular world in complex and not entirely negative ways. It is this more subtle influence of modernity upon evangelicalism that offers a partial explanation for the crisis of undifferentiation.

Hunter (drawing largely on the work of Berger) summarises the key cultural features commonly identified with modernity in his study of American evangelicalism. Although Hunter's work is focused on American evangelicals, the issues of cultural change he addresses affect all evangelicals in the West. He argues that modernity is marked by functional rationality (meaning that all spheres of human experience are expected to be engaged with on the same criteria of rationality, undermining religious belief), cultural pluralism (meaning that there is constant exposure to different world views, undermining social

support for belief), and structural pluralism (meaning that life is divided into public and private spheres – religion is privatised, becomes depoliticised and confined to a therapeutic role).[55] These factors in combination undermine the plausibility of religious world views. Hunter argues that evangelicalism (and every individual evangelical) must be understood as engaging in a cognitive bargaining process with modernity, choosing when and to what extent to resist or accommodate its demands in different situations. Although it is theoretically possible that religion could change modernity, it is the weaker partner, and therefore accommodation is a far easier and more likely outcome in any situation. Hunter traces several examples of ways that evangelicalism has already accommodated modernity: the codification of spirituality into methodologies and systematic theologies shows clear signs of functional rationality. The rise of civility in public address, so that beliefs most inimicable to modernity (sin, judgement, hell, exclusivity) are played down, demonstrates accommodation to cultural pluralism. Subjectivisation and a spirituality focused on therapeutic values show accommodation to structural pluralism.[56] His study of the coming generation of evangelicals makes it clear that these trends in evangelicalism are becoming even more pronounced. Hunter's view is that evangelicalism has made itself more marketable, but become domesticated and perhaps fatally weakened in the process.[57]

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[55] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 12-14; Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (London: Collins, 1980), 17-22; Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).
[56] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 73-99. Note that the Alpha Course is, in the English context, a clear example of all three phenomena.
[57] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 99-101.

There are key weaknesses in Hunter's understanding of evangelicalism when applied to English evangelicals (though this critique may also apply to his analysis of American evangelicals). He assumes that evangelicalism is almost an ideal type of orthodoxy – a tradition somehow hermetically sealed from the world around it. Despite acknowledging pluralism and change within evangelicalism, Hunter argues that significant challenge to evangelical orthodoxy has only arisen in the twentieth century.[58] Prior to this he believes that evangelicals had maintained strong symbolic boundaries against the secular world:

> These boundaries are regarded as timeless... They are not supposed to change... Thus the duty of the faithful is to ensure that the boundaries remain intact – pure and undefiled... Their stake in keeping the tradition sound and unqualified is high because their very identity and purpose as religious people (both collectively and individually) are bound to that mission... For the orthodox, the symbolic boundaries mean everything.[59]

As we have seen, Bebbington has documented extensively the way in which evangelicalism in Britain has demonstrated remarkable adaptability in the face of cultural change, with its symbolic boundaries changing constantly. Noll and Marsden have shown the same in a US context.[60] Hunter is in fact reflecting here the perspective of many exclusivists, who share this sense that the processes of late modernity are seeking to unravel the very identity of evangelicalism (and that these processes are embodied in particular groups in society, especially

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[58] Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 161-3.
[59] Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 158-9. Hunter regards homosexuality as a marker of a symbolic boundary.
[60] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Noll et al. (eds.), *Evangelicalism*.

those associated with the media and academia.)[61] This makes his work

insightful yet fundamentally mistaken about the relationship between

evangelicalism and modernity.

A significant critique of Hunter and Berger has been made by the

sociologist Christian Smith, whose research undermined many of Hunter's

conclusions.[62] Smith demonstrated that Hunter's fundamental assumption (that

modern pluralism would corrode evangelicalism) was mistaken. In fact it

showed evidence of thriving in its contemporary cultural environment.[63]

Hunter, drawing on Berger, worked from the assumption that modernity was

inherently corrosive to religion, and therefore any evidence of evangelical

health had to be explained away as resulting from existing in a sheltered

cultural enclave isolated from the full effects of modernity. Smith's research

demonstrated that evangelicals were not culturally isolated, but rather more

engaged with the modern world than the average American. He argued that the

empirical research suggested the secularisation thesis as advocated by Berger

and Hunter was mistaken – evangelicalism thrives precisely because it is

engaged in struggle with the modern world. Smith argues for a subcultural

identity theory of religious strength – for a religious movement to thrive in a

pluralistic environment it must be both culturally distinctive and socially

engaged.[64] On this basis, religious creativity and adaptation to changing cultural

circumstances can be understood as evidence of strength, not as

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[61] See here Iain H. Murray's use of Hunter in his *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 210.

[62] Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[63] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 20-66.

[64] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 89-90. His use of the work of Bourdieu in his understanding of the construction of social identity through conflict brings him close to Mimetic theory. 93-7.

accommodation to an opposed modernity in relation to which religion is doomed to decline.

The sociologist Joseph Tamney has made a similar study of American evangelicalism (though he prefers the term modernised traditionalism, seeking to create a category transferable to the study of other religions) and its resistance to modernity, coming to similar conclusions that likewise distance him from the work of Hunter. Where Hunter envisages evangelicalism losing a fight to maintain itself as an orthodoxy, gradually diluting its distinctiveness as it accommodates itself to modernity, Tamney suggests that the outcome of the bargaining process is less obviously one-way. He argues that religious resistance to the cultural changes of late modernity express a counter-trend within modernity itself. The fragmentation that characterises late modernity could dissolve society completely if taken to its logical conclusion, and religious resistance is one site of a countercultural move to find balance.[65]

The work of Smith and Tamney, which highlight the degree to which evangelicalism is a culturally creative and vibrant product of modernity rather than being considered as somehow outside of modernity and engaged in a loosing battle of resistance to it, reflects the historical understanding of evangelicalism that is presented in the work of Bebbington. I have already noted Bebbington's argument that evangelicalism has always exhibited a flexibility in regard to its engagement with wider culture and society. However, Bebbington's reading of evangelical origins and history has even more far-reaching

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[65] Joseph B. Tamney, *The Resilience of Conservative Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 248-52.

implications for an understanding of the relationship between evangelicalism and modernity. In Bebbington's understanding, evangelicalism in essence is what happened to Protestantism when it adapted to modernity. If modernity is corrosive of religion, then evangelicalism is religion adapted to a corrosive environment, and which has a track record of flourishing within it. This suggests that if evangelicalism is now suffering late-onset decline, it cannot be because of the effects of modernity per se, but the more specific social and cultural changes of late modernity that have occurred far more recently (as suggested by Brown's focus on the significance of social change since the 1960s).

Bebbington and Marsden divide modernity into three distinct cultural-historical periods or cultural moods, during each of which evangelicalism, far from remaining a static hermetically-sealed orthodoxy as Hunter describes, has undergone dramatic change in the manner that Smith outlines.[66] The Enlightenment, the first of these periods, corresponds to a period approximating (but not limited to) the eighteenth century, finds its expression in the writings of Locke and Hume, and is marked by cultural tendencies towards rationality, practicality (and corresponding scepticism towards metaphysics), use of the inductive method in all spheres of life, and optimism about the possibilities for human advancement. It found its clearest evangelical expression in Methodism.

Romanticism, the next period, corresponds to a period from around the 1820s to well into the twentieth century, finds its expression in the writings of

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[66] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

the Romantic poets and is marked by cultural tendencies towards an emphasis on the place of feeling and intuition in human perception, a seeking of meaning and significance in nature and in the past, and the ability to discern spiritual significance in the everyday world. It found its clearest evangelical expression in premillennialism, fundamentalism, and the Keswick movement.

Modernism, the final period discussed by Bebbington and Marsden, began to become dominant in popular culture at a period approximating to the 1960s, and is likely to continue being influential well into the twenty-first century. It found its expression in the writings of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot amongst others, and was marked by cultural tendencies towards a loss of faith in objective reality and the 'word', a fascination with the unconscious, a seeking of meaning and significance in the self, and a glorification of self-expression. Its stress on authenticity over faithfulness to inherited values and structures gave it a revolutionary edge. It found its greatest evangelical expression in the charismatic movement.[67]

Neither Bebbington nor Marsden (due to the periods they are analysing) use a term to designate the cultural-historical period that follows modernism, though the conventional term would be postmodernism.[68] I do not use the term here to designate a significant cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity, and am agnostic as to the existence of such a shift, as I have signalled by my use of the more modest 'late modernity' label to designate the contemporary period. Postmodernism is characterised by a thorough-going scepticism in regard to

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[67] Bebbingon clearly distinguishes this cultural 'modernism' from twentieth century theological 'modernism'.

[68] Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

objectivity, values and meaning, and an interest in meaning and identity as subjective constructions. A lack of faith in the original and fundamental is accompanied by a neo-romantic nostalgia for a more innocent past which can be ironically and knowingly revisited. At present, the postmodernist cultural mood has only found limited evangelical expression in so-called 'post-evangelicalism', and in some fresh expressions, emerging church, and alternative worship communities, though many progressive evangelicals show postmodern influences.[69] All are relatively isolated and it is unclear what form (or forms) evangelicalism will take when it adapts to this latest cultural mood in a more mainstream way, though it seems certain that it will adapt. Bebbington's work makes it clear that evangelicalism, far from engaging in a fight to the death with modernity, as Hunter suggests, is actually engaged in a far more creative struggle or dialogue with modernity in the manner discerned by Smith and Tamney.

2.3.3 Girard and Modernity

In recognising that the relationship between evangelicalism and modernity is considerably more complex than a community of the righteous standing firm against the seductions of the world, we come close to a key theme in the writing of Girard: the Christian impulse behind modernity and secularisation. Girard here picks up an idea first articulated by Weber, but

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[69] Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995); Graham Cray (ed.), *The Post-Evangelical Debate* (London: Triangle, 1997); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

which has been explored by an increasing number of thinkers since – that the modern Western world, which unquestionably had its origins in Christian values and Christian institutions, is still essentially Christian, even in its commitment to the secular and the process of secularisation.[70] Tamney, echoing Weber, argues that the Reformation, and the birth of Protestantism, is a key moment in the process of modernisation, and traces the Christian heritage of modern and even secular ideals such as anti-clericalism and a focus on the worldly.[71] He argues that the churches that have fared best within modernity are those that clearly express those ideals that are both modern and Christian: spiritual self-sufficiency, anti-elitism, and a rejection of theocracy. Girard similarly argues that the suspicion of religion, which in modern Western society is typically directed against Christianity, is ultimately derived from Christian revelation and its critique of the sacred with its roots in sacrifice. Secularists unknowingly critique Christianity by means of the tools and insights of Christian revelation.[72]

Girard's evaluation of modernity and modern Western culture is complex and never systematically set down, but its broad outlines can be discerned within a number of his writings, and they point to an understanding that goes deeper than Tamney or Bebbington, without contradicting the insights they offer. Girard notes the omnipresence of mimetic desire and lack of hierarchy in modernity, universalising internal mediation, which inevitably leads to a hugely

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[70] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 110, notably argued that Christianity contains the seeds of secularisation within itself, though he was keen to point out that this did not therefore mean that the modern world was a logical realization of Christianity.
[71] Tamney, *Resilience*, 41-3.
[72] Girard, *TH*, 226, 399; *IS*, 161-9; *EC*, 236, 257-8.

unstable society in which violence is never far away. Stability in the face of the threat of violence is created in modern Western society through individualism – the individual is expected to dominate their violent impulses and not give in to them, despite the fact that our society is based on mimetic rivalry understood positively as economic competition. This requires people to follow a Judeo-Christian moral code. The emergence of the individual as the key unit of society is therefore not an entirely negative development, whatever the negative aspects of individualism, but reflects Christian values. For Girard, the crowd is always the potential mob, and an individual by their very nature is one set apart from the crowd. Christianity is the religion of the individual, the victim or martyr.[73]

In Girard's understanding, modernity is genuinely heir to and expressive of prophetic truth – the biblical vision of harmony and peace between all. Enlightenment thought, and its values of equality, democracy, and revolution are in this sense Jewish rather than Greek in origin.[74] Even secularisation as a process is ultimately an expression of Christian religious impulses – it is the process by which the sacrificial order is being dismantled. It is Christianity that has broken the power of mankind's religions, in an act that truly began the modern era, and those same iconoclastic impulses are now being directed against institutional Christianity itself, which contains sacrificial elements.[75] Girard argues against seeing the withdrawal of the divine produced by secularisation (the withdrawal of the 'sacred canopy' in Berger's terms) as an

[73] Girard, *EC*, 239-245. He does however note that there are huge moral questions about the level of consumption modern Western society requires in order to maintain its stability. 79-80.
[74] Girard, *BE,* 45.
[75] Girard, *EC,* 257; *CTWF*, 23-4.

indication that society is more secular. Rather, he suggests that this experience

of the peril of the absence of God is an intrinsic part of the process of salvation:

the rejection of idolatry. Humanity must be weaned away from a god who is

proximate: 'A god who is appropriable is a god who destroys.'[76]

The Christian character of modernity expresses itself in other ways too.

Although modernity is a culture of heightened violence it is also a culture with a

heightened concern for victims, demonstrating the degree to which it has been

shaped by the gospels.[77] The mass media can act in a *katechetic* role, to hold off

mimetic violence. However, they can also act to induce conformity, making

people easier to sway by mimetic dynamics. They can sell the romantic truth of

the individual and their desire, blinding people to mimetic rivalry, or they can

lay the mechanisms of mimetic desire bare.[78] Modernity is profoundly

ambiguous in Girard's thought – still reliant on false transcendence, still

producing violence and injustice, but also acting to *katechetically* hold back

satanic violence, and shot through with the Christian revelation that is

ultimately acting to destabilise it altogether. Girard's sense of the apocalyptic

suffuses his understanding of modernity. Modernity is inherently unstable – and

this instability is directly due to the corrosive effects of Christian revelation on

the institutions of human society. (It is notable that Girard's understanding of

modernity reverses that of most theorists of secularisation, who would see

modernity as corrosive of Christianity, whereas he sees Christianity as corrosive

of modernity, indeed its corrosive power is so great that it dissolves even its

[76] Girard, *BE*, 122.
[77] Girard, *EC*, 254.
[78] Girard, *EC*, 249-50.

own cultural form.) In this unstable situation, the ultimate dissolution of society becomes possible, a dissolution that could result either in the devastation of contagious mimetic violence or the unity of the kingdom.[79] In such a situation we are unwise to seek prematurely to undermine the *katechon* that is all that is left to preserve us from satanic violence, so Girard counsels against the more revolutionary desire to do away with institutions based on violence, which derives from an over-optimistic assessment of human nature.[80]

Girard does not make specific reference to evangelicalism, but his understanding of the church in modernity may be assumed to apply to evangelicals as much as Catholics. Girard is clear that historically Christianity itself has failed to hold back violence, and in many cases has completely given way to it. Historical Christianity is both sacrificial (and complicit with the sacrificial systems) and contains within itself an anti-sacrificial message. When it has failed, in various historical persecutions throughout its life, it has done so largely because like all human institutions it has tended to be conservative and resort to violence to protect its power.[81] Even in its failure, the church has remained a disruptive influence in society, occasionally revealing the kingdom despite itself.[82]

In a Girardian understanding, the conflict between Christianity and modernity is laced with ambiguity. In some senses this conflict is best understood, as Tamney suggests, as a dialogue between truths that are both Christian and modern. To see the history of Christianity in modernity as a

[79] Girard, *CTWF*, 44.
[80] Girard, *CTWF*, 31&2.
[81] Girard, *TS*, 204; *TH*, 224-5; *EC*, 258-262; *BE,* 103-5, 196.
[82] Girard *EC*, 262; *BE,* 141.

history of persecution in defence of the gospel is to confuse the deep meaning of the gospel with the history of Christianity 'which is fundamentally the slow process of coping with the heritage of the sacred mentality and with our mimetic behaviour.'[83] However, this is only part of the story, because Girard insists that a sense of the apocalyptic be maintained. There is a real conflict, and there is a real choice to be made, between Christ and Satan, between reconciliation and reciprocity, but the lines of this conflict run through both church and world, not between them. In examining evangelicalism in late modernity, then, I will be mindful of the degree to which these two are intimately inter-connected, more dialogue partners than rivals. Both modernity and evangelicalism show signs of compromise with violence and with satanic forces, and both likewise contain an inheritance of the gospel, with apparently secular Western culture sometimes expressing aspects of the gospel that evangelicalism may not currently be emphasising (just as evangelicalism at times expresses modern truths that modernity has not fully articulated). In adopting this perspective, I do not seek to imply that modernity is divinely inspired, a source of revelation, or that it should be a source of authority to evangelicals, but simply that modernity (which has itself been profoundly shaped by biblical values) may at times prompt evangelicals to rediscover biblical truths that they had neglected. Indeed, the nature of the gospel is a central part of the dialogue between evangelicalism and modernity – with periods of cultural change essentially prompting evangelicalism to rediscover facets of the gospel that had not been emphasised in a previous cultural mood. Most significantly, as we shall see, in periods of cultural change different

[83] Girard, *EC*, 259.

evangelical traditions may make different theological judgements about the emerging cultural mood, some seeing aspects of it as emphasising a gospel truth to be embraced and proclaimed, others seeing the same phenomena as representing sacrificial structures seeking to enslave humanity. Sometimes both are true.

2.3.4 – Modernity - Conclusions

The underlying causes of the crisis of undifferentiation in which evangelicalism finds itself within the period 1960-2010 lie within the dialogue between modernity and evangelicalism. Modernity, which is a culture shaped by and expressive of Christian values, has formed and been formed by Protestantism (and evangelicalism is perhaps best understood as modernised Protestantism) throughout its history. Late modernity has been characterised by increasing secularisation (which has had a dramatic effect on evangelical self-perception), and by the various cultural changes identified by Berger. These cultural changes are reflected in evangelicalism, as it expresses itself in new forms to reflect the new cultural mood, just as it has in earlier periods of cultural change. Within our period, the division between exclusivists and progressives, which is the centre of the crisis of undifferentiation, can be understood as a conflict between different forms of modernist evangelicalism. Each expresses a different theological evaluation of the current cultural mood, perceiving gospel truth and sacrificial structures in different places. This understanding avoids two key errors: that progressives are being formed by modernity and exclusivists are not (a characterisation that both exclusivists and

progressives tend to foster), and that modernity itself is in some sense inimical to evangelicalism.

2.4 English Evangelicalism in Late Modernity

I have examined the crisis of undifferentiation through the contested meaning of evangelicalism in the period and through reflecting on the deeper cultural changes that have prompted the crisis. I now turn to examine the history of English evangelicalism from 1960-2010. This will also function to set a context for my analysis of popular evangelical texts of the period in the next chapter.

2.4.1 Pre-history – The Ancestral Battle Against Liberalism

Warner describes English evangelicalism of the 1960s as dominated by a biblicist-crucicentric conservative evangelical hegemony. This unity was the result of a bitter internal conflict in English evangelicalism waged between the ultimately victorious conservatives and the liberals, who eventually lost their evangelical identity. This conflict profoundly shaped the identity of English evangelicalism, which was formed by those who had stood firm against liberals within the fold.[84] Subsequent studies, like that of Martin Wellings, suggest that the differences between the two (both Romantic forms of evangelicalism) may

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[84] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 181-228; *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 139-200; Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwminism, and Theological Liberalism 1890-1930* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

not have been great, however, for our purposes this is not as relevant as the evangelical folk memory that the conflict created.

The conflict between the two positions played out over several decades, bringing a collective memory of hurt and betrayal embodied in institutions, which were constituted in such a way as to ensure that the memory of the split endured. Most significant of these was the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU), which had split from the more liberal Student Christian Movement (SCM) in 1910 and in 1928 became part of the Inter Varsity Fellowship (IVF) (forerunner of the contemporary Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF)), formed as an umbrella group for university Christian Unions across the country.[85] As a direct legacy of this conflict, IVF/UCCF focuses allegiance around a narrow doctrinal basis, and provides students with a 'sound' source of theology through its publishing house Inter Varsity Press (IVP). This structure strongly communicates the need to beware of the theological credentials of other Christians, even those claiming to be evangelical. The vast majority of evangelical leaders in the period 1960-2010 would have been part of an IVF/UCCF affiliated CU in their formative years, with many having served on their executive committees. [86]

By the end of the Second World War, with the liberal evangelicals effectively ceasing to exist, the victorious conservatives were a small and embattled group, inward-looking, often anti-intellectual, and withdrawn from

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[85] Oliver Barclay, *Whatever Happened to the Jesus Lane Lot?* (Leicester: IVP, 1977), 33-60; Pete Lowman, *The Day of his Power* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 33-54; Tissington Tatlaw, *The Story of the Student Christian Movement* (London: SCM, 1933), 87-91.
[86] N.T. Wright identifies this history as having a strong influence over evangelical self-understandings in his 1980 survey (commissioned by the CEEC). J.I. Packer and N.T. Wright, *Anglican Evangelical Identity: Yesterday and Today* (London: Latimer Trust, 2008), 85.

wider social concerns through what Bebbington calls 'the Great Reversal' – the process whereby historical evangelical concern for social justice became abandoned because it was identified with liberals.[87] The movement was dominated by a spirituality nurtured by the Keswick holiness movement. Many even viewed the first of Billy Graham's Mission England campaigns in 1954 (initially supported only by the Evangelical Alliance (EA)) with suspicion, though the evident success of the mission was to attract evangelical support.[88]

2.4.2 Post-War Growth

The next decades were to see a dramatic increase in the numbers and influence of the conservative evangelicals.[89] This was largely due to an investment in youth and university ministry, including the work of IVF and IVP. However, as McGrath writes, 'if the remarkable growth of English evangelicalism can be attributed to any one person, it is to Stott.'[90] John Stott was a key figure in the expansion of evangelicalism, becoming one of the most influential leaders in the post-war movement, with a focus on evangelism and an outward-looking agenda.[91] The young J.I. Packer, a gifted evangelical academic with an enthusiasm for Puritanism, also invigorated the growing

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[87] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 214-7; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1983* (London: Collins, 1986), Randle Manwaring, *From Controversy to Co-existence: Evangelicals in the Church of England 1914-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17-56.

[88] The EA is a parachurch umbrella organisation that speaks for evangelicals of all denominations. See Randal and Hilborn *One Body in Christ*. John Pollock, *Billy Graham: The authorised biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 152-181; Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 30, argues that Graham's ecumenism had a profoundly liberalising effect on post-war conservative evangelicalism.

[89] Manwaring, *Controversy to Co-existence*, 57-84; Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, 453-8; Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 59-60.

[90] McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 35.

[91] Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Leicester: IVP, 1999); *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001).

movement.[92] Together with the famous preacher Martin Lloyd Jones he encouraged a Calvinist trend in theology through publishing and conferences.

2.4.3 Keele - The Conservative Evangelical Hegemony Broadens and Fragments

The conservative evangelical hegemony, with its roots in the universities and public schools, was unprepared for the new cultural mood that swept through the country in the 1960s. Modernism, with its focus on the individual, its optimistic orientation towards the future, its challenge to establishment and its finding of authenticity and validity in self-expression rather than any appeal to the past, was a huge challenge to the mainstream Romantic culture of society. The 1960s were to see an explosion of permissiveness and rejection of institutions that were to have a catastrophic effect on church allegiance. In addition, liberal theology began to reach a readership it had never had before, with Anglican Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God* in 1963 becoming particularly well known.[93] The conservative evangelicals instinctively resisted this new cultural mood. In Girard's terms, they were only able to perceive the sacrificial structures within this new expression of modernity, and could not see the gospel truths within it. The permissiveness, disregard for authority, and determination to build a better future by their own lights that characterised modernism was seen as egotistical and sinful, a judgement conservative evangelicals extended to the new wave of liberal theology. In 1971 evangelicals organised the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFL), beacons were lit, a 'Light up

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[92] Alister McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Biography of James I. Packer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 32, 49-58.
[93] John A..T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963); John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1966).

the Fire' single was released, and 60,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square to call for an end to moral pollution in British society.[94]

Despite this explicitly-stated resistance to the cultural mood, evangelicalism was also being shaped by modernism in this period. The modernist sense of an optimistic willingness to engage with wider society and set aside the shibboleths of the past had far-reaching effects. A new generation of evangelical theologians showed a desire to engage with wider non-evangelical biblical scholarship.[95] Others, notably Packer, began to make moves towards ecumenical engagement. A more active involvement with social action and social ethics was signalled with the establishment of The Evangelical Alliance Relief (TEAR) Fund in 1968 and Stott's London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in 1975. Finally, renewed evangelical engagement with the arts and culture was demonstrated in the launch of the Christian arts festival Greenbelt in 1974, and the magazine *Third Way* in 1977.

These modernist movements within evangelicalism were to find wider expression in the Keele National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC) in 1967. Although Keele was an Anglican evangelical conference, it was to have a decisive impact on all English evangelicals, expressing an attractive vision of evangelicalism that cautiously accepted some aspects of modernism.[96] Anglican evangelicals had been becoming bolder and more organised during the 1960s,

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[94] Francesca Carnivale and Julie-Marie Strange, (eds.), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Longman, 2nd ed., 2007), 301-6. NFL continued to campaign until 1983 when it reformed itself as Christian Action Research and Education (CARE).
[95] As McGrath notes, however, most moved away from an explicit evangelicalism as they became academically credible. Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: IVP Apollos, 1996).
[96] Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, 552-4, 615-8; Manwaring, *Controversy to Co-existence*, 174-190; Welsby, *History of the Church of England*, 214-5.

and the 1967 NEAC conference in Keele was the culmination of years of smaller

gatherings.[97] Keele resolved that ecumenical engagement and social

engagement were not antithetical to the cause of the gospel, undoing the Great

Reversal and marking a significant shift in emphasis for evangelicalism

worldwide. At Keele Anglican evangelicals repented of narrow partisanship and

obstructionism and resolved that all those who acknowledged Christ as Lord

should be treated as Christians. They committed themselves to fully engaging

with the Church of England, working together with non-evangelicals in the

cause of the gospel.[98] Despite the theologian Martyn Percy's assertion that Keele

was a moment of conservative retrenchment, Alister McGrath and others are

clear that in fact Keele was a triumph for a new broader evangelicalism, and

symbolised the end of conservative evangelical separatism as a serious force in

the Church of England.[99]

The turn away from separatism was demonstrated most dramatically in

John Stott's public rejection of what appeared to be a call from the

Congregationalist Martyn Lloyd-Jones for evangelicals to leave their

denominations at the National Assembley of Evangelicals in 1966.[100] It led to

surprising new ecumenical developments, with Anglican evangelicals forming

strategic alliances with anglo-catholics against liberals (a pattern in Anglican

church politics that would continue into the future). This strategy was

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[97] Many of the emphases of Keele were brought to worldwide evangelicalism through the First International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne in 1974, the covenant of which was drafted by Stott, the main architect of Keele. McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 40.

[98] Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 43; King, *The Evangelicals*, 108.

[99] Martyn Percy, *Engaging with Contemporary Culture: Christianity, Culture, and the Concrete Church* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 184; McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 39.

[100] John Brencher, *Martyn Lloyd-Jones 1899-1981 and Twentieth Century Evangelicalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 116-141.

expressed in the publication of *Growing into Union* in 1970, where J.I. Packer

and fellow Anglican evangelical (and later bishop) Colin Buchanan, together

with two prominent anglo-catholics, pledged themselves to work together.[101]

The openness of Keele ultimately brought evangelical unity under

considerable strain. Packer, who in his ecumenism was often surprisingly

liberal, was a signatory to the controversial Church of England report *Christian

Believing*, which allowed for the acceptance of massively divergent views on

matters of faith.[102] He argued that liberal clergy could be extended an 'agnostic

judgement of charity'.[103] Other evangelicals were showing rising concern about

liberals.[104] At Nottingham in 1977 Buchanan noted that the big question mark

over whether there should be a 1977 NEAC following Keele in 1967 had been

whether there was an identifiable 'we' to have it.[105] Keele, in opening the way

for a broader evangelicalism, had sown the seeds for the destruction of the

conservative evangelical hegemony.[106] Warner's analysis of shifting emphases

in doctrinal bases over the second half of the twentieth century demonstrates

the degree of unacknowledged pluralism within conservative evangelicalism at

[101] Colin Buchanan, Graham Leonard, E.L. Mascall and J.I. Packer, *Growing into Union: Proposals for Forming a United Church in England* (London: SPCK, 1970). Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 94, notes that Packer had himself argued against catholic practices as incompatible with the gospel in 1961.
[102] Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Christian Believing* (London: SPCK, 1986).
[103] J.I. Packer, *A Kind of Noah's Ark? The Anglican commitment to comprehensiveness* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1981), 35.
[104] Church of England Evangelical Council, *Truth, error and discipline in the Church of England* (London: Grove books, 1978).
[105] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 269.
[106] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 267-70, is aware of the strains, but downplays them, taking his account only to the mid-1980s.

this point.[107] It was becoming harder to secure agreement on doctrine amongst an increasingly diverse party.

2.4.4 The Charismatics – Modernist Evangelicalism

The sudden emergence of the charismatic movement was to strain the bounds of evangelical diversity still further. If Keele's ambiguous progressivism represented a rather reserved and mixed acceptance of modernism, the charismatic movement that emerged in the 1960s was a full-blooded expression of it. It spread rapidly, seeming to instinctively express the emerging new counter-cultural spirit of the times in a way that established evangelicals found increasingly threatening. It was characterised by a desire to be authentic to the self, and an elevation of insight and experience over reason and established structures.[108] Initially the charismatics were marginalised, with John Stott publicly disavowing the movement at the Islington Clerical Conference in 1964.[109] As the conservative evangelical hegemony began to fracture, however, the charismatics began slowly to be welcomed into the fold by an evangelical mainstream that was becoming increasingly broad. The publication in 1977 of *Gospel and Spirit*, a series of discussions between charismatics and non-charismatics, marked the acceptance of renewal by Anglican evangelicals.[110] It was the fact that the younger Keele evangelicals increasingly driving the agenda

[107] Warner, *Reinventing*, 158-233.

[108] Manwaring, *From Controversy to Co-existence*, 167-9; Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, 557-60; Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2nd ed., 1997); General Synod of the Church of England, *The Charismatic Movement in the Church of England* (London: CIO Publishing, 1981).

[109] The Islington Clerical Conferences were conferences for evangelical Anglican clergy, and rather broader in nature than the later and more conservative National Evangelical Anglican Conferences, the first of which Stott was instrumental in holding at Keele in 1967. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 247.

[110] John Goldingay, *Gospel and Spirit* (London: Fountain Trust and CEEC, 1977).

(like Colin Buchanan) shared a common modernist culture with the charismatics that made their eventual acceptance so comparatively painless.

Warner has demonstrated how, far from causing division within English evangelicalism, the charismatic movement became the means to hold it together. Charismatic entrepreneurialism offered a new means for English evangelicalism to find unity, away from divisive questions of doctrine. Key to this unifying role were the phenomenally successful charismatic conferences like the EA-sponsored Spring Harvest, whose songbook and style of worship was to displace more traditional evangelical hymnody in many churches.[111] English evangelicalism became charismaticised, and in the process became dominated by a new breed of entrepreneurial evangelicals: consciously engaged in contemporary culture, well-packaged and publicised, part of a consumerist trend, with a minimalist approach to doctrine, stressing instead a unity in pragmatic activism, in evangelism, resourcing the churches, and influencing wider society.[112]

In the 1980s, the entrepreneurial pan-evangelicalism fostered by Spring Harvest and the EA appeared to show a phenomenal success, resisting decline (though as Warner has shown, the signs of evangelical strength in EA membership, Spring Harvest attendance and Alpha are best accounted for as shifts in the internal market rather than net growth, and mask a late-onset

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[111] Warner, *Reinventing*, 72.
[112] This shift corresponds to that which Wells identifies as being the move from a confessional to a trans-confessional identity. Wells 'On being Evangelical' in Noll et al. (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 389-415. On consumerism see Pete Ward, *Selling Worship* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2005).

decline).[113] There were other signs of evangelical strength. Between 1985 and

1986 evangelical churches led the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, a massive

pressure group organised to prevent the scrapping of the Sunday Trading Laws.

They succeeded in provoking a back-bench rebellion requiring the bill to be

amended. This was the first time Margaret Thatcher's government was defeated

on primary legislation, and the last time that the church influenced the statute

book by rejecting a change to the law on specifically Christian grounds.

Charismatic churches also started the March for Jesus initiative, beginning in

1988, where Christians would engage in public marches in towns and cities,

singing choruses and praying as they went. The entrepreneurials represented a

reactionary assertiveness against 1960s libertarian secularity combined with a

revolutionary accommodation of evangelicalism to contemporary consumerist

culture, producing a plethora of products and brand names.[114] They both

challenged and embodied the modernist cultural mood.

2.4.5 The Emergence of Exclusivists and Progressives in the Wake of Entrepreneurial Decline

The success of the new entrepreneurial centre of English evangelicalism

masked the widening fissure between progressives and exclusivists, each set on

a different trajectory by Keele. Warner identifies the way in which exclusivists

began tightening up doctrinal bases with trenchant statements of inerrancy and

penal substitution following the openness of the 1970s.[115] Discomforted by the

liberal and charismatic influences on mainstream evangelicalism, a group of

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[113] Warner, *Reinventing*, 87-145.
[114] Richard Bartholomew, 'Publishing, celebrity, and the globalisation of Conservative
Protestantism', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 21:1, (London: Routledge, 2006).
[115] Warner, *Reinventing*, 192-206.

proto-exclusivists under Dick Lucas began consciously mobilising themselves in

the 1980s, through groups such as the Proclamation Trust and the Evangelical

Ministry Assembly. These groups established strong links with the conservative

diocese of Sydney in Australia.[116] The vote to ordain women in the Church of

England in 1992 prompted the formation of the Anglican group Reform by those

exclusivists who felt betrayed by their church and yet held out the possibility of

transforming the church from within.[117] Martyn Percy's occasionally insightful

analysis of Reform is correct in asserting that Reform is not a separatist

grouping (they see themselves as convinced Anglicans), but one committed to

the transformation of the church.[118] However, Percy goes astray in asserting

that Reform is a Puritan 'Roundhead' group aligned against a 'Cavalier' liberal

catholicism.[119] In fact, the cordial relationship between Reform and Forward in

Faith (a traditionalist anglo-catholic network formed at the same time as

Reform in response to the ordination of women) suggests a striking lack of

antipathy towards catholicism in a traditionally-minded evangelical group.[120]

Percy acknowledges this unprecedented degree of cooperation but without

giving it due weight, seeming determined to describe Reform as advocating a

religion of rationalist certainty and therefore naturally opposed to anglo-

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[116] John Richardson 'Anglican Evangelicalism and Evangelical Anglicanism 1945-2011' [July 2011], The Ugley Vicar blog, http://ugleyvicar.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/eajcc-first-address.html (10th July 2012).
[117] David Holloway, 'The background to, and the need for, Reform', Reform Website.
[118] Percy, *Engaging*, 195-6.
[119] Percy, *Engaging*, 183, 200-1. Reform is aligned against liberalism in all its forms rather than specifically in its catholic one.
[120] Rod Thomas, chair of the Reform council is in fact an observer on the Forward in Faith council. 'The Forward in Faith UK website', http://www.forwardinfaith.com/about/uk_council.html (April 20, 2010). The Reform website.

catholic ambiguity.[121] Reform's (limited) Puritanism is best understood as a conscious re-alignment with pre-Keele evangelicalism, with its interest in Puritanism and uncertainties about mixed denominations.[122]

Women's ordained ministry divided Anglican evangelicals. Some (Warner's progressives) were openly supportive, particularly following the limited but public support John Stott had given to the move.[123] For progressives, the inheritors of Keele's openness, the ordination of women was a valid re-interpretation of scripture, correcting poor hermeneutics and allowing women to follow their callings. Christina Rees, a prominent lay Anglican evangelical, was a key figure in the campaign for women's ordination, and later became chair of the Anglican pressure group Women And The Church (WATCH). Women's ministry had long been accepted amongst many other evangelical groupings and in many of the churches of the charismatic movement (albeit often as part of a couple), and there had been women speakers on the platform at Spring Harvest since its beginnings.[124] The pan-evangelicalism fostered by the entrepreneurials had therefore done much to normalise women's ministry amongst Anglican evangelicals. However, for the exclusivists, the more progressive evangelicals who supported the ordination of women were traitors

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[121] Percy's determination to characterise Reform as implacably opposed to Catholicism appears to owe more to his need to identify ambiguity and doubt with catholicism. In the process he misinterprets catholicism too. Forward in Faith (unlike Reform) is focused entirely around the need to avoid doubt. 'The Forward in Faith UK Agreed Statement on Communion' [1994], 3, http://www.forwardinfaith.com/about/uk_com_statement.html (March 10, 2010).

[122] They follow Packer more closely than any Puritan divines, especially in their willingness to cooperate with anglo-catholics.

[123] John Stott, *Our Social and Sexual Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 3rd ed.,1999), 1st ed, 1984.

[124] William K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain: New Ways of Being Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007) 330-1.

within their ranks, perhaps not true evangelicals at all. A year after the vote,

Gerald Bray, in an editorial in *The Churchman*, was to write:

> Convinced evangelicals are now derided as 'narrow' by those who
> are more 'open', and are being consistently marginalized within their
> own constituency... It is worth reflecting that if Jesus had been an
> 'open evangelical' there would not be a Church at all today.[125]

From the 1990s, as Warner has demonstrated, although the

entrepreneurial cautiously-open conservatives continued to proclaim the myth

of evangelical success, it had begun to ring false.[126] Evangelicalism was

experiencing late onset decline. Alpha was not bringing in waves of new

converts. Attendance at Spring Harvest and EA membership had plateaued in

the 1990s. The evangelical unity created by the entrepreneurials began to

disappear. Exclusivists in particular began to organise themselves to stand

against liberalism in church and society, often creating their own alternative

versions of the entepreneurial's products, effectively removing themselves from

the consumerist unity they created.[127]

2.4.6 Progressives and Exclusivists in Conflict over Homosexuality

In 2002, the evangelical George Carey stepped down as Archbishop of

Canterbury, and was replaced by Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Wales,

and a theologian of liberal catholic convictions who had admitted to knowingly

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[125] Gerald Bray, 'Editorial', *The Churchman*, 107 no 4 (1993). This is a clear example in Girardian terms of the aggressor always having been already attacked – there were no open evangelical groupings on the scale of Reform within the Church of England at this time, yet Bray clearly feels as an exclusivist that he and his well-organised network are a marginalised minority who must act to defend themselves.

[126] Warner, *Reinventing*, 138-45.

[127] Examples would include Christianity Explored as an alternative to Alpha, and New Word Alive as an alternative to Spring Harvest.

ordaining a practicing homosexual.[128] Exclusivist evangelicals campaigned

actively against him.[129] Progressives welcomed the appointment. The CEEC

condemned the choice of Williams as Archbishop unanimously, disregarding the

objections of Christina Rees, who was a long-standing member, prompting her

resignation from that body.[130] Exclusivist opposition to the appointment

ultimately expressed itself in the CEEC's All Souls Day Statement of 2002, which

declared that the biblical norms of sexuality and sexual relationships are first-

order issues and that those leaders not holding to them would not be

supported.[131] The decision to draw battle lines on the issue of homosexuality

led to some tactical redefinition of the exclusivist position in the interests of

forming a broad coalition. In 2005 Wallace Benn, Bishop of Lewes, who was a

Council member of Reform and Steering Committee member of Anglican

Mainstream, released a paper entitled 'Faith and Order', arguing that although

homosexuality was a communion-splitting issue, women's ordination was

not.[132] In doing so, he was signalling Reform's willingness to be flexible even on

the issue that had prompted its formation (the ordination of women) in order to

build broad support against the progressives.

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[128] Bates, *Church at War*, 144-8.
[129] Melvin Tinker, 'Rowan Williams: A Godly Concern',
http://www.reform.org.uk/pages/bb/godlyconcern.php, (November 3, 2009); Gary Williams,
The Theology of Rowan Williams: An Outline, Critique and Consideration of its Consequences
(London: Latimer Trust, 2003).
[130] Bates, *Church at War*, 149; Rachel Harden, 'Bishops pledge support as Williams-bashing
grows', CT [October 18, 2002], http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=19792&print=1
(January 19, 2011).
[131] Church of England Evangelical Council, 'The All Souls' day Statement: Leadership in society
today' [All Souls Day 2002] http://ceec.info/library/documents/All%20Souls%20Statement.pdf
(October 12, 2009), the signatories were all to be key figures in Anglican Mainstream.
[132] Wallace Benn, 'Faith and Order' [June, 2005]
http://ceec.info/library/documents/Faith%20%20and%20Order%20-
%20Wallace%20Benn.pdf (October 13, 2009).

Homosexuality as an issue had already become hugely symbolic of the struggle between liberals (generally Western, and with their greatest strength in the US) and conservatives (generally Southern, but with their organisational and financial strength in the exclusivist evangelicals of the US, UK, and Australia) within the Anglican Communion.[133] The Church of England was caught in the middle of the dispute, its own official position being conservative, yet containing within itself a sizeable group of those (like Rowan Williams) with liberal convictions on the issue. The Jeffrey John affair of 2003 occurred alongside two other significant events elsewhere in the Communion that were to push it to breaking point over the issue: the carrying-out of same-sex blessing services in Canada immediately following an agreement amongst the Primates that none would occur, and the consecration of Gene Robinson, an openly gay man in a long-term relationship, as Bishop of New Hampshire in the US. This wider crisis in the Communion became a significant factor in the English context. Anglican Mainstream, formed in the aftermath of the Jeffrey John Affair, increasingly had an international focus and a broader agenda: creating the basis for a future incarnation of Anglicanism worldwide that would be faithful to their understanding of orthodoxy.[134]

The international context radicalised English exclusivists still further, as they saw themselves as standing in solidarity with the conservatives in the US, who in some cases were facing legal action against them by an avowedly liberal

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[133] Philip Groves, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* (London: SPCK, 2008).
[134] By 2006 Anglican Mainstream brought together conservative groups in England, Canada, the US and SA. 'The Anglican Mainstream website', http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/?page_id=216 (October 6, 2009).

church hierarchy.[135] Partly due to this US influence and partly due to the public

dissent from other Anglican evangelicals, the rhetoric of being an Anglican

Mainstream, a majority position of the Church of England ignored by the liberal

media and church hierarchy, was becoming less common. Exclusivist

evangelicals now increasingly characterised themselves as representing an

embattled minority inhabiting 'the diminishing space the orthodox are given by

the dominant liberal culture in church and society.'[136] In Girardian terms, the

Jeffrey John scandal was being opportunistically swallowed up by the larger

scandal within the Communion.

By contrast, progressives were becoming increasingly broad. When

Inclusive Church formed in 2003 in the aftermath of the Jeffrey John affair, its

affirmation of inclusivity was sufficiently broad (referencing homosexual

'orientation' rather than 'practice', and affirming obedience to scripture) that

many evangelicals could and did sign. Over time it became increasingly liberal in

its expressed positions.[137] However, it continued to have evangelicals (like

Christina Rees – who is on its Committee representing WATCH) actively

involved in it. Progressives were increasingly willing to directly challenge

exclusivist presumption in stating 'orthodoxy', as was signalled by the formation

of the pro-gay Accepting Evangelicals group in 2004 (it contained both

evangelicals who supported same-sex relationships and those who did not).[138]

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[135] Bates, *Church at War*, 199.
[136] Chris Sugden, 'The Evangelical debate' [November 23, 2008], Religious Intelligence, http://www.religiousintelligence.com/news/?NewsID=3365 (November 3, 2009).
[137] Inclusive Church website, http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/About-Us-b079c3d (November 3, 2009).
[138] Accepting Evangelicals website, http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/Index.htm (October 6, 2009). The majority of its members are Church of England and in the UK.

Towards the end of our period, the division hardened still further within the Church of England. Disenchanted with the existing structures of the Anglican Communion, exclusivists began to establish their own alternative vision for the future, provocatively staging the high-profile Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem a matter of days before Lambeth 2008 (boycotted by some exclusivist bishops, including the high profile Michael Nazir-Ali). The conference concluded with the release of the Jerusalem Declaration, a trenchant statement of the Conference's need to distance itself from the rest of the Anglican Communion by establishing a separate Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans overseen by a Primate's Council.[139] The progressive evangelical bishop N.T. Wright publicly attacked the Declaration, which stopped just short of declaring a schism within the Anglican Communion.[140]

The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FOCA) was launched in London in 2009 inviting dioceses, parishes and individuals to publicly affiliate to it, suggesting that it saw itself as a sort of communion of the faithful within the wider Anglican Communion. This move by exclusivists created bitter divisions within English evangelicalism, something publicly exposed at NEAC 5 in 2008. A mishandled proposal from Richard Turnbull, principal of Wycliffe Hall theological college and then CEEC chair, that the conference should offer unequivocal support for the Jerusalem Statement, prompted an acrimonious

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[139] The GAFCON website,
http://www.gafcon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=79&Itemid=29
(November 3, 2009).
[140] BBC News, 'Bishop attacks anti-gay movement' [July 3, 2008],
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7487805.stm (November 3, 2009). Notably, despite his alignment with progressives in regard to scripture, Wright holds to the consensus position on homosexuality.

discussion and a majority vote to instead move to other business.[141] Although

CEEC would later adopt the motion itself, NEAC did not, and the episode led to

Turnbull's resignation as chair of CEEC.[142]

I have dwelt on events since 2002 to demonstrate the degree of

mimeticism now apparent. Denunciation mirrors denunciation, political groups

emerge to mirror each other, the conflict escalates, and scandal envelops

scapegoats like Jeffrey John or Richard Turnbull, who whatever their individual

involvement in the crisis are made to carry the burden of guilt for all.[143] Just as

the crisis was broader than the issue of homosexuality, so the scapegoats were

sometimes ones who seemingly had nothing to do with that debate. The Baptist

Minister Steve Chalke was probably one of the most well-known progressive

evangelicals in the country, having appeared regularly on television, published a

string of popular books, and was a regular speaker at Spring Harvest. In 2004,

he published *The Lost Message of Jesus* together with his collaborator Alan

Mann.[144] In the book, he was understood to reject penal substitution, which was

increasingly becoming a touchstone of orthodoxy for exclusivists, as Warner's

analysis of doctrinal bases demonstrates.[145]

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[141] Pat Ashworth, 'NEAC5 closes in acrimony after claims of "set-up"', CT [November 21, 2008], http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=66485 (October 6, 2009).
[142] Pat Ashworth, 'Turnbull resigns from CEEC', Church Times, [December 12, 2008], http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=67486 (March 17, 2010).
[143] Warner describes such political groups as part of a 'post-conservative emergence'. Warner, *Reinventing*, 207-33.
[144] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
[145] As I show in chapter 6 there is some disagreement as to whether this was Chalke's intent, but certainly he was understood by exclusivists as having done so.

The EA (with whom Chalke was closely identified) was sufficiently concerned to convene a symposium on the atonement.[146] Chalke drew widespread condemnation from exclusivists worldwide, and IVP published a book on the atonement specifically to counter his arguments.[147] In 2007, UCCF ceased its partnership in the student-focused Word Alive track within Spring Harvest over the conference's continued support for Chalke.[148] EA's refusal to make Chalke into a scapegoat rescued him, but at the cost of further visible division within English evangelicalism.

2.5 Conclusion

I have examined the crisis of undifferentiation within English evangelicalism through conflicts over evangelical identity, different responses to cultural change, and the history of the period 1960-2010. All demonstrate the extent to which this crisis came to overwhelm English evangelicals within the period. Cultural changes produced transformations in evangelicalism even as it attempted to resist the new cultural mood. This created new forms of evangelicalism, prompting a crisis in evangelical identity. As progressives and exclusivists diverged, they were temporarily held together by the charismatic entrepreneurials. This unity was dependent on the myth of evangelical success, which began to fade towards the end of the period. Homosexuality (along with certain doctrinal identity markers, like penal substitutionary atonement) became a focal point within the crisis of undifferentiation, and the scandal

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[146] David Hilborn, Justin Thacker, and Derek Tidball (eds.), *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).
[147] Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Leiester: IVP, 2007).
[148] Pat Ashworth, 'Atonement Row gets personal as Evangelical partnership splits', *CT* (April 27, 2007).

created around this issue in turn drew English evangelicals into the larger

scandal centred around homosexuality that was consuming the worldwide

Anglican Communion. A certain position on homosexuality became a shibboleth

of authentic evangelical (and Christian) identity for some evangelicals over the

period 1960-2010. I turn now to examine evangelical responses to

homosexuality over this period in more detail.

Chapter 3

The History of the Evangelical Consensus Position on

Homosexuality -

A Study of Popular English Evangelical Texts 1960-2010

> ...they [Christians] often adopt a siege mentality and a suspicion of conspiracy, which, ironically, creates the mirror image of what they abhor in the homosexual community.
>
> Thomas E. Schmidt[1]

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2 I argued that the period 1960-2010 was a time of growing division within English evangelicalism, creating a crisis of undifferentiation, in which evangelical identity was increasingly contested. The crisis expressed itself in responses to the issue of homosexuality, which prior to 1950 had been largely neglected by evangelicals.[2] By 1993, however it was being used in the Reform Covenant as a shibboleth of genuine evangelical and Christian identity, which justified giving such prominence to understandings of sexual sin on the basis that sexual sin was where the Bible's authority is most frequently denied.[3]

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[1] Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), 15.

[2] D.L. Hilliard 'Homosexuality', 546-55 in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *Cambridge History of Christianity IX: World Christianities c 1914-c2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[3] Reform Covenant, Clause 2.4, http://reform.org.uk/about/reform-covenant (March 18, 2011); Mark Burkill, 'The What and Why of the Reform Covenant' [1998], http://reform.org.uk/resources/media-downloads/src/publication/25/title/the-what-and-why-of-the-reform-covenant-mark-burkill-1998 (March 18, 2011).

In 2008, clause 8 of the Jerusalem Declaration outlined a position on sexual ethics clearly framed to set out sexual abstinence or heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable alternatives for gays.[4] It was (with clause 10) one of only two clauses regarding ethical behaviour, and was far more specific than the other. Significantly, the declaration also included an acknowledgement that there is 'freedom in secondary matters', which would presumably include different (and perhaps contradictory) understandings of Christian ethics in all other areas (as clause 10 did not establish ethical positions in any detail). A position on homosexuality was being marked out as a primary matter about which there could be no freedom to hold diverse views. Over the course of half a century, an issue that had never featured in any evangelical basis of faith came to represent the definitive mark of authentic Christian identity for exclusivists.

Key to this process was the emergence of an evangelical consensus position on homosexuality, which acted to hold the increasingly divided evangelical parties together. By the end of our period it was under considerable strain. The evangelical consensus position may be summarised as follows:

1. (Biblical teaching) Lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the only place for genital sexual expression. This was God's intention in creation, as outlined in Genesis and reaffirmed by Jesus. All references in scripture to homosexual activity are negative, confirming that lifelong monogamous homosexual

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[4] The phrasing is clearly intended to be succinct and yet cover all areas of sexual ethics, prohibiting homosexual activity, fornication, adultery and polygamy, though makes no comment on appropriate sexual behaviour within marriage (rape and contraception are not addressed) or divorce. The Jerusalem Declaration [2008], http://fca.net/resources/the_jerusalem_declaration/ (April 25, 2011).

relationships are not biblically equivalent to heterosexual marriage.

2. (Implications for gay Christians) Gay Christians should commit themselves to a life of sexual abstinence, as homosexual genital sexual activity is sinful. (Some evangelicals would here hold out the hope of healing leading to the possibility of a fulfilling heterosexual marriage.)

3. (Implications for all Christians) Christians are called to hate the sin and love the sinner, therefore although homosexual genital sexual activity is condemned, gays themselves are to be loved and accepted. (Some evangelicals would here point to the need to take a stand against homophobia. Others would point to the need to challenge gay Christians who persist in sin out of love for them.)

4. (Implications for the church's public ministry) Given the above evaluation of homosexual sexual activity, the church cannot bless same-sex partnerships or otherwise suggest that it views them as equivalent to marriage. Likewise, it is inappropriate for those in positions of leadership in the church to enter into same-sex partnerships as this would imply church approval of them.

The above would be a moderate, centrist evangelical perspective, characteristic of cautiously-open conservatives like Stott and Gumbel.[5] To the right of this grouping, exclusivists would assert the harmfulness and sinfulness of

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[5] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1st ed., 1984); Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994).

homosexual behaviours and gay culture more strongly, would downplay the reality of homophobia, and argue that gay Christians who persist in sin (including by definition all those entering into civil partnerships) and those who argue that doing so is not sinful (including liberals) should face the discipline of the church and perhaps be excluded from fellowship. Such people are viewed as the vanguard of destructively permissive cultural forces. In addition, they would argue that this is a first-order issue of faith, in which the integrity of the gospel is at stake, and on which the church has reached a common mind. Therefore, those who do not agree with the consensus position (including other evangelicals holding only to aspects of it) are in effect placing themselves outside of the bounds of the faithful.[6]

To the left of the evangelical centre, progressives would assert the reality of homophobia and injustice faced by gays and the church's role in it more strongly, would call for repentance on the part of the church for past injustice towards gays, downplay the harmfulness and sinfulness of gay culture, and argue that even if the church could not condone or bless gay sexual behaviour, the civil rights of gays (including the right to enter into same-sex civil partnerships) should be defended. Some would go further and argue that lifelong monogamous homosexual relationships could be accepted (at least as the lesser of two evils and a better alternative to promiscuity, though some would adopt a more liberal position in regard to sexual ethics across the board, and for many progressives this acceptance is a mission imperative.) In addition, progressives would accept the Christian integrity of those holding a different

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[6] Lisa Nolland, Chris Sugden and Sarah Finch (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church: Human sexuality and Experience in Christian Thinking* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2008).

view on homosexuality – essentially seeing it as a second-order issue, on which Christians can disagree, or as an ongoing debate in which the church has not yet come to a common mind.[7]

In this chapter, I will trace the history of the emergence and then fragmentation of the consensus position within English evangelicalism, by examining a number of key popular texts. In locating the consensus position historically my intention is to clearly identify how its development has been inter-related to the changes within English evangelicalism already outlined in chapter 2. I am not seeking to suggest that its historicity makes it invalid, or that it is not a legitimate and faithful interpretation of tradition and scripture. However, my line of argument assumes and demonstrates that it is a product of its time, that it is not the only possible evangelical response to homosexuality, and that it has taken some time to refine and justify. Even if it is argued that it represents the best possible interpretation, it cannot easily be maintained that this is or should be immediately obvious to everyone.

3.1.1 Some Methodological and Theoretical Concerns

Before proceeding, it is important to establish, at least in broad terms, how I understand gays and gayness.[8] The nature of homosexuality is contested, with social constructivist interpreters, like David Greenberg, arguing that

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[7] Andrew P. Marin, *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009). The increasing involvement of progressive evangelicals with more broadly liberal groupings like Inclusive Church is associating them with some who would also see homosexuality as a first-order issue, but one on which the Christian position is demonstrably the liberal one.

[8] I use 'gay' to refer to both men and women with a homosexual sexual orientation. 'Gay' is a term of gay self-identification, unlike the terms 'homosexual' or 'homophile' (used frequently in evangelical writings) that originate in medicalised discourse about gays by straights. I will continue to use 'homosexuality' to refer in the abstract to the condition of being gay.

homosexuality in the modern sense did not exist before the nineteenth century,

whilst essentialist interpreters, like Rictor Norton, argue that despite changes in

language the same sense of identity has been expressed throughout history (by

early eighteenth century mollies for example).[9] Although the nature and origins

of homosexuality are beyond the scope of this study, implicit in my argument is

the assumption that the contemporary cultural expression of gay identity in

Western gay culture is a relatively recent phenomenon, acquiring a high level of

sociocultural visibility within the modernist cultural mood. Its rise to

prominence parallels the rise to prominence of the charismatic movement

within evangelicalism, and the two betray common cultural roots.[10] My interest

is not in the homosexual condition itself but in what it has come to symbolise to

evangelicals. For the purposes of this study therefore, it suffices to note that a

group of self-identified gay people exist within contemporary English society,

and that others (including evangelicals) have accepted (at least in conventional

usage, whatever their theological quibbles) this use of self-proclaimed sexuality

as a key marker of identity, and situate themselves in relation to (and

sometimes in reaction against) this grouping.

One more point must be addressed in this regard, however, which is

Girard's understanding of homosexuality. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation*

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[9] Here and throughout the chapter. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997); Matt Houlbrook and Harry Cocks (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Greenwood World, 2007); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 2nd ed., 1989); Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

[10] Their valorisation of authenticity and close inter-relationship with consumerism are the two most obvious examples of this.

of the World he advances a psychological understanding of homosexuality in terms of mimetic theory.[11] Girard assumes throughout that heterosexuality is the biological norm, with homosexuality therefore being a sexual abnormality in need of explanation. Girard's argument essentially is that 'at least some' forms of homosexuality are caused by a distortion of the normal mimetic triangle in which the model/rival (through whom the [sexual] desire for the [heterosexual] object is learnt) themselves becomes object, each becoming both rival for and object of desire for the other in a binary rather than triangular form of desire. He suggests that all sexual rivalry is 'structurally homosexual', in that in real terms the most significant relationship is with the model/rival, not the object. In discussion he elaborates on this theory by reference to ritualised homosexuality and temporary homosexual behaviour amongst monkeys. Girard sees this explanation for homosexuality as superior to that of Freud in that it is simpler, presupposing no difference between male and female forms of homosexuality, or between homosexual and heterosexual eroticism. He is (predictably) strongly opposed to the idea that homosexuality is an expression of some sort of essential or instinctual drive, or that it is a form of 'difference'. For Girard, perceptions of difference are always deceptive, concealing the deeper (and more threatening) truth that we are in fact the same as the other, and mimetic desire works to break down difference still further, propelling us towards conflict.

Girard's understanding here was criticised by the critic and social theorist Jonathan Dollimore, who notes the reductionistic tendency to use

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[11] Girard, *TH*, 335-51.

homosexuality simply as an explanation for aspects of male social relationships rather than allowing it to be understood as a phenomenon in its own right.[12] He argues that in fact arguments like Girard's unconsciously reveal far more about the nature of heterosexuality than homosexuality: far from homosexuality being (as it is commonly understood) an abnormal expression of fear of the other, heterosexual masculinity is revealed to be structured around an abnormal fear of the same that must construct homosexuality in terms that project, disavow and legitimate those fears. This fear of the same is what structures the violence of sexual difference.

Clearly Dollimore has misunderstood Girard's intent here. Although Girard may justly be criticised for his unquestioning medicalised assumption that homosexuality is an abnormality to be explained as a divergence from a healthy heterosexual norm (an assumption Girard never appears to see the need to justify), the points Dollimore is raising about the violent relationship between heterosexual and homosexual are in fact inherent in the deep structures of Girard's own thought. Girard's understanding of the monstrous double is based on the insight that the increasingly apparent sameness between two rivals is so threatening that the rival must be perceived as a monstrous other against whom violent action is justified. Likewise, it is central to Girard's understanding of the mimetic nature of violence that rivals have an inter-penetrative and reciprocal relationship – any attempt to see one as primary, with the other as a perverted or abnormal form of the first is mistaken. Neither can be understood in isolation from the other.

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[12] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 267-8.

Dollimore is on safer ground with his claim that Girard demonises homosexuality as a drive towards undifferentiation, but here once again fails to see the deeper significance of Girard's thought. Although Girard does speak clearly of homosexuality as an example of a drive towards undifferentiation, it is clear from his more recent work that undifferentiation for Girard is a profoundly ambiguous destination – describing both humanity's deepest fears and its greatest hopes. To see Girard's understanding of homosexuality as a demonization is therefore only a partial truth – homosexuality could potentially represent both the demonic and the angelic.

Girard's understanding of sexuality is to a certain degree detachable from his wider theory. The gay Girardian theologian James Alison demonstrates that it is perfectly possible to hold to Girard's mimetic theory without feeling any need to understand homosexuality as potentially demonic.[13] However, mimetic theory certainly contains a predisposition towards a social constructivist rather than biological determinist understanding of homosexuality. Girard's understanding of the inescapably mimetic nature of all desire leads naturally to a presumption that sexual desires are learnt rather than discovered (even if rooted in a biological appetite), however much they are experienced as individual and essential to the self.[14] My commitment to mimetic theory therefore encourages me to assert a strong social constructivist element to sexual identity, though I remain agnostic about the extent to which this may also have a biological element.

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[13] James Alison, *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (London: DLT, 2001).
[14] *EC*, 74.

3.2 Evangelical Writings on Homosexuality 1960-2010

3.2.1 Before Wolfenden - Gays in the early Twentieth Century

Before 1954 the position of gays in English society was a precarious one. Male homosexual acts were illegal and openly identifying as gay carried great social stigma.[15] A number of high-profile cases involving gays had created a prevalent stereotype of them as traitors, immoral, and committed to undermining society.[16] However, in the first half of the twentieth century there were also moves towards a greater tolerance of gays, initially mainly amongst intellectuals, but with the publication of the Kinsey reports of 1948 and 1953, increasingly broadly.[17] Kinsey encouraged an acceptance of homosexuality as a natural condition present to some degree in all, and this research increased the pressure for the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts between consenting adults.

3.2.2 Derrick Sherwin Bailey

In 1954, the Church of England Moral Welfare Council published *The Problem of Homosexuality: An interim report* through the Church Information Board, alongside a more formal submission of evidence to the government's Wolfendon Committee, which had been appointed to investigate the case for reform of the law. [18] The Council called for reform of the law to protect the civil

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[15] Until 1861 sodomy was a capital crime. Until 1967 buggery could be punished with life imprisonment.
[16] The Russian spies Burgess and Maclean were gay. The Montague-Wildebloode trial in 1954 created an image of gay men as undermining social norms.
[17] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, (London: Quartet Books, 2nd ed., 1990), 136.
[18] Derrick Sherwin Bailey (ed.), *Sexual Offenders and Social Punishment: Evidence submitted to government by the Church of England's Moral Welfare Council* (*SOSP*), (London: Church Information Board, 1956).

rights of gays whilst reinforcing the Church of England's position that

homosexuality was sinful.[19] Both prongs of this argument were felt to be

important, allowing the Church to both avoid scandal and call for justice. The

Council's study secretary was the theologian Derrick Sherwin Bailey, whose

Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, examining the material

regarding homosexuality in Bible and church tradition was published in 1955.[20]

Sherwin Bailey's approach to the issue of homosexuality was to literally

define the terms of debate for most Christian churches (and certainly for

evangelicals) for the rest of the century. For this reason, it is vital that the broad

lines of his approach are understood. A distinction between homosexual

condition and homosexual acts was stressed, not only as a key legal distinction,

but as something that would change social attitudes if better understood. This

is, of course, the distinction between behaviour and identity enshrined in the

evangelical catchphrase 'love the sinner, hate the sin'. The more crucial

distinction, however, was made between the 'invert' (who has a set homosexual

condition) and the 'pervert' (who does not, and yet engages in homosexual

acts). Bisexuality ('ambisexuality' was preferred) was seen as a convenient

fiction, in that everyone may be understood to have a basic orientation, though

this may or may not be reflected in their sexual behaviour – thus those

describing themselves as bisexual are essentially 'perverts', heterosexuals

choosing to engage in homosexual acts.[21] This categorisation, which differs from

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[19] The Church of England Moral Welfare Council, *The Problem of Homosexuality: An interim report* (London: Church Information Board, 1954).
[20] Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans,1955).
[21] *SOSP*, 25-8.

Kinsey's approach (which describes a continuum in which a degree of

bisexuality is relatively common), is still the basis for Church of England (and

evangelical) understandings of the subject (though the language of 'pervert' and

'invert' tends not to be used.) Thus Stott is careful to note the distinction

between condition (for which people are not responsible) and act (for which

they are) at the start of his discussion in *Issues Facing Christians Today*.[22] Many

of the variations between evangelical approaches throughout the twentieth

century can be understood as dependent on whether Sherwin Bailey's category

of 'invert' – the person whose homosexuality is unchosen and not subject to

alteration - is accepted as genuine or not. In 2003 the most recent Church of

England publication on homosexuality, the discussion document *Some Issues in

Human Sexuality,* essentially continued the approach of denying the significance

of bisexuality as a category.[23]

The general understanding of homosexuality presented in these reports

was moderate and sympathetic, even if maintaining that homosexual practice

was immoral. The causes of homosexuality were seen as uncertain (though

there was some suggestion dysfunctional families were to blame), but it was

assumed that if it were possible to prevent it then it was society's duty to do

so.[24] Homosexual sexual activity was not seen as medically harmful, ideas that it

was contagious in any sense were dismissed, and links between homosexuality

and paedophilia were ruled out.[25] Overall, gays were seen as victims, not

criminals. Their activities were argued to cause comparatively little threat to

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[22] Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 302-3.
[23] *Some Issues*, 282-4.
[24] *SOSP*, 29.
[25] There was, however, concern under the current law children might be sought as potential partners because the blackmail risks were lesser. *SOSP*, 110.

society compared to the actions of adulterers and fornicators, yet they were

disproportionately punished and lived in fear because of their legal position.[26]

Legal reform was recommended to bring it in line with laws regarding

heterosexual acts, as the state's concern should be public morality and crime,

leaving private morality to the church.[27] As we shall see, in all but a few minor

aspects, this basic approach to homosexuality has remained unchanged in all

Church of England statements since, despite alterations in the way in which

biblical teaching and Christian tradition are understood.

For evangelicals, the most significant aspect of Sherwin Bailey's work

would be his handling of scripture. This was one of the first modern systematic

critical examinations of homosexuality from the perspective of biblical teaching

and Christian tradition, and his analysis would literally begin contemporary

theological debate. Although Sherwin Bailey's conclusions were reasonably

conservative (homosexuality is analogous to deformity – an example of human

fallenness, and homosexual acts are like incest - sinful even if they express love)

his handling of scripture and tradition was strikingly radical.[28] He argued that

most biblical teaching was irrelevant - the traditional prohibition of sodomy

was derived from a misinterpretation of the Sodom narrative by Josephus and

Philo.[29] Other biblical passages condemning homosexuality (especially New

Testament ones) were argued to apply to homosexual perverts, but were silent

in regard to inverts, of whom they knew nothing - though the tenor of his

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[26] *SOSP*, 31-4.
[27] *SOSP*, 38-40.
[28] *SOSP*, 75-6. He also maintained, however, that if gays acted with a clear conscience they were not morally culpable, 77-81, 99
[29] *SOSP*, 67-9, explored more fully in his *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*.

argument was that this silence could not be presumed upon given the negative evaluation of homosexual acts elsewhere.[30] These interpretative moves were to feature repeatedly in later liberal approaches to homosexuality, being applied far more widely than Sherwin Bailey himself had.

The Wolfendon Committee, appointed by the Home Office to examine homosexuality and prostitution, delivered its report recommending decriminalisation in 1957. The Church of England Church Assembly and Methodist Conference both debated and approved it. The Homosexual Law Reform Society, established in 1958, had significant church support. Conservative evangelicals, who had engaged in a defensive withdrawal from 'liberal' concerns with social justice, were largely uninvolved in the issue. When they became involved, it was to be in reaction to a new cultural mood, expressed and embodied by an entirely different sort of gay community.

3.2.3 After Wolfendon - Evangelicals and Gays Challenged and Changed by Modernism

The 1960s and 1970s brought massive change for both gays and evangelicals. We have already examined the fundamental changes that occurred within evangelicalism: Keele, the emergence of the charismatic movement, and the fracturing of the conservative evangelical hegemony. Amongst the gay community the same sort of cultural and generational shift was to occur. The position of gays in society was finally made more secure with the passing of the 1967 Act (though the age of consent was still fixed at 21 for homosexual acts).

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[30] *SOSP*, 71.

In church and society there were modest signs of increased toleration.[31]

In 1969, however, the Stonewall riots in New York revolutionised the emergent gay scene, marginalising the more staid groups who had campaigned for legal reform, and identifying gays powerfully with the counter-culture. This new radicalised gay identity, embodied in England in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) of the early 1970s, was much more at home within modernism.[32] Gays were increasingly visible, in gay societies and campaigning groups, and marching on the streets in Gay Pride rallies. They were linked to radicalism and 'the Movement' of radical liberation, alongside women's liberation and black power. For outsiders who found the powerful revolutionary culture created in the 1960s threatening, the gays were the face of transgressive, permissive modernism.[33]

As I discussed in chapter 2, the modernist evangelicalism expressed in Keele undid the Great Reversal, bringing evangelicals into a sometimes critical engagement with wider society once again. This engagement was to put them on a collision course with the emergent gay culture that was a key part of the permissive society of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1977 E.R. Shackleton, legal advisor to the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFL), wrote to the *Church Times* stating that 'of all the threats to family life today none is so direct and so powerful as militant homosexuality'.[34] The potential challenge to the cause of gay liberation represented by conservative evangelicals was something that was recognised by some militant gay groupings. The Nationwide Festival of Light in

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[31] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 180.
[32] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 185.
[33] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 183-6.
[34] *CT*, Letters, 16th December 1977.

1971 was perceived as an attack by gay activists, and the inaugural meeting was disrupted by GLF protesters, working as part of 'Operation Rupert' in a deliberate attempt to disrupt NFL activities.[35]

The conflict was heightened by the fact that acceptance of gays was becoming strongly linked to liberal theology. The 1950s and 1960s had seen the publication of popular Pelican books on the subject by D.J. West and Anthony Storr.[36] Joseph Fletcher's *Situational Ethics* called for a wholesale reassessment of Christian ethics to centre them on being loving and the philosopher and broadcaster Bryan Magee argued in his popular *One in Twenty* that repressing one's desires and seeing them as sinful was self-destructive.[37] In 1967, Norman Pittenger was making similar claims to Magee from an explicitly Christian standpoint, writing that denying homosexuals physical sexual expression was inhuman, unjust, and unchristian.[38] Less radical than this, yet creating a perhaps even greater impact, was Hugh Montefiore's lecture to the Modern Churchman's Union at Somerville College, Oxford, in which he argued that Jesus' unmarried state suggested that he may have been gay.[39] Montefiore, who was later to be made a bishop, was at the time a notable New Testament scholar and vicar of St Mary the Great, Cambridge. By the 1970s, Malcolm MacCourt was arguing that a

[35] Weeks, *Coming Out*, 205.
[36] D.J. West, *Homosexuality* (London: Pelican, 1955); Anthony Storr, *Sexual Deviance* (London: Pelican, 1964), 90.
[37] Joseph Fletcher, *Situational Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1966); Bryan Magee, *One in Twenty* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966).
[38] Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent?* (London: SCM, 1967), 70.
[39] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, 246.

Christian ethic for homosexuals should recognise that promiscuity was not always sinful.[40]

Liberal pro-gay groups within the churches like Quest, Open Church, and Reach were established in the mid 1970s, as was the Gay Christian Movement, in 1976. In the same year, the Revd Peter Elers conducted a service of blessing for two lesbian couples in his church at Thaxted. The modest moves towards liberal stances within the church were being given significant publicity and were perceived positively by wider society. It was increasingly obvious that the gays were not 'out there' but inside the churches, especially amongst the clergy, and that many of them were militant, willing to challenge societal and cultural norms, and had a radical liberal theology underpinning their actions.

However, post-Keele modernist evangelicalism was not universally opposed to this newly assertive gay community. Some evangelicals were more supportive, not least because some were gay. Metropolitan Community Churches, which were evangelical in spirituality and teaching yet welcoming of gay people, had been established in the US by Troy Perry in 1972, and spread to London later in the decade.[41] In 1979 an evangelical fellowship of LGCM was founded. The very existence of such a group, however, was anathema to most conservative evangelicals, who saw LGCM primarily as a liberal theological grouping. In 1984, John Stott described it as a 'so-called "Evangelical Fellowship"'.[42]

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[40] Malcolm MacCourt, *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1977).
[41] McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 60s*, 185.
[42] Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 321.

3.2.4 The Formation of a Position - Early Pastoral Perspectives

Jonathan Clatworthy of the Modern Churchpeople's Union advances the claim that evangelicals were historically at the forefront of homophobia within the churches, forcing liberals to respond and engage in a debate they did not seek.[43] Although it may certainly be the case that evangelicals were the uncritical inheritors of a traditional homophobic discourse within the church, all the evidence is that liberal pro-gay writings preceded any evangelical writings on the subject, and evangelicals took considerable time to seriously engage with them at all. The first serious ethical writing on homosexuality from an English evangelical perspective was David Field's Grove booklet in 1976, almost a decade after Pittenger's *A Time for Consent?*[44] Homosexuality simply wasn't on the agenda at Keele or Nottingham. In and of themselves, evangelicals had little interest in the issue. This indifference to the needs and rights of gays could be interpreted as symptomatic of being an institutionally homophobic group, but if so it is hard to assert that this homophobia was being militantly propagated. Although English evangelicals might not agree with the sexual revolution and all that it had brought with it, they mounted no sustained campaign for the recriminalisation of homosexual activity. In fact, the earliest influential evangelical writings on homosexuality were pastoral rather than apologetic in focus, concerned to address the gay evangelical, and offering pastoral advice to Church leaders. They were strikingly non-prescriptive and affirming of the humanity of gays when compared to later writings. Some, as we shall see, even

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[43] Jonathan Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith in a Divided Church* (Winchester: O Books, 2008), 7-8.
[44] David Field, *The Homosexual Way – a Christian option*, (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1976).

castigated the church for its homophobia and held up sexually abstinent gays as moral examples for all Christians.

Alex Davison's 1970 autobiographical account *The Returns of Love* was possibly the first publication on the subject of homosexuality by an English evangelical. It was the excruciatingly honest account of a gay evangelical determined to live by a traditional sexual ethic, highlighting the pastoral problems faced by a gay Christian in his position.[45] It didn't attempt to systematically address the issue, but it was influential on evangelical leaders, as was Gerald Coates' well-publicised 1977 testimony of being delivered from homosexuality.[46] Both of these accounts suggested that the gay evangelical who earnestly strived to follow traditional ethical teaching on homosexuality in their own life could be seen as at the least a figure deserving of sympathy and support, and perhaps even upheld as an exemplary Christian, carrying their cross. Of course, this did nothing to increase the acceptance of those gays who failed to live by these teachings (still less those who presumed to openly question them), but it made considerable inroads towards preventing straightforward homophobia being openly expressed within mainstream evangelicalism.

John White and Roger Moss, whose books were published in 1978 and 1977 respectively (White's dealing with sexuality more generally, Moss writing purely about homosexuality), were both professional psychologists, seeking to address pastoral concerns. They directly challenged evangelicals to repent of

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[45] Alex Davidson, *The Returns of Love* (Leicester: IVP, 1970).
[46] Roger Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 41; Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today* (1984), 317; John White, *Eros Defiled* (Leicester: IVP, 1978), 130-1.

homophobic attitudes and made it clear that church culture was often hostile to gays.[47] Although both argued that sexual abstinence was the appropriate path for gays, they expressed far more equivocation about it than would later be common. Both argued that homosexuality is not a sickness, and cannot be cured. White argued that most attempts made to cure it (including heterosexual marriage) are not only unsuccessful but also immoral.[48] Moss openly admitted that there were frustrations and limitations to all the advice commonly given: marriage, self-discipline, treatment, conversion, and disassociating with other gays, arguing that as a condition (ie. in regard to inverts) it must be at the least tolerated by evangelicals.[49]

In fact, both Moss and White advocated an ethical position considerably more liberal than the later consensus position. In his discussion of heterosexual sexual activity, White argued that anal and oral sex cannot be condemned morally or psychologically, and should even be rejoiced in as a form of God-given pleasure in a heterosexual relationship, though without becoming the predominant form of intercourse.[50] He was rather less affirming in this regard when it came to homosexual sexual activity, but the general tone of his discussion was that none of the forms of intercourse used in gay sex could be condemned in themselves.[51] Moss stated that scripture never directly addresses same-sex relationships lovingly entered into, and argued that gays, like all believers, are sinners in a lifetime's process of being reformed. This empathetic

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[47] Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality*, 17; White, *Eros Defiled*, 127.
[48] White, *Eros Defiled*, 120.
[49] Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality*, 14-16; White, *Eros Defiled*, 120. White also argues marriage is inadviseable as a 'cure'.
[50] White, *Eros Defiled*, 24-6.
[51] White, *Eros Defiled*, 130.

approach at one point led him to state his personal misgivings in denying that sincere Christians in committed homosexual relationships might be fulfilling God's will in an unexpected way, though he did eventually conclude that such a relationship was not appropriate.[52] However, he stressed the need to accept and minister to even those who persist in homosexual sexual relationships, ruling out any sort of exclusion on these grounds.[53]

There were some signs that evangelicals were beginning to see homosexuality as an issue that represented a liberal apologetic challenge in the 1970s. David Field's 1976 Grove booklet *The Homosexual Way- A Christian option?* began this process, addressing the work of Sherwin Bailey, Pittenger, and Fletcher.[54] Field was Senior Tutor at Oak Hill, one of the Church of England's evangelical theological training colleges, and doubtless shared the concerns of the theological college principals who had in 1974 urged the Church of England to produce an official statement on the subject. (The Church's only official statements at this point were *The Problem of Homosexuality* and *Sexual Offenders and Social Punishment*, both written in the 1950s, when the possibility of 'out' gay clergy seeking to advance the cause of gay liberation had not been envisaged.) In many respects, the Grove booklet prefigured the consensus position: Field's use of the biblical material conformed to that pattern and he was swift to critique Sherwin Bailey's interpretation of the Sodom narrative.[55] However, the aggressive and fearful tone of some later writings was absent from his discussion, and he showed much of the same generous spirit that

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[52] Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality*, 32, 38.
[53] Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality*, 42.
[54] Field, *The Homosexual Way*, 18-19.
[55] Field, *The Homosexual Way*, 4, 9-10, 16-17.

characterised Moss and White. Field called for evangelicals to overcome social

prejudice, and debunked the idea of a gay threat to children or marriage and

family life.[56] He also criticised evangelicals for their silence in the face of the

injustice and ostracism faced by gays and commended the work of gay charities

CHE and REACH in this area.[57] Finally, he was careful not to define all of gay

sexual behaviour as simply unnatural – noting that anal and oral sex are

permissible, and that Protestants who are in favour of contraception cannot

argue that purely relational sex is wrong.[58]

The earliest evangelical writings on homosexuality expressed a

modernist evangelicalism (content to radically depart from inherited views on

sex in seeking a more biblical ethic), responding constructively to a modernist

gay culture (actively demanding freedoms to express itself authentically). They

sought to establish areas of accommodation and resistance, engaging in a

dialogue with Modernity. In regard to the interpretation and authority of

scripture they demonstrated a more consistent conservatism, but in applying

that basic biblical understanding to pastoral issues they showed considerable

diversity and flexibility. There was an affirmation of gays and gay culture and a

serious desire to condemn homophobia even in the church. That this predated

the consensus position, and was not seen by the authors of that position as

having been corrected by it, suggests firstly that that position was not initially

seen in as exclusive a way as is now common, and secondly that it cannot be

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[56] Field, *The Homosexual Way*, 6-7. He even pointed to the popularity of gay marriage
ceremonies as evidence that despite GLF rhetoric gays were not all abandoning traditional
family structures – a perhaps unlikely source of comfort for an evangelical.
[57] Field, *The Homosexual Way*, 24.
[58] Field, *The Homosexual Way*, 14-15.

understood simplistically as either an expression of an unchanging evangelical approach or as the natural response of evangelicalism to modernism.

3.2.5 The Gloucester Report – The Threat of the Crisis of Undifferentiation

The publication of the Church of England's Gloucester Report on homosexuality by the Anglican Board of Social Responsibility in 1979 as *Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion* marked a turning point for many Anglican evangelicals.[59] This was the Church's first attempt at official guidance on homosexuality since the 1950s, when it was still criminalised. It was dogged by controversy and in the event it was not officially adopted, leaving the Church once again without official guidance on the issue. The Board (which included the evangelical and future founding member of Reform David Holloway amongst its members) was sharply divided in its response, taking the extreme step of appending its highly critical 'observations' to the published version of the Report prepared by its own working group, which although relatively conservative was clearly not conservative enough for some.[60]

The Report declared that further discernment was necessary on the appropriate way of life for gays, as total prohibition of sexual activity and explicit recognition of the validity of homosexual relationships were both seen

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[59] Similar controversy surrounded the Methodist report *A Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality*, published in the same year, which was even more liberal – urging for homosexual relationships to be judged on the same criteria as heterosexual ones. It was attacked by the evangelical President of Congress Donald English and sent back for further work. Sean Gill (ed.), *The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement: Campaigning for Justice, Truth and Love* (London: Cassell, 1998), 40.

[60] It upheld traditional teaching, saw homosexuality as a departure from the natural heterosexual order (meaning that some discriminatory practices might be legitimate), and asserted that marriage was only for heterosexuals. General Synod Board for Social Responsibility, *Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion* (London: Church Information Office, 1979), 20, 37, 49, 52, 55-7.

as mistakes. Clergy, however, were not at liberty to engage in any homosexual sexual relationships, and any within them should resign.[61] Where it created most disquiet amongst evangelicals was in its handling of scripture. A hermeneutic of suspicion was implicitly applied to scripture, in which moral teaching was assumed not to be capable of a straightforward transferance from the Bible to everyday life. Biblical writers were argued to not have a true understanding of homosexuality, their works were assumed to be culturally conditioned, and Jesus' summary of the law was asserted to make the Old Testament teaching irrelevant.[62]

The Report posed a real problem for Anglican evangelicals, who now found themselves needing to justify the adoption of carefully nuanced positions in relation to official statements that were in some ways very close to their own. It pleased no-one, being condemned by both the Gay Christian Movement and Raymond Johnson, director of NFL, (who linked it explicitly to recent liberal publications).[63]

Homosexual Relationships confronted Anglican evangelicals with a liberal approach to scripture being applied to homosexuality by their own church, prompting a turn to apologetic rather than pastoral concerns in the issue of homosexuality. As the apparent unity of Keele gave way to a recognition of the diversity within evangelicalism, and fears about evangelical identity spread, homosexuality began to be addressed more as a symbolic issue for deeper questions about responses to liberal theology and liberal hermeneutics. The

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[61] *Homosexual Relationships*, 52.
[62] *Homosexual Relationships*, 34-6.
[63] Gill, *The LGCM*, 42.

issue of homosexuality became a cipher for the issue of biblical authority –
something central to evangelical identity.

A year after the publication of the Report, David Holloway published *The
Church and Homosexuality* to refute it. It contained contributions from himself,
Michael Green and David Watson, who between them commanded respect from
both conservative and charismatic wings of evangelicalism.[64] The intent was
clearly to delineate an evangelical position that could count on wide acceptance,
and the tone was combative. There was a tendency throughout to present the
evangelical position as one that stood in sharp contrast to that of 'homosexuals',
used as a synonym for 'liberals', as in Holloway's statement that: 'the Church
over the centuries has been clear that the homosexual way is not the way of
Jesus Christ.'[65] Both Green and Holloway warned readers against uncritically
accepting liberal thought and attitudes, Holloway explicitly arguing that the
Working Party had fallen prey to this danger in writing this report.[66] David
Watson's more sensitive and sympathetic chapter on pastoral issues (which
references both White and Moss with approval) was essentially relegated to an
afterword, with pride of place going to Holloway's systematic demolition of the
Report.

Holloway's contribution represents one of the first clear presentations of
the myth of the gay-liberal conspiracy that became central to exclusivist
approaches. He presented the Report as the work of a group of liberals who

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[64] David Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality: A Positive Answer to the Current Debate*
(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980).
[65] David Holloway, 'A Watershed in the Church', 9-11, in Holloway (ed.), *The Church and
Homosexuality*, 10.
[66] David Holloway, '"Homosexual Relationships" – the discussion continued', 35-128, in
Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 16, 64.

gave primacy not to scripture (indeed he argued they deliberately presented positions condemned by scripture) but to themselves, believing that God's will was identical with human fulfilment.[67] Quoting from the US evangelical Richard Lovelace (whose work he and Green make extensive use of), he argued 'if we can interpret Scripture to endorse homosexual acts among Christians, we can make it endorse anything else we want to do or believe and our faith and practice are cut loose in a borderless chaos.'[68]

The quotation makes it clear what Holloway saw as the real danger represented by the issue of homosexuality: a liberalism that would dissolve evangelical and even Christian identity by striking at the authority and interpretation of scripture. Liberal positions on homosexuality represented the crisis of undifferentiation. The degree to which this (rather than concern about gays and their lives per se) was the real issue that prompted Holloway's concern was particularly apparent in his seemingly wilful lack of empathy towards gays and his unwillingness to seriously engage with the real social issues highlighted in the Report.[69] For Holloway, gays and liberals represented the visible side of a dark and shadowy conspiracy that threatened both church and society.[70] He suggested that homosexuality was more of an actively chosen lifestyle than the Report acknowledged, and created a 'network of evil' in which gay Christians

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[67] Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 43, 46, 88.
[68] Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 92. (Citing Richard F. Lovelace, *Homosexuality and the Church: Crisis, Conflict, Compassion* (London: Lamp Press, 1979), 78, 111-2.
[69] Despite the Report's concern about the vulnerability of gays to prejudice, violence, malicious prosecution and suicide, Holloway refused to countenance any further legal reform and refused to recognise the necessity of any form of support for gays that was not attempting to change their orientation or encouraging abstinence. Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 110-113.
[70] Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 52-4.

were complicit, involving blackmail, bribery, exploitation, prostitution

paedophilia and promiscuity.[71]

In fact, Holloway's rhetoric notwithstanding, his position was not far

removed from that of the Report. Both of them asserted that homosexuality was

best understood as a result of the fall and that the norm was heterosexual

marriage, with homosexual unions unable to claim equivalence. Both saw

promiscuity as unacceptable, and abstinence as the appropriate way of life for

the unmarried. Both were clear that this was not the same as a call to celibacy.

Unlike the Working Group, Holloway asserted that for many if not most gays a

cure was possible. Unlike Holloway, and largely as a result of this key difference,

the Working Group asserted that genuinely gay Christians were victims of the

fallenness of the world suggesting that the Church should view moral choices

made by gay Christians in expressing their sexuality with respect and

compassion.

In *The Church and Homosexuality*, both Green and Holloway made

reference to two significant books on the subject that had been published by

American evangelicals: Virginia Mollenkott and Letha Scanzoni's *Is the

Homosexual my Neighbour?* and Richard Lovelace's *Homosexuality and the

Church*. Both books were to have a decisive influence on the English evangelical

understanding of the issue. One of the reasons why evangelical engagement

with homosexuality as an issue shifted from a pastoral to a more apologetic tone

towards the end of the 1970s was the taking up of liberal positions and liberal

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[71] Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*, 47-9, 59-65, 104, 106-7, 114-5. The slander
that the gay Christian 'scene' was inherently promiscuous also occurs in Green's chapter, 30.

interpretations of scripture by those who continued to define themselves as evangelicals. Virginia Mollenkott & Letha Scanzoni's *Is the Homosexual my neighbour?* was the earliest and best-known example. It was published in a UK edition by SCM in 1978, the same year it was published in the US.[72] Green was sufficiently concerned about it that he explicitly referenced it in his discussion in *The Church and Homosexuality*, though it is possible he had engaged with them through Lovelace rather than directly, as his critique mirrored Lovelace's.[73]

Scanzoni and Mollenkott were evangelical biblical scholars with a credible pedigree who had done significant work on marriage and gender. The book was dangerous for conservative evangelicals seeking to maintain that there was a single biblical position (or even a single evangelical position), because it was clearly rooted in biblical study with respect for the authority of scripture. As well as asserting that gays were vulnerable and needed love, support, and acceptance, Mollenkott and Scanzoni suggested, drawing on critical scholarship, that the biblical basis for traditional teaching was not as assured as other evangelicals had assumed. Asserting that homosexuality was a naturally occurring stable alternative sexuality (inversion) and declaring that this understanding was completely absent from scripture, they argued that there therefore was no clear biblical position. [74]

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[72] Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour?: A Positive Christian Response* (London: SCM Press, 2nd ed., 1994), 1st ed. 1978.
[73] Green, *The Church and Homosexuality*, 22.
[74] They questioned whether any of the passages traditionally used could legitimately be applied to contemporary homosexual relationships. *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour?*, 27-42, 51, 81-2.

Suggesting that Christians were free to construct a responsible ethic following the example of Jesus and Paul in setting aside taboos, they noted that similar things have happened in relation to contraception, oral sex, masturbation, and intercourse during menstruation –pointing out that this last is never approved in scripture and always condemned, yet was now commonly seen as acceptable.[75] On this basis they argued that even if it were seen as less than ideal, a Christian ethic that called for exclusive, stable, non-exploitative homosexual relationships might be an ethic that was biblical and sincerely aimed to please God rather than self.[76]

Few of these arguments were new, but in being made from an explicitly evangelical hermeneutics and spirituality they appeared to give the lie to Holloway's argument that any move from traditional teaching must represent complete disregard for the authority of scripture. They were revisionist yet cautious, occasionally disputing more liberal interpretations (such as that of Sherwin Bailey). Much of what they said echoed earlier pastoral writings and the position they finally advocated – upholding a covenantal union between two people as the ideal for human sexuality – was comparatively conservative. Ironically it was this moderation in Scanzoni and Mollenkott, their sameness, that threatened more conservative evangelicals like Holloway and Green. In showing that biblically faithful evangelicals might adopt a more liberal position they embodied the crisis of undifferentiation.

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[75] *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour?,* 132.
[76] *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour?,* 143-4.

Richard Lovelace's *Homosexuality and the Church: Crisis, Conflict, Compassion* was also to exert a powerful influence over English evangelicals in this period as the consensus position was being formed. Published in a UK edition a year after it was published in the US, it was at the time the most in-depth treatment of the issue by a more conservative evangelical. Significantly, Lovelace's handling of the biblical material was moderate, and in many places he accepted the arguments of Scanzoni and Mollenkott that certain passages traditionally thought to be relevant for understanding homosexuality were not. At one point he even admitted a theoretical possibility that some homosexual unions might be acceptable.[77] He commended theological liberals for taking seriously the need to reach out to the gay community with the gospel, which he acknowledged evangelicals had failed to do.[78]

It was the form rather than the conclusions of Lovelace's argument that were to have the greatest (perhaps unforeseen) influence. For Lovelace, the real issues at stake were theological liberalism and biblical authority. His overview of literature on the subject of homosexuality suggested (perhaps unintentionally) a 'slippery slope', whereby liberal writers move from approving homosexual behaviour to far more radical positions.[79] Also, by failing to clearly distinguish between the terms, he implicitly linked 'gay', 'liberal', and 'worldly', suggesting that gay Christians were almost all liberal theologically and

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[77] *Homosexuality and the Church*, 24-7.
[78] Lovelace's work actually contained some elements radically critical of conservatives: he suggested that homophobia was a greater sin than gay sex, and that witch hunts in the church and seeking to separate from 'liberal' churches would be a mistake. *Homosexuality and the Church*, 67, 121, 123.
[79] *Homosexuality and the Church*, 52.

uncritically identified with contemporary culture.[80] The overall effect was to suggest that those evangelicals advocating a more liberal position on homosexuality, whatever their protestations of orthodoxy, were contaminated by worldly values and were opening the door to serious heresy and possibly to the disintegration of church and wider society.[81]

Lovelace helped set the tone of later conservative evangelical discussion of homosexuality – less concerned with homosexuality as a pastoral and ethical issue affecting real people and more concerned with homosexuality as a battleground in the conflict with liberalism. It was this aspect of his work that appeared to have had the greatest impact on Green and Holloway and those who were to follow them.

3.2.6 The Consensus Position Articulated

The 1980s saw a hardening of attitudes towards homosexuality, both amongst evangelicals and in wider society. The anxiety around AIDS encouraged the depiction of gays as promiscuous, dangerous and diseased.[82] Conservative evangelicals increasingly believed there was a gay-liberal conspiracy in the media and within the churches, working in an almost satanic manner to draw people away from biblical values and to undermine society as a whole.[83] In 1984 the Anglican evangelical Tony Higton formed Action for Biblical Witness to Our Nation (ABWON), attacking liberal compromise on homosexuality and

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[80] *Homosexuality and the Church*, 51.
[81] *Homosexuality and the Church*, 105-6.
[82] Anglican evangelical Tony Higton wrote a letter to the Times calling for unrepentant gay clergy to be dismissed as an AIDS risk. *The LGCM*, 55-6.
[83] Notably the 1980s saw some significant increase in gay visibility in the mass media. The first openly gay soap character on British TV appeared on Eastenders in 1986. The new Channel 4 broadcast magazine programmes aimed at the gay community such as Out on Tuesday in 1989 and 1990.

interfaith issues and calling for a return to traditional values.[84] Their stance against permissiveness and homosexuality created common ground between some evangelicals and parts of the Conservative Party, then in power.

In 1986, in the wake of the success of the Keep Sunday Special campaign, the Conservative Family Campaign was founded by Graham Webster-Gardiner, as a pressure group with Tory MPs and Church of England clergy as supporters.[85] It presented Britain as suffering from a 25 year period of moral decline, and opposed easing of laws on abortion and divorce. They urged the recriminalisation of homosexuality and the internment of AIDS patients, the ending of funding for the Terrence Higgins Trust and the Family Planning Association, and denounced government information and safe sex campaigns as a waste of time. The CFC represented an extreme grouping within Anglicanism – for many Anglican evangelicals in this period cooperation with the Conservatives was unthinkable – but the existence of the group demonstrated the extent to which this profoundly reactionary vision resonated with both political and theological conservatives.

In 1987 Tony Higton introduced a private members motion on homosexuality at the Church of England's General Synod. After an acrimonious debate, an amended motion was passed noting that homosexual genital acts 'fell short of the ideal' and required repentance and the exercise of compassion.[86] In the same year, again at the instigation of Tony Higton, LGCM (they had renamed

[84] *The LGCM*, 53.
[85] *The LGCM*, 54.
[86] Compare the accounts of Gill *The LGCM*, 59-62, and *Some Issues*, 28. *Some Issues* suggestively states that this motion is the only statement of the mind of the church as a whole on the issue, 290.

themselves to include Lesbians that year) was ejected from its offices on church property, with the diocese taking them to court to do so. The campaign against them became virulent, accusing them of promoting promiscuity, pornography, paedophilia, sado-masochism, and proscribed drug use.[87] In 1988, following campaigning by CFC, the Local Government Act was passed, section 28 of which prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality' or its acceptability as 'a pretended family relationship'. During a debate in General Synod that year, John Selwyn Gummer, then Minister for Agriculture, as well as a lay member of Synod, was to accuse the church of not giving a strong enough moral lead to the nation, and to censure the Archbishop of York, John Habgood, for not supporting section 28 in the House of Lords.[88] In 1989 the Osborne Report, commissioned by the Church of England as a further attempt at producing an official statement of the Church's position on homosexuality, was presented to the House of Bishops, who declined to publish it. It was shrouded in secrecy, but leaked to the media.[89] It had examined the experiences of gay Christians and summarised opposing views before stating a need for the bishops to be creative and inclusive, but made no specific recommendations. LGCM criticised the report as lacking teeth. Evangelicals saw it as too liberal.[90] These debates and conflicts confirmed for many evangelicals that there was a powerful liberal conspiracy ranged against them, connecting church, media, and gay rights organisations, which worked to undermine traditional values, destroy the family, and marginalise the church.

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[87] *The LGCM*, 65-68.
[88] *The LGCM*, 62.
[89] Monica Furlong, *CofE: The State It's In* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), 140-2.
[90] *The LGCM*, 84-5. Michael Vasey noted that many of the contributors to the Osborne Report were evangelical in his *Evangelical Christians and Gay Rights* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1991), 12.

The more gay-affirming tone that had marked the modernist evangelical writing of the 1970s began to disappear during the 1980s, as fears rose that the church was being too timid in resisting the cultural forces ranged against it.

It was in the 1980s that the evangelical consensus position on homosexuality was to find its classic exposition, in John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today*. Stott was the key figure in English evangelicalism throughout our period, widely recognised as a touchstone of orthodoxy, and a guiding force in Keele and post-Keele evangelicalism, seeking to engage with church and society rather than withdrawing from it. His *Issues Facing Christians Today,* first published in 1984, was one of the most important expressions of this commitment, discussing a number of the most significant social issues of the day and seeking to present a principled evangelical perspective on them. Its intent was therefore primarily ethical and apologetic: presenting an ethical position on a topic in the public eye, and defending it against alternative views. Pastoral concerns (even if included in the discussion) were not primary. It has remained a classic popular evangelical text on social ethics, continuously in print since publication and now in its fourth edition.

Stott followed the pattern of biblical interpretation already established by Green and Lovelace – in a discussion centred on the creation narratives, he argued that lifelong heterosexual marriage was the divinely ordained pattern for sexual activity, and all deviation from that (including homosexuality) was to be seen as sinful.[91] Gays were to live a life of abstinence, though healing might

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[91] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 303-12.

be a possibility for some.[92] Stott was careful to affirm the full humanity of gays, maintaining a clear distinction between orientation and behaviour as a means of arguing against homophobia. However, he also argued for an appropriate place for church discipline in enforcing agreed standards of sexual morality, asserting that rejecting homophobia should not prevent 'proper Christian disapproval of homosexual behaviour.'[93]

Despite Stott's condemnation of homophobia it is hard to avoid Michael Vasey's conclusion that such statements were becoming conventional rather than carrying much actual weight.[94] Although Stott mentioned the church's failings, there was no sense that corrective action should be taken, or that the church might have a moral obligation to work for justice for gays in wider society. Stott's approach contained an implicit argument that undermined his explicit stance against homophobia. It was clear that he felt a robust apologetic was a necessity because of the existence of a defined 'enemy': a liberal-gay conspiracy. Although at times his interlocutors were named writers, he also referred to groups like the 'so-called' Gay Christian Movement (the rather ungracious 'so-called' was removed in the third edition), and the less clearly defined 'homosexual lobby', 'the secular world', 'the world' or 'the secular mind', (all used interchangeably). The implication was that a homogeneous liberal enemy existed that advocated even the abandonment of monogamy.[95] At one

[92] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 319.
[93] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 322.
[94] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 321; Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 180.
[95] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 303, 306, 317, 318; (2nd ed.), 338, 341, 355, 357; (3rd ed.), 384, 389, 411, 413, ('the world' not in 3rd ed); (4th ed.), 452, 470, 473.

point he even referred to 'homosexual Christians' as a monolithic grouping whose views are uniformly liberal:

> Homosexual Christians are not, however, satisfied with this biblical teaching about human sexuality and the institution of heterosexual marriage. They bring forward a number of objections to it, in order to defend the legitimacy of homosexual partnerships.[96]

In the third edition of 1999, the following section appeared (remaining in the fourth edition):

> They ['many homosexual people'] regard it as a great victory that in 1973 the trustees of the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental illnesses. Michael Vasey declares that this decision was not the result of some 'liberal' conspiracy. But that is exactly what it was. Seventy years of psychiatric opinion were overthrown not by science (for no fresh evidence was produced) but by politics.[97]

Perhaps unconsciously, Stott was painting a picture for his readers of an organised liberal-gay conspiracy representing the cultural forces of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, who were closely linked to Christian groups to the extent that gay Christians en masse may be assumed to be 'not satisfied' with biblical teaching and the institution of marriage.[98] Gays were once again being presented as emblematic of liberalism and the visible face of a shadowy conspiracy seeking to undermine church and society.

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[96] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 312; (2nd ed), 347; (3rd ed.), 397; (4th ed.), 459, 470, 473.
[97] Stott, *New Issues facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Pickering, 3rd ed., 1999), 413; (4th ed.), 472.
[98] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 312.

Stott's influence brought the work of psychoanalyst Elizabeth Moberly to the attention of evangelical leaders. Stott made significant use of her *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, published in 1983.[99] Moberly argued that homosexuality was best understood as 'same sex ambivalence', a response to a (perhaps unconscious) deprivation of love from the same sex parent during childhood by which an individual attempts to find that love through same-sex attachments. [100] This analysis allowed her to view homosexuality as a natural response to a childhood problem rather than as pathology, whilst also suggesting that homosexual same sex relationships can never be genuinely fulfilling. Moberly was actually critical of both liberal and conservative perspectives, but in advocating a position in which orientation was not condemned but sexual acts were, she allowed evangelicals to cite her work as evidence that their position had scientific credibility.[101]

Particularly notable was Lance Pierson's use of Moberly in his Grove pastoral series booklet.[102] Pierson's booklet would remain the series' main pastoral treatment of homosexuality throughout the rest of our period and would be recommended by Bob Fyall and Mark Bonnington in their Grove biblical series booklet on homosexuality a decade later.[103] Pierson wrote

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[99] Elizabeth Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 1983).

[100] Moberly, *Homosexuality*, 2-4.

[101] *Issues facing Christians Today* (1st ed.), 319-20; John White, *Eros Redeemed* (Guildford: Eagle, 1993), 179.

[102] Lance Pierson, *No-Gay Areas* (Nottingham: Grove Books,1989). Pierson was the author of the study guide to Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* published in the 1986 reprint of the 1st ed and in the 1990 2nd ed.

[103] Mark Bonnington and Bob Fyall, *Homosexuality and the Bible* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996), 2.

explicitly as an ex-gay evangelical, now married.[104] He accepted the biblical

understanding of the consensus position, but showed a remarkable tendency to

affirm gay culture and pro-gay groupings, expressing respect for the LGCM and

Scanzoni and Mollenkott's *Is the Homosexual my Neighbour?*.[105] He urged

pastors to consider encouraging gays who would not abandon same sex

relationships to adopt monogamous patterns of behaviour as an 'optimum

homosexual morality'.[106] Pierson was particularly notable, however, for his use

of Moberly, primarily deploying her research to reduce the sense of threat

posed by homosexuals – if they were individuals whose sexual development had

been stunted through lack of affection then they were figures deserving of

sympathy and love, not a threat to society.

3.2.7 *Issues in Human Sexuality* and the Evangelical Consensus

In 1990 the Church of England's House of Bishops released a statement

of its position on homosexuality in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. It was not as

definitive a statement of the conservative position as evangelicals had doubtless

hoped for, but it did represent a more conservative hermeneutical approach,

with a concern to trace consistent themes and lines of continuity within

scripture and church tradition.[107] This contrasted with the hermeneutic of

suspicion employed in *Homosexual Relationships* and its tendency to see

discontinuity between biblical texts and between scripture and contemporary

life. The conclusions of *Issues in Human Sexuality* were, however, almost the

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[104] *No-Gay Areas*, 5, 19.
[105] *No-Gay Areas*, 3.
[106] *No-Gay Areas*, 15. His central argument, however, was that same-sex relationships were unfulfilling and sinful.
[107] *Issues*, 25.

same as those of *Homosexual Relationships* (which had, in turn been almost the same as those of *Sexual Offenders and Social Punishment*). Same sex relationships were seen as less than the divine intention in creation, but it was acknowledged that Christians of a homosexual orientation might make a responsible decision before God to engage in such a relationship and whilst this could not be condoned by the Church, such individuals deserved support and acceptance as mature Christian disciples.[108]

The main difference in policy came in the fact that although clergy were still not allowed to engage in homosexual relationships they were not to be required to give their resignation if they were, nor would any active attempt be made to seek such clergy out.[109] Although this might suggest a more liberal position, in practice it created an oppressive environment, instituting a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, which militated against honesty. A clergyperson in a same-sex relationship would have no action taken against them as long as they were clandestine about it, and bishops essentially promised to turn a blind eye to such relationships as long as they were not presented with direct evidence of their existence. Honesty, although explicitly praised in *Issues in Human Sexuality,* would effectively be penalised – a bishop would be obliged to take action against a clergyperson who went public with their relationship.

Issues was very clearly presented as a statement of the House of Bishop's position on homosexuality (ie it presented the policy by which bishops would operate), even if it went out of its way to highlight the fact that the topic was

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[108] Compare the wording of *Homosexual Relationships*, 53, and *Issues*, 40-41.
[109] *Issues*, 46-7.

still open for debate within the church. By contrast, the URC in the same year

published *Homosexuality: A Christian view*, declining to impose a single policy,

but arguing that homosexual activity was not inherently sinful, and the

judgements of biblical writers regarding homosexuality could not be seen as

binding on the modern church due to their ignorance of homosexuality as a

given orientation.[110] In comparison to the URC, then, the Church of England

showed a remarkable degree of resilience in its moderately conservative official

position – maintaining the same line in broad terms since the 1950s.

The publication of *Issues in Human Sexuality* came just as evangelicals

were beginning to develop a sense (as was apparent in Stott's discussion) that

homosexuality was a key issue on which a stand against liberalism must be

taken. It was around this period, in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the

divisions produced by Keele were beginning to be keenly felt. What unity

evangelicals had at this point was largely found in the products and

programmes of the entrepreneurials. It was a unity built on activism rather than

doctrine, and masked deep differences, as had been evident over the issue of

women's ordination in the Church of England. Homosexuality now appeared to

be an issue on which there was broad agreement (both amongst evangelicals

and more widely, as *Issues* had shown) in regard to the biblical position and

which could therefore act as a focus for unity.

This broad agreement required, however, that some quite distinct

differences in emphasis be harmonised. There were a spectrum of evangelical

responses between those like Moss, Watson, and Pierson, who saw the issue in

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[110] *The LGCM*, 92-4.

primarily pastoral terms and argued strongly for the church's need to repent of

homophobia, and in some cases (as with Pierson, or David Atkinson's discussion

in his 1989 *Pastoral Ethics in Practice*) would even argue for a qualified

acceptance of committed same-sex relationships as a lesser of two evils, and

those like Holloway, Lovelace and Stott, who saw the issue as inextricably

bound up in a wider struggle with liberal theology, with gays and liberals bound

together in some sort of conspiracy against the kingdom.[111] Harmonising such a

range of responses required that homosexuality as a pastoral issue be de-

emphasised so that broad agreement on the biblical position could be stressed.

Then homosexuality could be viewed as an issue primarily about acceptance of

biblical authority. This effectively became the basis for the consensus position

as a means of establishing evangelical unity.[112]

Girardian theory makes it clear that unity cannot be found in a shared

creed when faced with a crisis of undifferentiation. A shared creed simply

provides another battleground for the rivalries and violence within the group.

Instead, the single-victim mechanism leads those in crisis to finding a victim

who can be blamed for their violence. Therefore, although evangelicals saw the

consensus position as being an assertion about biblical authority and ethics

made to bring unity, in Girardian terms it must be seen primarily as a means of

marking out scapegoats for the crisis. For evangelicals (and especially Anglican

evangelicals), the scapegoats were liberals, the wolves within the fold, with

[111] David Atkinson, *Pastoral Ethics in Practice* (London: Monarch, 1989), 72-88. Note that Moss and Atkinson's books are recommended by Stott in *Issues Facing Christians Today* (2nd ed.), 364; (3rd ed.), 477;(4th ed.), 482. The continued citation in later editions (where he states it is a first order issue) is either editorial oversight or further evidence of the tension in Stott's consensus position.
[112] Bates, *A Church at War*, 89.

homosexuality the defining issue as to what made a liberal (a distinction that would increasingly cut across established party boundaries for Anglican evangelicals – marking some evangelicals out and some anglo-catholics in).[113] This perception was already widespread enough to colour the discussion in the 1988 General Synod debate already noted. This is what prompted Reform to make a position on homosexuality a matter of key doctrine in 1992. Just like the UCCF doctrinal basis, forged in the midst of the struggle with liberal evangelicals, the Reform Covenant is designed to keep the liberals out.

The growing sense that liberals were being turned into scapegoats in evangelical discussions of homosexuality was perhaps what prompted the CEEC to publish the St Andrew's Day Statement in 1995.[114] The Statement was produced by a group of theologically distinguished and moderate evangelical Anglicans in an attempt to invite a debate with moderate liberal Anglicans about the issue. The approach adopted by the Statement (which could perhaps be described as marking out certain fundamental positions that were not up for debate, and then inviting liberals to try and change the evangelical's minds on what was left) was not actually conducive to real debate about the issue, but it did demonstrate a genuine respect for and desire for unity with liberals on the part of more moderate evangelical Anglicans, a position that would become increasingly rare.[115]

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[113] Inevitably, the fact that evangelicals were uniting around a conservative position on homosexuality created the impression that the scapegoats were gays (and it is obvious that for some evangelicals this was also the case), but it was liberals rather than gays that evangelicals blamed for their crisis. I discuss homophobia in more depth in chapter 5.

[114] Timothy Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward?* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004).

[115] As O' Donovan, one of the contributors, now recognises. O'Donovan, *A Conversation waiting to begin*, 16.

Opposition to liberals elsewhere was becoming more hardline. In 1996, the LGCM held a service of thanksgiving in Southwark Cathedral. It was opposed by both ABWON and Reform, which threatened to withhold quota payments if it went ahead (a highly political use of the financial clout of the often large Anglican evangelical churches which foreshadowed later developments).[116] The evangelical speaker and writer Anne Atkins condemned the service on Radio 4's *Thought for the day*.[117]

3.2.8 The Consensus Position becomes Hardline 1 - Homosexuality as Satanic Threat

As evangelicals began to use the consensus position on homosexuality as a focus for unity and became more conscious of it as a bulwark against liberalism, there was a shift away from the more accepting pastoral approach of the past. This was most clearly apparent in John White's *Eros Redeemed*, which was a revised and expanded version of his earlier *Eros Defiled*. White was explicit that he had changed his mind on a number of areas since his earlier book, and homosexuality was one of those.[118] This was partly due to his engagement with Moberly's research, which he saw as providing clinical evidence of the possibility of healing, something he had discounted earlier, and which had prompted his more liberal stance.[119] Partly, however, it was due to a shift in his thought that affected the entire book – a thorough recasting of his

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[116] The quota is the proportion of income Anglican churches pay to the central funds of the diocese to cover the costs of ministry. Larger churches pay more to enable ministry to be provided in smaller ones.

[117] *The LGCM*, 96.

[118] John White, *Eros Redeemed* (Guildford: Eagle, 1993). Published 1993 by IVP in the US.

[119] White, *Eros Redeemed*, 179.

whole understanding of sexual morality in the light of a deeper engagement with spiritual warfare.[120]

White saw sexual sin as the key battleground in spiritual warfare - linked to witchcraft and idolatry, crippling the mission of the church and bringing all under judgement (though he was careful to state that biblically sexual sin is not regarded as worse than other sin).[121] This darkening of mood linked White's writing to a tradition of writing particularly found amongst charismatic evangelicals, which emphasised a concern about the occult and Satanism.[122]

Eros Redeemed expressed a further development of the theme of satanic threat, one which connected it to another characteristically modernist discourse – therapeutic approaches. In charismatic circles the two discourses merged, so that therapeutic concern for individuals became expressed in the language of deliverance from satanic oppression.[123] Drawing on a discussion of Romans 1:18-23, White argued that spiritual oppression expresses itself in sexual sin (in this passage, of course, homosexuality is particularly emblematic of this more general tendency), which was a sign that God had given Western culture over to judgement.[124] The deeper cause of this was a spiritual blindness, which led people to pursue their own interest instead of God's and set their judgement above his. Eventually, he warned, this path leads to an open defiance of God and setting aside of his decrees.

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[120] White, *Eros Redeemed*, 18.
[121] *White, Eros Redeemed*, 47-50.
[122] Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970); Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 3rd ed., 1999), 1st ed. 1981.
[123] A theme expressed clearly in Neil T. Anderson's, *The Bondage Breaker* (Oxford: Monarch, 2000).
[124] White, *Eros Redeemed*, 19-23.

This theological underpinning brought some powerful themes together in White's approach to homosexuality. Homosexuality was a sign of God's judgement upon the West as a culture (as was AIDS). It demonstrated the degree to which the West had become enslaved to Satan, it had links to witchcraft, was a form of idolatry, and was inextricably bound up in a downwards drift towards false teaching and the exaltation of the self and its interests and judgements. The tendency to view sexual sins lightly was likewise evidence of the spiritual bondage of believers. White had bound together liberal theology, sinful pride, homosexuality and the service of Satan. Although it was implicit to his thought that all in the West were caught up in spiritual bondage and coming under God's judgement, for anyone accepting this basic outlook (especially for straight evangelicals) gays and liberals could very easily be seen as at the least symbols of satanic oppression and defiance of God, and perhaps even active agents in that oppression. *Eros Redeemed* clearly marks them out as potential scapegoats.

3.2.9 The Consensus Position becomes Hardline 2 - Homosexuality as a Threat to Health and Society

If *Eros Redeemed* showed the influence of a new emphasis on the threat of the demonic on the issue of homosexuality, another book initially published by IVP in the US showed the influence of a rather different (but equally negative) perspective – in which the gay person was viewed through a medicalised perspective that presented them as a problem: Thomas E. Schmidt's *Straight & Narrow?* Published in 1995 in the US, its comprehensiveness led to it

swiftly becoming the highest-regarded 'serious' text on homosexuality for evangelicals in the UK.

Schmidt presented the same evangelical consensus position as Stott, but more significantly he presented the gay-liberal conspiracy in full-blown force. Positions that were the mark of more extreme conservative evangelicals like ABWON or the CFC in the UK were far more mainstream amongst the American Religious Right, and Schmidt's book brought these perspectives into the English evangelical mainstream.[125] Schmidt argued that homosexual practice, as an expression of a different way of life, actually implicitly undermined heterosexual union and the family, and that there was an ideology within the 'gay movement' that explicitly identified the heterosexual family as oppressive.[126] He presented a survey of medical and statistical evidence to argue that gay sexual practice posed serious health risks, effectively arguing that it constituted sin against the body, a distinct change from the position taken by earlier English evangelical writings.[127] The picture Schmidt painted was of gays as a threat to society, living self-destructive lives that tended towards promiscuity and had links to paedophilia.[128] Despite all this it was clear that Schmidt was aware of the dangers of homophobia, and of the failures of the church in this area, showing a shrewd awareness of the excesses of the heavily

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[125] Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 4th ed., 2010).

[126] Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?,* 48, 51, 99.

[127] Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?,* 112, 115, 122-30. His argument rested on a rather tendentious reading of research (ignoring the comparatively good sexual health of lesbians, disregarding research on a lack of psychological problems in stable homosexuals, and refusing to consider the degree to which psychological problems may be caused by social pressures.)

[128] The link to paedophilia was made both explicitly by reference to statistics and implicitly by consistently comparing homosexual behaviour to paedophilia. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?,* 62-3, 83, 108, 114-5, 166.

politicised conservative position on homosexuality in the US. He called for the church to be engaged in costly love for gays, especially those with AIDS, noting that to see them as enemies and leave them to die was to work for Satan, not Christ.[129]

Perhaps the greatest indication of Schmidt's influence on English evangelicals, and a clear demonstration of the degree to which evangelical approaches to the issue were hardening under the pressures of the crisis of undifferentiation, was the use made of Schmidt's work in Stott's third edition of *Issues Facing Christians Today* in 1999. Where he had previously simply disputed that the existence of loving same-sex relationships could justify a change in ethical stance, Stott now began to emphasise the health risks of gay sex – suggesting that any practice involving such risks was not really an expression of love, though he continued to assert that it was wrong to deny that they could be genuinely loving.[130] Also, drawing once again on Schmidt and the US psychologist Jeffrey Satinover, he cast doubt on the fidelity and longevity of same-sex relationships, suggesting that the picture presented by liberals of gay relationships operating in a manner equivalent to heterosexual marriage was mythical as gays were inherently promiscuous.[131]

Stott's third edition also introduced another shift towards an exclusivist position. For the first time he asserted that homosexuality, unlike the ordination of women, was a first-order issue.[132] It is clear from the context that Stott was not making the assertion with the same separatist edge with which it was to be

[129] Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?,* 172-4.
[130] Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today,* (3rd ed.), 403-4; (4th ed.), 465-7.
[131] Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today*, (3rd ed.), 402-3; (4th ed.), 463-4.
[132] Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today*, (3rd ed.), 400-1.

made in the All Soul's Day statement three years later. He was not claiming that those who disagree with the consensus position were not bona-fide Christians, simply that the issue was too significant to be regarded as adiaphora. His was an assertion about the significance of the issue rather than about the finality of the consensus position as a solution. Nevertheless, it appeared to represent a shift in his own thinking about the significance of homosexuality as an issue, and about what might constitute a 'first-order issue'. In 1988 he had co-authored a book called *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* with the liberal David Edwards, in which he had conceded that although denying the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection are unbiblical positions, they did not constitute grounds for asserting that someone was not Christian, as this was God's judgement to make.[133] Both of these doctrines are positions which are thoroughly biblical and have centuries of tradition behind them (featuring in the creeds), but Stott asserted that it was personal faith in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour alone that was truly essential. A decade later, however, Stott suggested that adherence to the consensus position on homosexuality was a first order issue because it was based on the Bible and tradition.

3.2.10 The Popularisation of the Consensus Position

Both White and Schmidt were writing in a US context, however influential their writings may have been on evangelicals in Britain. Stott, however widely respected, was read mainly by the more committed evangelicals. In 1994, however, the most popular and influential English

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[133] John Stott and David Edwards, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 227-8.

evangelical leader of the 1990s addressed the issue.[134] Nicky Gumbel, author of the massively influential Alpha course, addressed the controversial issue of homosexuality in his follow-up book *Searching Issues*.[135] The book has been continually in print since publication, and in addition the same material was re-released by Kingsway as a separate booklet *What is the Christian attitude to homosexuality?* in 2002. Gumbel's Alpha Course was a classic example of evangelical entrepreneurialism, cautiously-open conservative in flavour, and deliberately designed to present a mainstream evangelical position. Gumbel presented the consensus position, explicitly referencing Stott for his understanding of the biblical material and White for his approach to pastoral issues.[136] He nowhere suggested that these interpretations were disputed, suggesting that the only key issue for Christians was whether they followed scripture (implicitly asserting that this was a first-order issue): 'Jesus took the Scriptures as his authority and if Jesus is our Lord, then we must follow him.'[137] Gumbel's presentation of the consensus position in such an unqualified fashion was in line with the whole Alpha style, which tended towards a simple and direct presentation by the speaker followed by an opportunity to question and debate. However, it also suggests that by 1994, the consensus position was so well-established that evangelical unity on the subject could be assumed and the consensus position presented simply as 'what the Bible says.' By the 1990s,

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[134] Christian Research figures suggest that 3.08 Million people in the UK have attended an Alpha course (which if run according to Alpha's guidelines must be based closely on Gumbel's material) since 1993. 'Facts and Figures', *The Alpha Website*, http://uk-england.alpha.org/facts%20and%20figures (10th June 2012).

[135] Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994).

[136] *Searching Issues*, 92, 88.

[137] *Searching Issues*, 82.

evangelicals had re-written their history to gloss over the earlier diversity of views.

By the mid 1990s then, the consensus position was functioning as an evangelical shibboleth – a first-order issue of faith that could determine whether someone was a faithful Christian or had been led astray by sinful pride and the machinations of an insidious gay-liberal satanic conspiracy. The affirming tone and pastoral outlook of evangelical writings of the 1970s had been largely forgotten. The consensus position on homosexuality was a gospel truth to be defended against a world that did not wish to hear it. In Girardian terms it was central to the mimetic crisis of undifferentiation within evangelicalism, and especially Anglican evangelicalism – marking out the *pharmakoi*, those who were potential sacrifices for the good of the evangelical community in a time of crisis. For an evangelical, particularly an Anglican evangelical, to declare that they questioned the consensus position was to separate oneself from the crowd – to stand before them as an individual and potential scapegoat.

3.2.11 *Strangers and Friends* – the Evangelical Consensus Challenged

As the 1990s progressed, gays and gay culture continued to meet greater acceptance within the cultural mainstream. Although Section 28 wasn't to be repealed until 2003, it was clear that the tide was turning in government policy too. In 1994 the age of male homosexual consent was lowered to 16. There was high visibility for gays in the mass media. The 1990s was also marked by a number of high-profile clergy being outed or demonstrating a sympathy with liberal pro-gay positions. In 1994 Michael Turnbull was enthroned as Bishop of

Durham despite it emerging that he had been cautioned for cottaging in 1968. In

the same year the gay campaigning group OutRage! engaged in a campaign to

forcibly 'out' bishops, and forced then Bishop of London David Hope to declare

his sexuality to be a 'grey area.'[138] In 1996 Derek Rawcliffe, Honorary Assistant

Bishop in the diocese of Ripon, was dismissed for publicly conducting a service

of same sex blessing. In 1997, John Austin Baker, retired former Bishop of

Salisbury and main author of *Issues in Human Sexuality*, disowned it as an

incoherent fudge.

More disturbingly for those holding to the evangelical consensus

position, evangelicals were coming out, arguing for liberal theological stances,

and claiming they were still compatible with evangelicalism. In 1999 Roy

Clements, EA council member and minister of Eden Baptist church in

Cambridge, came out as gay, separating from his wife to start a relationship with

another man. He was disowned by the movement as a whole, his teaching

rendered suspect, his books and tapes withdrawn from church bookshops.[139] In

1995, Michael Vasey, a tutor at the evangelical theological college Cranmer Hall,

published *Strangers and Friends*. He was a prominent Anglican evangelical and

member of the evangelical group on General Synod. He had 'come out' publicly

in 1989. Primarily a liturgist, Vasey had published a Grove Booklet in 1991 that

suggested that Jesus would have been at home with gays and that evangelicals

risked losing touch with their biblical roots by condemning them, though he

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138 Gill, *The LGCM*, 209. Hope was later that year to become Archbishop of York.
139 Stephen Bates, 'No room in the church', *The Guardian* [September 20, 2003],
http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/sep/20/religion.world1 (November 3 2009).

didn't directly challenge the consensus.[140] *Strangers and Friends* was a direct

challenge. Commissioned by the patronage secretary of the evangelical Church

Pastoral Aid Society (who was then refused permission to endorse it), it became

emblematic of the threat of a liberal 'enemy within' for some evangelicals.[141] It

was significant enough that it was to be referenced and discussed at multiple

points by Stott in the third edition of *Issues Facing Christians Today* four years

later, with Stott describing it as a 'sincere but misguided attempt… to combine

evangelical faith with homosexual advocacy.'[142]

Vasey wrote as an evangelical, yet systematically undermined the

foundations of the consensus position. His approach was deconstructionist –

problematising key terms in the debate and arguing that sexuality, sexual acts,

and family structure were all cultural products, necessitating a far more

carefully nuanced approach to the issues than the consensus position generally

allowed for. He questioned a simplistic understanding of 'homosexuality',

suggesting that what was really being debated was a certain cultural

combination of particular sexual behaviours and affections, which assumed

different patterns in different cultures (sometimes not sexual ones).[143] Vasey

critiqued Moberly (and by implication evangelical positions based on her and

similar medical and psychological studies) for a lack of attention to the crucial

importance of this cultural dimension of homosexuality.[144] His basic assumption

was that all sexualities are fallen and sinful to certain degrees, as are all

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[140] Michael Vasey, *Evangelical Christians and Gay Rights* (Nottingham: Grove books, 1991).
[141] Trevor Beeson, *Priests and Prelates: The Daily Telegraph clerical obituaries* (London: Continuum, 2004), 194-5.
[142] Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (3rd ed.), 395. Stott's generous refusal to cast doubt on Vasey's sincerity or evangelical credentials here is notable.
[143] Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 71-112.
[144] Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 104.

understandings of gender, friendships, and means of expressing and receiving affection. This assumption of universal sinfulness was key to any evangelical approach, and had been acknowledged within the consensus position, but Vasey argued that an understanding of the disordered nature of all human sexuality should lead to humility and a lack of judgementalism on the part of straight evangelicals.[145] He called for a 'grace-led' approach to ethics that would show a pastoral pragmatism within an understanding that sanctification is an ongoing process: 'a sort of penitent tolerance of some imperfection in what we call sexual matters', showing tolerance and respect for the choices made by others in good conscience and an openness to the insights and challenges they might bring.[146] He was very clear that, evangelical rhetoric notwithstanding, the gay community was a very vulnerable one in need of support, citing official statistics to back up the claim that violent homophobia was a fact of life, and that evangelicals had often been amongst those acting in homophobic ways.[147]

Although many of Vasey's points were simply restatements of the more pastoral emphasis that had marked evangelical approaches in the 1970s, the book now constituted a direct challenge to the consensus position. He declared that not only was homosexuality not a first-order issue, there was no clear correct position on the issue at all. It was a deceptively modest position – Vasey did not seek to make a case for committed same-sex relationships being regarded as equivalent to heterosexual marriage, but his position, if accepted,

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[145] Indeed Stott makes the striking point that we are all sexual deviants in God's eyes. *Issues Facing Christians Today* (2nd ed.), 337.
[146] Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 61, 161, 212-37.
[147] Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 172, 175.

would in fact potentially legitimise evangelical tolerance even of promiscuity and 'open' relationships.

The response to the book was a clear sign that the diversity and flexibility of an earlier generation of evangelicals could no longer be tolerated. The EA mounted a campaign against the book. Mark Bonnington and Bob Fyall, who were the biblical studies tutors at Cranmer Hall, published their Grove booklet on homosexuality a year later. Although not explicitly written to refute Vasey, its pastoral section does just that - stressing that non-judgemental acceptance is cheap grace, and a biblical understanding of grace and sanctification involves commitment to repentance and reformation of life.[148] However, there were those whose reactions were rather more extreme than colleagues disagreeing with a position sincerely held. Reform demanded that Vasey be sacked, and when he was not, 'blacklisted' Cranmer Hall, refusing to endorse it as an appropriate place at which 'their' ordinands might be trained. The presence of Vasey made the whole college (which included Bonnington and Fyall, whose adherence to the consensus position was clear) a dangerous and impure place.[149] *Strangers and Friends,* like the Roy Clements affair, dramatically demonstrated the single victim mechanism at work, attempting (unsuccessfully) to dispel the threat of undifferentiation.[150]

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[148] Bonnington and Fyall, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 15.
[149] Andrew Carey "As eye see it: We know what 'listening' means in the modern Anglican lexicon", originally published in Church of England Newspaper, [October 5th, 2006] http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=4806#.T0ezGFFy_zI (accessed February 2012).
[150] The connection drawn between Vasey's *Strangers and Friends* and issues of Anglican evangelical identity is obvious in the publication of Melvin Tinker (ed.), *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1995).

The sense that the evangelical community and its consensus position were under threat grew throughout the 1990s. In 1998, the EA released a statement on homosexuality through their newly-formed theology group ACUTE, titled *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*.[151] The statement showed signs of the pressures now being placed on the consensus position – with progressives and exclusivists pulling in different directions on the issue, the statement contained aspects of both positions, attempting to hold them together. The preamble frankly acknowledged the division amongst evangelicals on the issue, even though it downplayed the degree of disagreement, noting that the vast majority held to a single consensus position.[152] Aspects of the exclusivist position were clear in the way that blame for evangelical division was very swiftly shifted onto an 'ever more powerful gay lobby' in wider society 'which by skilful use of the media and clear long-term strategy has won significant support for its cause.'[153] The 'gay lobby' was described as constituting part of a cultural movement 'away from absolutes based on biblical revelation, to judgements based on self-determination, self-fulfillment and individual rights.'[154] Clearly the myth of the powerful liberal-gay conspiracy was being affirmed here, and linked explicitly to a negative evaluation of the 1960s counter-culture, with instances of homophobia and injustices and discrimination against gays reported in the media being seen as inflated

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[151] Evangelical Alliance, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* (London: Acute, 1998).
[152] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, ix. A survey the EA had conducted in 1997 found that 96% of EA member groups held to the consensus position. Shockingly this suggested that 4% - 1 in 20 of EA member groups did not, yet still considered themselves EA members. The percentage amongst evangelicals who did not consider themselves EA members might be even higher. This was glossed over in the report.
[153] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, lx.
[154] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 2.

attempts to gain public sympathy.[155] By contrast, evangelicals were seen as genuinely vulnerable:

> even measured Christian opponents of homosexual activity risk being branded as intolerant reactionaries. In certain work contexts, they may now also conceivably be disciplined on the grounds of sexual discrimination... Christian employers may even be subject to prosecution if they refuse to engage active homosexuals.[156]

In its discussion of the scientific material, it suggested that '...serious research into the origins of homosexuality has sometimes been distorted for propaganda purposes', going on to posit that exclusively homosexual behaviour was rare, and possibly transitory.[157] This nuancing of the scientific evidence allowed the report to imply that what evangelicals were facing was not in fact an issue of how to respond to a defined group suffering discrimination (who may not exist, or did so in far smaller numbers than was supposed), but an issue of how to respond to a large and powerful liberal conspiracy seeking to normalise sinful patterns of sexual behaviour.

Aspects of progressive approaches were also present in the report's acknowledgement that Christians had often given way to homophobia in misunderstanding homosexuality – referencing the argument that a majority of paedophiles are gay (an argument it carefully debunks).[158] The report's recommendations included a repudiation of homophobia and regret for the hurt caused to gays and lesbians by the church. It recommended that although

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[155] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 4.
[156] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 4. As Girard argues, in the modern world the only way to justify persecution is to identify those being persecuted as persecutors themselves.
[157] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 23.
[158] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 29.

sexually active homosexual relationships should not be seen as acceptable,

sexually active gays should be accepted within the church in the expectation

that they will change, though public promotion of such activities would merit

discipline.[159]

3.2.12 The Consensus Fracturing

At the turn of the millennium, the consensus position was under serious

threat. After its emergence and consolidation in the 1980s it had come under

bifurcatory pressures in the 1990s. Exclusivists increasingly treated it as a first-

order issue and linked its use to a belief in a gay-liberal conspiracy, tending to

downplay pastoral concern for gays, and occasionally lapsing into homophobic

statements. Progressives became increasingly dissatisfied with the consensus

position as an imposed 'solution' to a complex problem, and attempted to re-

emphasise pastoral concerns, in particular a concern about homophobia. It was

becoming increasingly difficult to hold evangelicals together as the

entrepreneurials faltered and the divisions produced by Keele became far too

significant to be bridged by moderate and centrist statements by cautiously-

open conservatives like Stott and Gumbel. In 2001, the evangelical charity

Courage, which had offered support to gays and lesbians from the consensus

position since 1988, changed their position, proclaiming that over a decade's

worth of experience in supporting gay people had convinced them that same sex

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[159] *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, 34.

partnerships should not be condemned.[160] The next year, the EA asked them to resign their membership.[161]

In such a polarised atmosphere, the consensus position came under increasing stress, being presented with either a more exclusivist or a more progressive spin. Much influential writing now came from the US. Stanley J. Grenz's *Welcoming but not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* was a presentation of the consensus position with a rather progressive spin to it.[162] Grenz was an ethicist and systematician rather than a biblical scholar, and made an argument broadly for the consensus position on that basis.[163] However, in setting out a number of Christian positions he explicitly accepted that those arguing for more liberal positions are Christian. He also argued that the church as a community of sinners cannot exclude gays, that homosexuality cannot be singled out as a bar to ordination, and that Christians should work to help gays have equal legal rights.[164] Obviously not all progressives would find themselves in agreement with Grenz, but he was very clearly taking a stance against exclusivist interpretations. He explicitly rejected the myth of the gay-liberal conspiracy, emphasised many pastoral concerns (in particular being very sensitive to the issue of the exclusion of gays), and implicitly denied that homosexuality was a first-order issue.

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[160] Jeremy Marks, 'A time for Change: New Developments at Courage' [2002, revised October 2006], http://www.courage.org.uk/articles/article.asp?id=5 (October 7, 2009).
[161] Roy Clements, 'Cast Out' [April 2002], http://www.courage.org.uk/articles/article.asp?id=139 (October 7, 2009).
[162] Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Grenz was brought to a wider readership by being extensively referenced in *Some Issues*, 84, 88-9, 125, 128, 150-1, 155, 324.
[163] Grenz argued that same-sex erotic relationships are unnatural, and best understood as sexualised friendships.
[164] Richard B. Hays adopted a similar position in his *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). He was also referenced in *Some Issues*, 117-8, 137-8, 143-4.

A more exclusivist edge to the consensus position was found in American biblical scholar Robert Gagnon, whose *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* was published in 2001.[165] The book was really aimed at an academic readership, but found a wider non-specialist readership by being recommended by more conservative churches, as well as by its extensive use in *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*.[166] (I found a copy on the church bookstall of Jesmond Parish Church in 2005). Like Schmidt before him, Gagnon made considerable use of scientific evidence, drawing on it to suggest that homosexuality posed a threat to society, to children, and to gays themselves, arguing that it was strongly linked to paedophilia and promiscuity, and that it undermined gender norms.[167] Finally, he once again asserted the existence of a gay-liberal conspiracy working to conceal these facts, and argued that this powerful conspiracy was acting to persecute conservatives.[168] He called for sexually active gays to be viewed as 'persons engaged in persistent, unrepentant acts of immoral behaviour'.[169]

It was in Gagnon's application of the consensus position to church discipline that the real difference became clear between the more exclusivist understanding he represented and the more progressive approach represented by Grenz. Grenz argued that sexually active gays should simply be excluded from leadership positions. Gagnon argued that sexually active gays who were unrepentant should be excluded from the church altogether (whether lay or ordained).[170] To hold church office, they should not only refrain from

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[165] Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).
[166] *Some Issues*, 127-8, 134-6, 145-6, 334.
[167] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 479-85.
[168] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 483.
[169] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 489.
[170] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 490.

homosexual acts, they should also be someone who 'does not endorse homosexual behaviour, and gives every evidence of wanting to remain committed to the Bible's and church's teaching [the consensus position] on homosexuality'.[171] Indeed, Gagnon was so convinced of the self-evident nature of the consensus position, that he suggested in conclusion that there was no meaningful debate left to be had, and all that was left was the need to respond faithfully – the same seemingly pre-critical argument presented by Gumbel.[172]

The bifurcatory influence of exclusivists and progressives on the more moderate was clear in the fourth edition of Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today*.[173] This edition featured a significant rewrite of the homosexuality section, reflecting competing influences on cautiously-open conservatives from both progressives and exclusivists. The biblical material remained largely unchanged, but (seemingly under implicit progressive influence) the tone of acceptance of gays and gay identity was strengthened throughout. For the first time, the reality of persecution of gays was spelled out – with reference to countries where same-sex relationships were punished by death and gays were seen as less than human. There was an implicit assumption that Christians should be concerned to protect the human rights of gays.[174] However, this progressive influence was almost completely undermined by the rewrite of the discussion of AIDS under exclusivist influence. Ever since including reference to

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[171] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 491.
[172] Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 493. (This despite the fact it had taken him 400 pages of close argument to establish the position.).
[173] Stott and McCloughry, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th ed.), 449.
[174] Stott and McCloughry, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th ed.), 445.

AIDS in his discussion in the second edition, Stott had clearly stated that AIDS

was 'not a specifically "gay plague".'[175] Now he changed this assertion, claiming

that new scientific evidence suggested that in the West male same-sex

encounters are central to the spread of AIDS, and that the close links between

the spread of AIDS and male-male sex suggest that

> although we may not be able to say that HIV/AIDS is God's
> judgement on any particular individual, we can say that if a society
> tolerates wrongdoing and even celebrates it by calling 'evil good and
> good evil' then it must face up to the consequences of doing so
> (Romans 1:18-32).[176]

This theological gloss (alongside the description of the health risks of gay sex,

assertion of gay promiscuity, and statement that homosexuality was a first-

order issue – all introduced in the third edition) suggested that the persecuted

gays whose human rights evangelicals should be defending were in fact

diseased, immoral, and a threat to the health of society, that society's tolerance

of their sexual behaviour was bringing divine judgement upon us, and that

maintaining a firm line on the issue was of creedal importance. The pressure

that the consensus position was coming under from both sides had strained it

almost to breaking point. The crisis of undifferentiation made it almost

impossible to maintain a moderate stance.

In contrast to Stott's attempt to maintain a central position, some

cautiously-open conservatives seemed to be reaffirming a pastoral concern for

gays, perhaps under the influence of progressives. Alex Tyree's *Walking with*

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[175] Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (2nd ed.), 352; (3rd ed.), 407.
[176] Stott and McCloughry, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th ed.), 466.

Gay Friends, published by IVP, was written by a gay woman who held to the

consensus position. Despite affirming the possibility of healing, she

acknowledged it had not been her experience, and that sexual abstinence,

despite its difficulties, was therefore the faithful Christian response.[177] Tyree's

concern to present the struggles of gay people honestly led her to challenge

many of the positions advocated by exclusivists. She picked up Stott's point that

all human beings have a distorted sexuality, so that this should not be seen as

something marking out gays uniquely, and drew on Moberley to assert that

homosexuality was rarely a conscious choice.[178] Moberley also led her to a view

that homosexuality was a symptom of far deeper unmet needs, so that it was a

mistake for the church to view sexual abstinence and withdrawal from gay

culture as the solution to it. Gay culture helped enable gays to create an

affirmative identity (so asking someone to leave it risked removing that

affirming identity). Rather, genuine love and compassion for gays should lead

the church to reform itself to support them.[179] Failure to love and accept gay

people as they were (rather than as they should be) could cause massive harm.

Whilst arguing for evangelicals to share their understanding of

homosexuality honestly with gay friends, Tyree condemned the withholding of

acceptance from (or even worse 'excommunicating') those who could not or

would not hold to the morality the church wanted, arguing that Jesus's approach

was to love people to repentance.[180] She recognized the reality of homophobia,

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[177] Alex Tyree, *Walking with Gay Friends: A journey of informed compassion* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007).
[178] Tyree, *Walking with Gay Friends*, 58.
[179] Tyree, *Walking with Gay Friends*, 53-9, 65.
[180] Tyree, *Walking with Gay Friends*, 117-22.

and the church's culpability in it, and was particularly critical of medicalised

exclusivist rhetoric that suggested that same sex relationships were unfulfilling

or dangerous, seeing it as both untrue in many cases and irrelevant (in that it is

unnecessary to assert that the alternative to God's will 'doesn't work' in order to

call Christians to faithfully follow it.)[181] Without becoming progressive and

challenging the adequacy of the consensus position, Tyree showed a cautiously-

open conservative position becoming more critical of exclusivist positions.

The degree to which exclusivist approaches had become more hard-line

and greatly influenced by the more polarised sexuality politics of the US was

dramatically illustrated by *God, Gays and the Church*.[182] This book, edited by Lisa

Nolland, Chris Sugden and Sarah Finch (all closely associated with Anglican

Mainstream – Sugden was its Executive Secretary), was produced in response to

an acrimonious debate on homosexuality in the Church of England's General

Synod in 2007, in which exclusivists felt that their position had not been heard.

It was essentially a compendium of resources (almost all from the US, and from

a variety of conservative sources) for debates on homosexuality. It included

testimonies of ex-gays, extensive extracts from US psychiatrists Jeffrey

Satinover and Joseph Nicolosi, both of whom were involved in corrective

treatment for homosexuality, and a section by Robert Gagnon.

Several key points were asserted throughout. First, the reality of a 'gay'

identity was denied, which led to the use of awkward terms like 'non-gay

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[181] Tyree, *Walking with Gay Friends*, 38, 44-5.
[182] Lisa Nolland, Chris Sugden and Sarah Finch (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church: Human sexuality and Experience in Christian Thinking* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2008).

homosexual'.[183] Second, homosexuality was seen as a first-order issue, about

which the key facts were now clear, meaning that disagreement was indicative

of faithlessness.[184] Finally, gay culture was presented as inherently

promiscuous, with several contributors declaring that lifelong and exclusive

same-sex partnerships analogous to marriage were mythical even amongst gay

Christians, because most gays understand occasional promiscuity to be

compatible with a 'committed' relationship.[185] Lisa Nolland suggested that

liberals were not only deliberately deceptive on this point, many of them only

advocated same-sex unions as a means of attracting mainstream support for gay

rights. In reality, they saw promiscuity as morally acceptable, and marriage as

oppressive, and were actively seeking to undermine marriage as an

institution.[186] This degree of cynicism was leagues away from Stott's assertion

that 'no responsible homosexual person (whether Christian or not) was

advocating promiscuous "one-night stands."'[187] Despite signs of exclusivist

influence, Stott remained some distance to the left of Nolland et al.

The position of English progressives at the end of our period is harder to

judge (not least because their conviction that homosexuality is a second-order

issue legitimised a wide range of views.) One strand of progressive evangelical

responses was represented by Andrew Marin's *Love is an Orientation*, published

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[183] Joseph Nicolosi, "Post-Gay: The primacy of affect: A psychotherapeutic approach", 89-97, in Nolland et al. (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church*.
[184] Edith M. Humphrey, "'One of these things is not like the others': Women's ordination, homoeroticism and faithfulness", 139-148, in Nolland et al. (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church*.
[185] Nolland et al. (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church*, 11, 65-73, 176-186, 201-211, 229-231.
[186] Lisa Nolland, "Gay Wednesday's 'Gay Pain'", 176-87, in Nolland et al. (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church*.
[187] Stott & McCloughrey, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th ed.), 446. Stott's comments are made despite his apparent acceptance of the validity of the research suggesting gays were inherently promiscuous.

by IVP in the US in 2009, but influential on evangelicals in the UK.[188] Marin was an evangelical committed to evangelistic outreach to the gay community, and wrote to encourage evangelicals to set aside preconceptions and combative debates. He was deliberately non-prescriptive in his approach, recognising that discussion was unhelpfully locked into closed questions and blind alleys that militated against love and genuine relationship between gays and Christians. Marin recognised that there were three standard options presented to gay Christians: a sexually active embracing of a gay Christian identity, a reorientation to a straight identity, or a celibate lifestyle. Feeling that all of these were mistaken, he advocated a 'fourth way' for gays that focused not on sex but on God, setting no expectations as to what that lifestyle might mean.[189] He grounded this in a biblical understanding of the unconditional and committed love of God and the sort of open-ended discussions about faith that characterised Jesus' relationships. Essentially Marin's argument was for a provisional attitude of charitable acceptance towards the gay lifestyle in the cause of the gospel.[190]

This missional focus acted to undermine many exclusivist assumptions, as Marin insisted on gay identification of behaviour and identity being taken seriously (thus rendering 'love the sinner, hate the sin' meaningless and hurtful) and denied the importance, love, and effectiveness of demanding adherence to a

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[188] Andrew P. Marin, *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009). The book had a forward by Brian McLaren, the prominent American progressive evangelical, and Andrew Goddard of Fulcrum commended it strongly in his review on the Fulcrum website, http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=456.
[189] Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 102-3. In this respect, his position is remarkably reminiscent of Vasey's, albeit being rooted in evangelical missional pragmatism rather than theoretical argument.
[190] Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 107-10, 179-82.

set code of behaviour in church members on the grounds that Christians were not called to judge others but to love them.[191] He derived this last principle from Billy Graham, a clear sign that his position was being explicitly claimed as a mainstream evangelical one.

By the end of our period, then, exclusivists and progressives were pulling strongly in different directions. Exclusivists were presenting homosexuality as emblematic of the moral decline of society, at the vanguard of forces of secularism and moral permissiveness, the acceptance of which, to any degree, was to surrender to a liberal conspiracy that would betray the gospel. Progressives were presenting homosexuality as emblematic of the need to respond to contemporary culture with acceptance and love, standing against oppression and bringing the truth of the gospel. For both, this stance represented a costly expression of faithfulness, walking the way of the cross following the guidance of scripture. Both stances were therefore characteristically evangelical, representing alternate forms of modernist biblical-crucicentric evangelicalism. Cautiously-open conservatives, who represented the mainstream of English evangelicalism, were increasingly unable to contain the two extremes within a consensus position.

3.3 Some Provisional Conclusions

This survey of popular evangelical literature over the period 1960-2010 demonstrates the way in which the understanding and presentation of homosexuality as an issue has been shaped by the crisis within evangelicalism

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[191] Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 46, 108, 142-60.

identified in chapter 2. It has been my contention that shifts in evangelical approaches to ethical issues like homosexuality cannot be entirely explained as Hunter argues by reference to slowly crumbling evangelical resistance to modernity. Evangelical engagement with the issue of homosexuality, far from expressing resistance to modernity actually expresses evangelicalism's embracing of the modernist cultural mood – with the post-Keele modernist evangelicals (progressives, exclusivists and cautiously-open conservatives) choosing to attempt to transform the church and wider society rather than existing in a separatist ghetto.

Hunter's approach is also deficient in that he does not examine the degree to which evangelicalism itself is not a single cohesive tradition, but consists of different traditions which are in complex relationships with each other and with wider Christian traditions. Thus evangelicalism changes not only through a dialogue with modernity but also through its own internal dialogue (which may itself be a dialogue between different appropriations of the modern). Key to any understanding of shifts in evangelical approaches to homosexuality is the fact that the basic biblical understanding of the issue within mainstream evangelicalism (point 1 of the consensus position) has not changed significantly throughout the period, yet despite this the pastoral and ethical implications drawn from this biblical understanding have undergone a considerable evolution. These shifts in approach are linked to internal changes within evangelicalism, which can be linked to the developing crisis of undifferentiation.

Evangelicalism in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting the modernist legacy of Keele, expressed a modernist (rather than pre-modern) resistance to the permissive society, seeking to influence and transform from within rather than fleeing into a ghetto. Indeed, it was this engagement with wider society that forced the identification of homosexuality as an issue with which evangelicals should concern themselves. The pastoral focus of the earliest writings meant that the issue was initially defined as an ethical question for gay evangelicals and those trying to support them.

By the 1980s, as the conservative evangelical hegemony fractured, proving unable post-Keele to find a focus for evangelical unity in doctrine, the sense of danger from a creeping liberalism grew. Evangelical identity was threatened by the growing crisis of undifferentiation, and homosexuality became identified as a site of apologetic engagement with liberalism in the church and society. The issue became defined as one of biblical faithfulness and the need to defend against a liberal and permissive cultural mood that would undermine both church and society. In this context a consensus as to the evangelical position was established, with John Stott giving its defining statement. As the evangelical crisis of undifferentiation became focused around homosexuality as an issue, apologetic engagement became transformed into the drawing of the boundaries of evangelical identity. The consensus position became a shibboleth of evangelical identity, demarcating the boundary between evangelical and liberal.

The rise of the entrepreneurial evangelicals in the 1990s led to the consensus position becoming popularised in a pre-packaged form through the

Alpha course, with the subtleties and ambiguities left out in favour of a simple approach. The influence of the charismatic movement on the conversionist-activist axis of evangelicalism with its emphasis on spiritual warfare led to a hardening of the stance on homosexuality, which was sometimes identified as emblematic of a satanic threat to society. A similar hardening of the consensus position happened within the biblicist-crucicentric axis, under the influence of American writings presenting a medicalised understanding that set homosexuality within the context of a cultural battle between the faithful and a gay-liberal conspiracy. This hardening of the consensus position, including Reform's moves to formally adopt it as a marker of authentic evangelical identity, defining it as a first-order issue, caused progressives to react against it, questioning it increasingly publicly (as happened with Vasey's *Strangers and Friends*) and seeking to push evangelicals to take a stronger public stance against homophobia. From 2000, as entrepreneurial efforts to secure evangelical unity began to fail, the widening divisions between exclusivists and progressives became more apparent. Central figures like Stott found it harder to articulate the consensus position in a form that would secure agreement from all, and became increasingly marginal.

This history makes it clear that the consensus position (understood as both understanding of scripture and application in a particular set of ethical and pastoral stances) is of relatively recent origin, despite rhetoric that it represents the received tradition of the church.[192] As recently as 1980, David Holloway (who was arguing that legal acceptance of homosexuality would undermine

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[192] Its recent origins do not, of course, prevent it from being a genuine contemporary expression of a traditional stance.

society) was content to be published alongside David Watson, who was arguing that the church urgently needed to repent of homophobia, and that Christians should campaign for homosexual equality. [193] It is the product of and in itself expressive of a modernist evangelicalism, not a cultural relic of a Romantic, Enlightened or pre-modern past. All the current evangelical positions have formed under the pressure of the crisis of undifferentiation within evangelicalism itself, with the exclusivist position showing signs of being constructed as a defensive reaction to the perceived threat of a gay-liberal conspiracy, and the progressive position showing signs of being constructed as a defensive reaction to exclusivist attempts to impose a single evangelical identity.

I turn now to put evangelical writings on homosexuality in a deeper theological setting, situating them within different evangelical traditions of spirituality. In doing so, I will demonstrate that evangelical approaches to homosexuality (and sexuality more broadly) are intimately connected to evangelical approaches to holiness, and that these too have been affected by cultural change and the crisis of undifferentiation.

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[193] Holloway, *Homosexuality and the Church*, 106, 132, 140, 152.

Chapter 4

Holiness in Late Modernity - An Examination of English Evangelical Traditions of Spirituality

...pursuing the debate in the acrimonious spirit that has so far characterized Anglican intercourse on this subject is a greater sin than engaging in homosexual intercourse itself...Even if one regards homosexual practice as immoral, the attention, time, energy (not to mention money) devoted to this issue by anti-gay campaigners is indicative of a deeply disproportionate understanding of Christian morality.

- Andrew Linzey[1]

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, I examined evangelical writings on homosexuality, writings which acted to mark out gays and liberals as a class of *pharmakoi*: potential victims, of which Jeffrey John was one. I demonstrated the way in which they were formed under the pressures of the evangelical crisis of undifferentiation. In this chapter, I will situate those writings within wider evangelical traditions of spirituality. I will demonstrate that these writings are best understood not as expressions of an evangelical obsession with one particular issue, but as consistent expressions of deeper evangelical traditions of spirituality. To the extent then, that evangelical writings reveal a scandalised understanding of homosexuality, they also reveal a spirituality that has become scandalised.

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[1] Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker (eds.), *Gays and the future of Anglicanism: Responses to the Windsor Report* (Winchester: O Books, 2005), xxxii.

The assertion of Linzey above, that evangelicals are disproportionately focused on sex, is not uncommon, but misunderstands the nature of the distortion that has occurred within evangelical spirituality. The fact is that evangelicals simply reflect the wider cultural prominence given to sex and sexuality. This may mean paying disproportionate attention to sex and sexuality, but this is hardly something unique to evangelicals.[2] Indeed, the gay identity itself can be seen as an expression of the disproportionate cultural significance given to sex and sexuality, an expression whose legitimacy evangelicals are notorious for denying, suggesting that in many ways they seek to resist according undue prominence to sex and sexuality.[3] Evangelicals have a heightened concern with sexual ethics simply because contemporary culture has a heightened concern with sex and sexuality.

The sociologist Anthony Giddens argues plausibly that the underlying reasons for the cultural prominence of sex and sexuality are the way in which they are deeply implicated in wider cultural movements – the privatisation of sexuality and the transformation of intimacy to become a key component of identity.[4] Giddens demonstrates the way in which modernity is increasingly moving towards an acceptance of a fully privatised plastic sexuality and romantic love as the basis of pure relationships. This involves the freeing of love and sex from reproduction and sexual power politics, and has deep implications for gender roles. Giddens' understanding here implies that modernity is more univocal than my analysis suggests, however. Evangelicals are engaged in a

[2] As Girard argues, 'the vast importance attributed to sexuality…is, after all, a modern and Western phenomenon.' *VS,* 232.
[3] St Andrew's Day statement, Application I, in Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward?*, 7-8.
[4] Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, 174-80.

dialogue with modernity in this area as much as any other, and do so as participants in and shapers of modernity, not as outsiders. Thus evangelical discussions of sexual ethics tend to demonstrate a willingness to accommodate some aspects of privatised sexuality and pure relationships (contraception, sexual relationships chosen by the individuals concerned on the basis of romantic love, sexual relationships as a location of intimacy and identity) whilst seeking to challenge others (promiscuity, homosexuality, and in some cases gender roles).

It is by no means clear that the movement towards the ideal of completely pure relationships and fully plastic sexuality is an inexorable part of modernity. Understandings of relationships, intimacy and identity are a key area of dialogue within modernity, with homosexuality, as Giddens identifies, being a focal point of such dialogue. In seeking to resist certain aspects of the movement towards plastic sexuality and pure relationship, modernist evangelicals are acting as modernists and speaking into that dialogue, not acting as an anomalous group of pre-moderns somehow outside of modernity seeking to resist it.

So, having found the argument that evangelicals are disproportionately focused on sex to be misleading, in this chapter I argue that the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality has deeper roots in evangelical spirituality. It is not simply evangelical understandings of sex that have become distorted by exposure to scandal, but more basic evangelical understandings of sin and holiness. The different approaches to homosexuality I identified within different traditions in chapter 3 reflect different traditions of spirituality. Progressives

and exclusivists are not simply evangelicals with different sexual ethics. Increasingly, they understand sin, holiness and discipleship in different ways. I will therefore trace the history of evangelical spirituality across our period, explaining the different approaches to sin and holiness that have developed, and showing the ways in which these traditions have had a formative role on evangelical approaches to homosexuality.

4.2 Evangelical Holiness Traditions

The period 1960-2010 was one of significant change in English evangelical spirituality, mirroring the other changes already discussed in chapter 2. At the beginning of our period, the dominant evangelical spirituality was the Romantic Keswick holiness tradition, which had eclipsed the earlier Calvinist tradition. The Wesleyan tradition had been in long-term decline for some time and was largely insignificant by 1960. Around the 1960s, however, J.I. Packer and Martyn Lloyd-Jones encouraged a revival of interest in the Puritans and their Calvinist theology, which prompted a restoration of the Calvinist tradition. Keswick had broadened as it became dominant, losing its distinctive teaching on sanctification, with the annual conference becoming little more than a venue for high-level biblical teaching.[5]Also at this time, the charismatic movement emerged with its own distinctive spirituality that borrowed from both Wesleyan and Keswick sources. [6]

By the end of our period, then, the historians David Bebbington and Ian Randall identify two active holiness traditions of significance, Calvinist and

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[5] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 72, 90.
[6] Mark Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit* (London: DLT, 2006), 92.

charismatic.[7] These traditions can fairly easily be related to Warner's

categorisation of different traditions within English evangelicalism as discussed

in Chapter 2. The Calvinist tradition is predominantly associated with the

biblicist-crucicentric axis, and the charismatic with the conversionist-activist

axis. As Warner suggests that the biblicist-crucicentric axis has bifurcated

between the progressives and the exclusivists, it might be expected that the

Calvinist tradition of holiness teaching has similarly bifurcated. I will show that

this has in fact happened, with two distinct approaches developing within the

Calvinist tradition of spirituality by the end of the century. The energy and

activity of the conversionist-activist axis was paradoxically largely based in a

spirituality of passive reception of the empowering of God, which led to the

promise of this-worldly fulfilment and victory. It contrasted with the active

Calvinist spirituality of continual struggle with inward sin with no respite in this

life and no guarantee of success or freedom in the world. I now turn to examine

each of these in turn.

4.3 The Calvinist Tradition

The Calvinist tradition can be seen as representing the default devotional

tradition of evangelicalism per se, indeed Bebbington sees evangelicalism as

having developed originally as moderate Calvinism in Enlightenment cultural

mode.[8] What distinguishes it from earlier pre-evangelical Calvinist spirituality is

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[7] Ian Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London: DLT, 2005); David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000). See also David K. Gillett, *Trust and Obey: Explorations in Evangelical Spirituality* (London: DLT, 1993); James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1991).
[8] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 41. On Calvinist tradition see also Alister McGrath, *Roots that Refresh: A Celebration of Reformation Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991); J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

the degree to which it has proven willing to adapt to different cultural moods, allowing some form of accommodation to be made with Wesleyan Arminianism.

By the nineteenth century, Bebbington argues that the majority opinion amongst Calvinist evangelicals, represented by the writings of the English Baptist Andrew Fuller and the New England theology deriving from the writings of Jonathan Edwards, had accepted the Enlightenment principle of the reality of freedom of choice.[9] Although there were some more rigorously Reformed evangelicals, many of the doctrinal specifics of Calvinism were in fact steadily being eroded throughout the nineteenth century under the influence of Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment gave evangelical Calvinism a strong element of rationalism (expressed as a concern with doctrine), pragmatism (expressed in the adoption of business practices to maximise the effectiveness of mission), moralism (expressed in frequent injunctions to live a moral life despite a wariness of promoting works righteousness), and optimism (expressed in a faith in providence and in postmillennialism).[10]

It was the Calvinist understanding of sin in the life of the believer that distinguished it clearly from the Arminian Wesleyan position (and the later Keswick holiness movement), and which gave Calvinist spirituality its distinctive feel. Calvinist devotion stressed the deep-rooted presence of sin even in the justified believer. Sanctification was seen as a process that would not be completed within the believer's earthly life. Therefore the holy life required active devotion, rigorous discipline, and was centred on a knowledge of the

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[9] David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 121-137.
[10] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 41-9.

believer's own sin and a zeal to save others.[11] This was markedly different from

the Wesleyan teaching of Christian perfection, which suggested that by grace it

was possible to achieve sanctification within this life, living a life in which

voluntary transgression was absent.[12] It also differed from the teaching of the

nineteenth century Keswick holiness movement, which argued for an

understanding of sanctification received by faith in a moment of crisis, in which

sin was not eradicated (as the Wesleyans believed), but repressed, so that

through the Spirit the believer could experience victory over sin in their life.[13]

4.3.1 Nineteenth Century Origins – J.C. Ryle's *Holiness*

Some late twentieth-century developments in Calvinist tradition self-

consciously situate themselves as defences of or reactions against a historical

evangelical tradition. Others develop the tradition without apparent awareness.

To allow these developments in Calvinist tradition to be set in context, I will

begin by discussing a classic of nineteenth century Calvinist tradition: J.C. Ryle's

Holiness.[14] First published in 1877, it has been reprinted many times since, often

being commended by influential evangelicals.[15] It was originally written, as

Bebbington describes it, as 'a sustained polemic against Keswick'.[16] Ryle sets out

a characteristically Calvinist understanding of sin and holiness, that sin is an

objective reality and that it permeated every aspect of the Christian's being,

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[11] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 112-3.
[12] Bebbington argues that the doctrine of Christian perfection was an expre ssion of Enlightenment optimism. *Holiness*, 61.
[13] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 74, 83. Stated most clearly in Evan Hopkins' *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life* (1884).
[14] J.C. Ryle, *Holiness* (London: T&T Clark, 1952).
[15] The 1952 edition has a foreward by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. J.I. Packer makes extensive reference to it in his writings on holiness.
[16] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 88.

existing alongside their goodness, making their inner life one of constant struggle. Sanctification (which brought freedom from the dominion of sin) happened slowly, through constant effort, though because sin corrupted the judgement the Christian might not see the depth of their own sinfulness, and likewise might not see their own growth in holiness. The normal experience of the Christian life as progress was made towards sanctification would therefore be one of a growing consciousness of sin, provoking humility and thankfulness for the grace of God. Growth in holiness came through diligence in prayer, Bible study, and Sunday worship, and it did not prevent the experience of a great deal of inward conflict.

Ryle argued that holiness was 'the habit of being of one mind with God according as we find his mind described in scripture', measuring everything in this world by the standard of God's word. [17] Ryle's picture of the Holy Man (obviously intended to be inclusive, however gender specific the term might seem to modern ears) was of one who was pure and set apart from sinful humanity.[18] Ryle asserted that although the holy man would faithfully fulfil all his duties and obligations in this life, as a good husband, wife, child, parent, subject, friend, neighbour, master, he would set his heart on things above rather than earthly things. In consequence: 'He will not neglect the business of the life that now is, but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come… He will value every thing and place and company just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God'.[19] The reason for this separation was the constant

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[17] Ryle, *Holiness*, 51.
[18] Ryle, *Holiness*, 51.
[19] Ryle, *Holiness*, 54.

temptation that the world represented.

Continued human sinfulness meant that allowance had therefore to be made for failure, lack of moral courage or insight, and for human weakness amongst professing Christians, as long as this did not slide into approving of immorality. [20] This balance between acknowledgement of human weakness and failure, whilst refusing to accept a lowering of the highest standards of moral behaviour, is a keynote of a Calvinist approach. The stress on the reality of the believer's failures and shortcomings made the holiness sought after a practically graspable quality, requiring practical steps be taken to achieve it, rather than an abstract one. Limited holiness, or holiness mixed with sin, was still holiness, and its validity was demonstrated by the reality of the believer's struggles and the sincerity of their repentance.[21] Although the struggle against sin was expected to be lifelong, there was real possibility of progress.

4.3.2 The Calvinist tradition in Late Twentieth Century English Evangelicalism

At the beginning of our period, a form of Keswick teaching was dominant in English evangelical spirituality. The characteristic spirituality developed by the movement contrasted with that of the Calvinist tradition, being passive rather than active, focused on trusting in God rather than continuing to struggle against sin in one's own strength.[22] It had a clear expression in the 'faith principle' employed by evangelical missionaries like Hudson Taylor in which the believer trusts in God's provision alone and makes no appeals for funding. It

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[20] Ryle, *Holiness*, 55.
[21] Ryle, *Holiness*, 86.
[22] Bebbington, *Holiness*, 89; Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 211.

was personal dissatisfaction with this passive approach to the spiritual life that

was a key factor in J.I. Packer's turning to the Puritans in the 1950s as a source

of the active spirituality that would eventually triumph over Keswick's passive

surrender to Jesus.[23]

The engagement with the Puritans nurtured by Packer and Lloyd-Jones

ensured that the mainstream of English evangelicalism remained

characteristically Calvinist, but it remained a moderate, relatively inclusive

tradition. As evangelicalism became affected by the modernist cultural mood,

the openness and engagement expressed in Keele created a corresponding

change in spirituality. As Warner has shown, the fracturing of the conservative

hegemony following Keele led to a split in the biblicist-crucicentric axis between

exclusivists and progressives, a split that became particularly obvious towards

the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first, as the

conversionist-activist axis began to lose credibility as a source of unity.

Although many of the revered leaders of the Calvinist tradition (like Packer) are

personally aligned with exclusivist groupings (in Packer's case most notably

through his 2002 decision to split from the Canadian diocese of New

Westminster over the issue of blessings of same-sex unions), their writings

continue to represent a broad Calvinist spirituality.[24] However, towards the end

of the twentieth century, exclusivist and progressive strands of tradition

emerged, moving away from this broad Calvinism in opposite directions.

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[23] McGrath, *To Know and Serve God*, 23-6.
[24] e.g. J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ventura: Regal, 2009)

4.3.3 The Broad Calvinist Tradition of Keele

The broad Calvinist tradition articulated at Keele formed the mainstream of English evangelical spirituality through much of the period 1960-2010, being advocated by Packer and Stott, the period's most influential writers, though by the end of the period it was coming under pressure from a well-defined exclusivist position that saw its openness as problematic.[25] This Keele tradition shared the broad outlines of the Calvinist spirituality laid down by Ryle, but also showed the influence of modernism. It had several key characteristics. Firstly, and showing most clearly its heritage in earlier Calvinist spirituality, Christian discipleship was seen as a constant struggle with the world, the flesh and the devil (indeed, White's most popular book on the subject has *The Fight* as its title).[26] Although spiritual warfare was acknowledged as a key aspect of this, a clear distinction was drawn between the Calvinist tradition and emergent charismatic tradition by the focus on active internal struggle with the Christian's own sinful nature, rather than struggle with oppressive external spiritual forces.

Both Stott and Packer explicitly rejected the Keswick and Wesleyan traditions as deficient in this key understanding of the spiritual life as one of active struggle with self.[27] Both affirmed the genuine spirituality and scriptural

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[25] I also examine here the writings of the Anglo-Canadian John White, who became a best-selling author of popular spirituality books published by IVP in the 1980s. Packer lists White alongside Oswald Chambers, Andrew Murray, A.W. Tozer, and Watchman Nee as one of the 'latter-day evangelical teachers of holiness' in his *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in our Walk with God* (Leicester: IVP, 2nd ed., 2005), 83.

[26] John White, *The Fight* (Leicester: IVP, 1991). First published in the UK in 1977, the book has been in print ever since, most recently in an abridged form as an IVP classic.

[27] As McGrath makes clear, Packer's own turn to the Puritans was both personally a consequence of finding Keswick teaching deficient, and a key moment in transforming mainstream English evangelical spirituality. McGrath, *To Know and Serve God*, 24-6, 76-80.

basis of followers of these other traditions, but did not hesitate to describe them as ultimately distorting of the central thrust of scripture. [28] Packer similarly critiqued charismatic tradition, commending its focus on the reality of the power of the Spirit, but denying that there was any 'quick fix' for holiness without continual repentance and considerable effort and conflict.[29] As a natural consequence of its emphasis on the experience of the spiritual life as one of constant struggle, the Keele Calvinist tradition rejected any notion of easy victories and instead stressed an understanding of holiness as marked by self-denial and suffering.

In all the above, the Keele tradition as represented by Stott, Packer and White was essentially indistinguishable from the earlier Calvinist tradition of Ryle. It did have some key differences, however. Its second central characteristic was its openness, both to other Christian traditions and to a more world-affirming vision of the Christian life. Packer's work in particular was marked by a generous openness to the insights of other traditions, especially catholic tradition, that was notably lacking in Ryle, who wrote disparagingly about the 'going back to Egypt' and 'borrowing semi-Romish practices' he saw in anglo-catholics, and who saw the Keswick tradition as 'defective and mischevious in the extreme.'[30] By contrast, despite proclaiming a robustly Calvinist position, Packer claimed the Holiness Movement, the Puritans, and Roman Catholic and Orthodox divines as his teachers alongside Ryle himself, drawing on a wide variety of writers and encouraging his readers to be similarly broad-minded.

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[28] John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Leicester: IVP, 1963), 914; J. I. Packer, *A Passion for Holiness*, (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1992), 111.
[29] Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 27-31. *Passion for Holiness*, 174.
[30] Ryle, *Holiness*, 29, 90.

The sense of Packer's writing was that the move towards holiness is the basic form of the Christian life, and that in engaging with it evangelicals will find they have many fellow-travellers. His was a generous and broad vision, that did not hesitate to be self-critical. Packer critiqued some of the characteristic excesses of Calvinist tradition (which he described as those holding to a moral-struggle doctrine of holiness) in his *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, critiquing its legalism, pharasaism, scrupulosity, morbidity and pessimism.[31]

Stott and White also demonstrated a characteristic openness, in making a definite move towards a more world-affirming vision of the Christian life whilst staying firmly within the Calvinist tradition.[32] Both emphasised the Christian duty towards the this-worldly commitments already taken on, particularly family commitments, which was a generous and world-affirming (and indeed authentically Calvinist) approach.[33] It was also an approach to holiness that moved away from Ryle's advocacy of evaluating this-worldly commitments in terms of their ability to draw the believer closer to God towards seeing things of this world as having value in themselves. Valuing families could, of course, be perceived as a characteristically conservative emphasis, encouraging evangelicals to see family values as key to holiness. However, White showed signs of resisting this move, affirming the sense in which the call to holiness requires a commitment to the world irrespective of the extent to which it might conform to an ideal. He was refreshingly sanguine about the possibility of the

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[31] Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 34-5.
[32] There was substantial common ground with the more populist and highly influential broad Calvinism presented at the turn of the century by the American evangelist D.L. Moody. See for example Moody's call for a Christianity that offers salvation in this life and his subjectivist recognition that the theatre might be a thing of indifference to faith in *The Overcoming Life* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1994), 15, 30-33.
[33] Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought* (London: Blackwell, 3rd ed., 2000), 236-239.

nuclear family structure breaking down in the West, arguing that God designed

human beings to live in families and that they would continue to do so as long as

they are human, whatever particular structure they might take.[34]

White made a careful distinction between the world the believer was

called to hate and the world they were called to love. In fighting the world what

they were really fighting was desire made into a god, and ultimately this was

done out of love for the world (as it was now, not in an idealised future state). In

this regard, he critiqued evangelical tendencies towards withdrawal:

> in modern evangelical circles we withdraw by minimizing our
> contact with unbelievers and relating only to believers…we have
> confused separation from sin with isolation from sinners. But Jesus
> does not call us to isolation. True, we must not be of the world (not
> share its values) but be in it.[35]

This emphasis on holiness requiring commitment to and engagement with the

world as it is (which may at times require the taking up of a prophetic critique

of it from within) rather than separation and isolation from the world in order

to condemn it from without was a key mark of the openness of Keele.

A large part of Stott's ministry and writing was taken up with urging

Christians towards this sort of engagement with the world. The holy life was

seen to consist in a being in the world that accepted the bonds of fallen

community whilst being ready to critique it from within by reference to the

gospel. His *The Contemporary Christian*, written as a companion volume to his

more well-known *Issues Facing Christians Today*, commended a practice of

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[34] White, *The Fight*, 125.
[35] White, *The Fight*, 219-220.

'double listening' to the Word and the world, stressing the need for a middle way between escapism and conformity.[36] Stott urged Christians to exercise a critical alertness, striving to understand and sympathise with the world and seeking the grace to discover how the gospel related to it.[37] He argued that this listening to the world should lead to a basic respect for (non-Christian) others, an increased awareness of the needs of the world, and an acceptance of the responsibility to meet these needs in working for social justice. He advocated an understanding of 'holistic mission' as the natural outcome of this approach to the Christian life, by which he meant mission that embraced both evangelism and social action.[38]

A final characteristic of the late twentieth century Calvinist mainstream, perhaps emerging as a result of Keele's embracing of ecumenism and its willingness to recognise past failings of evangelicalism, was a focus on the sinfulness and failure of the church. I have already noted Packer's willingness to outline characteristic failings of a Calvinist spirituality, and his frank acknowledgement in his *Anglican Evangelical Identity Problem* of the way in which evangelicals had turned against each other. This penitential tone was characteristic of all three writers. White also noted the possibility of failure and sin within the church, and urged that Christians should be careful not to allow alienation caused by sin to fester into division and conflict. He particularly noted the dangers of disagreement, self-righteousness and unforgiveness.[39] Stott described the visible church as sinful and fallible in itself, as well as being a

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[36] John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: IVP, 1992).
[37] Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 28.
[38] Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 111, 337.
[39] White, *The Fight*, 244.

mixed body containing both true and nominal Christians.[40] This created a subtle

understanding in his writing of the relationship between visible and invisible

church, where the Spirit bound true Christians together in unity across visible

boundaries of church (within which they were bound together with nominal

Christians), whilst these true Christians themselves still remained sinful,

creating a mixture of wheat and tares that only God could untangle. Combined

with Stott's generous acceptance of liberals on the basis of a presumption of

genuine faith in *Essentials*, this understanding of a fallible and mixed church,

which only God could see truly, prevented the Calvinist mainstream from

adopting a separatist ideal of the church as a pure body.[41]

The broad Keele tradition of Calvinism was therefore characterised by its

emphases on the spiritual life as a struggle marked by suffering, the way of

holiness as leading to openness to other Christian traditions and a world-

affirming engagement, and on a humility about the church that lead to penitence

and a rejection of a separatist ideal. The continued popularity of the broad

Calvinist tradition (even amongst those who in other ways might appear more

naturally to be exclusivist or progressive) was demonstrated by the popularity

of Stott and Packer as authors and speakers throughout the period (Stott died in

2011). In many ways Stott, as the main architect of Keele, remained a central

figure for progressives, because of his determination to continue to affirm the

key modernist emphases of Keele Calvinism: a world-affirming openness and a

penitent humility in regard to the church (despite the fact that in regard to the

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[40] Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 107.
[41] A similar acceptance of liberals within a mixed church had been argued for by Packer in *A Kind of Noah's Ark.* It is also, of course, implicit in Stott's public split with Lloyd-Jones over the issue of mixed denominations.

two most divisive issues of the period: homosexuality and women's ministry, he was clearly somewhat to the right of most of them). Stott's progressive-friendly approach was shown even in one of his final books, *The Radical Disciple*.[42] His concern there to hold together the images of the Christian as both a pilgrim on their way to their true home and an engaged citizen in the world indicated his continued desire for unity in an increasingly fissiparous English evangelical world.[43]

IVP showed a continual willingness to publish books that fell broadly within this camp right to the end of the period, exemplified by two books published in the early twenty first century. The broad Calvinist spirituality of Tim Chester's *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for our Sinful Behaviour and Negative Emotions* was clear in the seriousness with which it took the need to address personal sin coupled with its pragmatism. Similarly the world-affirming tone of Julian Hardyman's *Glory Days* engaged with a theology of creation to stress the goodness (although fallen) of human society and culture, and thus the goodness and spirituality of engagement in all areas of life in order to give glory to God.[44]

We are now in a position to see the significance this tradition of spirituality has had in forming evangelical responses to homosexuality. The consensus position on homosexuality was born out of the Keele Calvinist tradition of spirituality, given its definitive statement by Stott. It contained an

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[42] John Stott, *The Radical Disciple* (Leicester: IVP, 2010).
[43] Stott, *Radical Disciple*, 98-102.
[44] Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for our Sinful Behaviour and Negative Emotions* (Leicester: IVP, 2008); Julian Hardyman, *Glory Days: Living the Whole of your Life for Jesus* (Leiecester: IVP, 2006). Hardyman is Senior Pastor of Eden Baptist Church, one of the most popular student churches in Cambridge.

implicit (and not insensitive) understanding that discipleship involves suffering and requires support from the church. This sympathetic understanding of human weakness in the face of sin that is characteristic of a Calvinist tradition encouraged the earlier pastoral tone of writing, and was expressed towards the end of our period in Tyree's *Walking with Gay Friends*. The Keele tradition's emphasis on humility and acknowledgement of the failures of the church also found expression in early evangelical expressions of repentance for homophobia.

The Calvinist tradition of spirituality also gives the consensus position some of its inherent tensions. Calvinist tradition presumes that the path of holiness is demanding, involving a denial of one's own desires and sense of self, however natural these may seem, and that the way forward is repentance and continual struggle, not acceptance and fulfilment of natural desires as constituting the true self. There is therefore a huge linguistic and cultural gulf between the rhetoric of Calvinist holiness and of gay liberation, to the extent that the two appear almost antithetical. The very fact that suffering is seen as a normal part of the Christian life makes the argument that it is unjust or inhumane to deny gay people a legitimate outlet for sexual desire particularly ineffective for those within this tradition. Despite the sympathy, there is a clear expectation that one must pick up one's cross and continue to follow.

The tradition's other key emphases, on openness to sympathetic engagement with the world and a willingness to acknowledge the failings of the

church, can be seen in earlier writings, like that of Watson.[45] However, the
tension created by the Calvinist tradition's understanding of the necessity of
self-denial has increasingly overshadowed these elements of the tradition
(except in Progressive writings, like Marin's *Love is an Orientation*, where they
are allowed to dominate). The emphasis on openness and sympathetic
engagement and on penitential acknowledgement of failure has allowed the
consensus position to listen to the gay community and to accept Christian
culpability for homophobia and repent of causing suffering, but within the
Calvinist tradition this does not naturally lead to a sense that suffering per se is
always unnecessary or to be avoided. Instead, the Keele Calvinist tradition has
played its part in making gays (and liberals supporting them) into *pharmakoi*.
The Calvinist understanding is that the way of faithful obedience and holiness
involves sorrow and suffering, and can therefore encourage the perception that
those seeking to avoid this are therefore disobedient.

4.3.4 The Bifurcation of the Calvinist Tradition - Progressive Evangelicals

As I outlined in chapter 2, the conservative evangelical hegemony
fractured after Keele, as the tradition's openness made unity on the basis of
shared doctrinal distinctives impossible to sustain. The newly-dominant
Calvinist tradition of Keele similarly fractured, creating two distinct new
strands of Calvinist holiness teaching. The first continued to follow the more
open and permissive trajectory of Keele, developing a world-affirming and
ecumenical vision for the emerging progressive grouping. By its very nature,
this grouping was diverse, but a key figure for English evangelicals within it was

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[45] In Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*.

Steve Chalke. The high-profile Baptist minister, broadcaster, and prolific author

had shown a strong commitment to social justice and engaging with the world

throughout his ministry, shown most clearly in the work of his charity Oasis,

which he established in 1985, and subsequently through Faithworks,

established in 2001.[46] A number of key American evangelicals were also

influential within English progressive evangelicalism, amongst them veteran

social justice activist Jim Wallis of Sojourners, author and pastor Brian McLaren

of Emergent Village, and progressive activist Shane Claiborne of The Simple

Way. The three are inter-connected, and share many common emphases.[47] All of

them had spoken multiple times at Greenbelt, and their books were widely read

by English evangelicals.[48] I will examine progressive spirituality through

Chalke's books *Apprentice* and *Different Eyes*, and through Shane Claiborne's *The

Irresistible Revolution*.[49]

The Keele Calvinist emphasis on openness to other Christian traditions

and engagement with the world was very evident in the progressive tradition. A

wide range of non-evangelical (and occasionally even non-Christian) sources

were used, not simply when they were seen to support evangelical positions,

but to bring new ideas that challenged conventional evangelical understandings.

Steve Chalke made extensive use of the work of the post-liberal Methodist

Stanley Hauerwas and the Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. *Different

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[46] 'The Oasis website', http://www.oasisuk.org/ (April 10, 2012).
[47] MacLaren is on the Sojourners board. Wallis wrote the forward for Irresistible Revolution.
[48] Krish Kandiah, a senior figure in the EA, particularly commended Claiborne: 'Irresistible Revolution (2008), http://krishk.com/2008/01/irresistable-revolution/ (April 10, 2012).
[49] Steve Chalke with Joanna Wyld, *Apprentice: Walking the Way of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *Different Eyes: The Art of Living Beautifully* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

Eyes shows the influence of Hauerwas throughout, being a commendation of a

narrative and virtue-ethics approach to the Christian life.[50] This led Chalke to

insist, contrary to conventional evangelical ethical approaches (like that of

Stott), that the Bible does not seek to teach universal moral rules (even in places

like the Sermon on the Mount), but rather schools its readers in having God's

vision for the world.[51] Shane Claiborne's most frequently-cited influences were

not evangelicals but the Hindu Mohatma Gandhi, and a number of Roman

Catholics, and he explicitly stated that he was drawn to these figures as an

evangelical because he was looking for 'fully devoted' Christians and couldn't

see any around him.[52]

Significantly for this study, both Chalke and Claiborne showed some

exposure to Girardian thought, albeit largely through Wink's exploration of the

Powers and the destructive cycle of violence.[53] For Claiborne, the openness to

other traditions led to an ultimate unwillingness to overtly identify himself as

evangelical, though clearly this was also expressive of a certain humility in

regard to the church:

> When people used to ask me if we were Protestant or Catholic, I was
> so discouraged with both that I would just answer, 'No. We are just
> followers of Jesus.' Now, as I thirst for God's church to be alive and
> one, when people ask me if I am Protestant or Catholic, I just answer,
> 'Yes.'[54]

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[50] Chalke and Mann, *Different Eyes*, 43, 56, 73. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984). The influence of virtue ethics on progressive evangelical approaches is also shown in NT Wright's *Virtue Reborn* (London: SPCK, 2010).
[51] *Different Eyes*, 37-42.
[52] *Irresistible Revolution*, 71-3.
[53] *Apprentice*, 121, 137; *Irresistible Revolution*, 205, 221, 240, 262-3, 279. As I will explore in chapter 6, Chalke's approach to the atonement also shows Girardian influence.
[54] *Irresistible Revolution*, 144.

As well as an openness to other traditions, progressives were marked by

a self-conscious commitment to the ideal of engagement with the world. Chalke

was scathing of attempts to understand holiness through separation from the

world. After dismissing some of the ways in which the church had historically

identified holiness with asceticism or withdrawal from certain aspects of

surrounding culture (including the cinema, alcohol, pop music and equal rights

for women), he stated that

> the concept of holiness is not about 'absence' but very much about 'distinctive presence'. It is not about withdrawal but engagement. It is not just about what we term the 'spiritual' but especially about the ordinary. Holiness is about a particular ethical presence within the world, never a withdrawal from it.[55]

Clearly, some of what he was critiquing here was the tendency within other

contemporary traditions of evangelicalism - Calvinist and charismatic – to use

the language of separation in discussing holiness. This self-conscious

identification of progressives as the tradition of engagement rather than

withdrawal (often glossed as 'following God's model', in that the incarnation

was seen as the supreme example) was therefore partly a rhetorical strategy to

distinguish themselves sharply from other traditions, particularly exclusivists.[56]

As well as using the rhetoric of engagement as a means of creating a

distinction between themselves and the exclusivists, progressives used a

rhetoric of faithfulness, smallness and simplicity to create a distinction between

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[55] *Different Eyes*, 31-2.
[56] *Different Eyes*, 29-31, 133.

themselves and the charismatic entrepreneurials. Both Chalke and Claiborne

(and Claiborne especially) were marked by a rejection of the myth of evangelical

success.[57] Chalke stressed the idea that the church was to follow in the footsteps

of one who chose weakness and faithfulness in the face of suffering and

apparent failure. Any expectation that the mission of the church should lead to

success, reward and personal fulfilment had therefore to be questioned. Here,

very clearly, Chalke was drawing on the Calvinist tradition's understanding of

the path of holiness as one of constant struggle to undermine the Keswick-

influenced charismatic tradition's expectation of success. Claiborne pushed the

point even more strongly, suggesting that Jesus calls his followers to be part of a

kingdom that is defined by its smallness and simplicity.[58] To the degree to which

the church had become focused on the institutional trappings of building and

administration it had allowed itself to become distracted from its mission and

absorbed the values of the world. For Claiborne, then, the call to follow Jesus

radically problematised Christendom and the institutional church.

If progressive Calvinists followed the trajectory of Keele Calvinism in

exhibiting a radical openness to other traditions and engagement with the

world, they also did so in expressing a far more thoroughgoing humility in

regard to the church. Keele Calvinism was notable for its willingness to express

penitence for the past mistakes of the church, and its consequent rejection of an

ideal of a pure church. However, in recognising the sinful and fallible nature of a

mixed church yet committing to remaining within it, Keele sidestepped more

radical questions. Both exclusivists and progressives problematised Keele's

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[57] *Apprentice*, 100-1; *Different Eyes*, 135.
[58] *Irresistible Revolution*, 322-6, 334-8.

response. Exclusivists did so by suggesting that the sinful and fallible nature of a mixed church required faithful Christians to show themselves as being distinct from it even whilst remaining within it.[59] Progressives did so by suggesting that Christendom and the institutional church itself were inherently sinful and fallible and were a barrier to the work of the kingdom.

Progressives argued that the patriarchal structures and ethos of the institutional church had wrongly led church hierarchies to assume the authority to dictate what the Christian stance on any particular ethical or pastoral issue might be. In contrast to exclusivists and Keele Calvinists, progressives asserted the right and responsibility of individual Christians to determine their own stance on such issues, and were suspicious of institutional attempts to assert that a particular position was correct and somehow binding on all. Clearly, as well as being a rejection of exclusivist and Keele Calvinist attempts to settle what 'the Christian view' on specific issues was, this was also a rejection of attempts by wider entrepreneurial groupings (like the EA) to speak for all evangelicals. Chalke noted the difficulty of finding certainty about matters of faith, and called for Christian disciples to draw up their own personal rule of life.[60] Significantly, in *Different Eyes*, in encouraging readers to reflect on a series of controversial ethical issues (including homosexuality), Chalke presented opposed arguments from Christians who took different positions, and suggested that the reader should make up their own mind. Disagreement between sincere

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[59] Even if, as with Reform and FoCA, they do not seek to step outside of the mixed church to create a new, pure church, they work to create a distinct network of the faithful within it.
[60] *Apprentice*, 75-8, 155, 160-3.

Christians on such issues was presented as normative.[61]

In Chalke, this potentially radical commitment to individualism was softened and contained by the influence of Hauerwas, and his insistence that virtue is formed in community as a way of life, not adherence to a set of rules.[62] Chalke's writing therefore also followed Hauerwas in containing an implicit sense that although a single position could not and should not be imposed by the church, a commitment to a shared narrative would ensure that the lack of stated ethical positions did not create relativism.

Claiborne, who did not engage with virtue ethics, visibly wrestled with the ecclesiological problem exposed by the progressive commitment to individualism. He robustly asserted the depth of the church's corruption through its assimilation into the structures and ideals of the world, its need to repent publicly for its sinfulness and failure, and its inability to truly fulfil its calling if it continued in its present form.[63] He wrote of the Spirit creating a new movement bubbling up from the bottom (rather than being initiated by the leadership and structures of the existing church) that was not a new denomination, but a new kind of Christianity.[64] However, he warned strongly against rejection of the existing church, despite its sin and corruption, largely on the grounds that it was due respect as the source of the new movement, and might continue to provide key resources as this new kind of Christianity grew

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[61] Significantly, Claiborne notes that agreeing to disagree on issues like homosexuality was a significant step forward in establishing The Simple Life, *Irresistible Revolution*, 120-1.
[62] *Different Eyes*, 139-51; Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 22-30.
[63] *Irresistible Revolution*, 193-222, 251-2, 329.
[64] *Irresistible Revolution*, 22, 324, 348.

and matured.[65] He described the institutional church as a dysfunctional parent, and although he held out the hope it might be renewed and transformed by the new movement, the central thrust of his writing suggested otherwise. Like the exclusivists, the progressives showed signs of wishing to return to the ideal of the pure church, but hesitated to abandon the mixed church, despite growing dissatisfaction with it.

Progressive evangelical spirituality, with its radical problematisation of authority in the church, encourages the rejection of 'positions' on ethical issues like the consensus position and a suspicion of those standing by them. As I have argued, the consensus position works as part of the single victim mechanism, as a boundary marker to identify *pharmakoi* – potential scapegoats. It therefore has a *katechetical* role – holding back the threat of indiscriminate contagious violence by diverting it onto a scapegoat. Stripping this away whilst still maintaining a mimetic rivalry with exclusivists (as progressives do) simply heightens the crisis of undifferentiation – there is no escape from the threat of the monstrous other.

4.3.5 The Bifurcation of the Calvinist Tradition - Exclusivist Evangelicals

As the progressive Calvinists pursued the trajectory of Keele, an exclusivist Calvinist tradition developed that reacted against this by seeking to return to a purer and more bounded Calvinism. Warner identifies this tradition as the conservative counter-trend in his study of doctrinal statements.[66] The appeal to a Calvinist past makes it important to situate exclusivists in relation to

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[65] *Irresistible Revolution*, 353-7.
[66] Warner, *Reinventing*, 192-206.

Ryle. Keele had retained Ryle's emphasis on the spiritual life as a struggle whilst supplementing this with other emphases not found in Ryle that challenged or counter-balanced certain aspects of his approach. Warner's description suggests that exclusivists were seeking to return to a position closer to Ryle's Enlightened Calvinism, effectively 'undoing' Keele and returning to a pre-modernist and anti-Romantic Calvinism. In fact, the picture is more complex. I will examine Vaughan Roberts' *Distinctives* (first published in 2000 and reprinted numerous times), and Linda Marshall's *Pure* (first published by IVP in 2005 as that publishing house's main student-focused sexual ethics book, and which formed the basis for a study course on sexual ethics) as texts that represent the spirituality of exclusivist Calvinism.[67]

Both of these books very clearly followed in Ryle's footsteps (indeed one of the commendations on the cover of *Distinctives* explicitly compared it to Ryle), presenting a vision of holiness as active and practical ongoing struggle against sin, in which failure may happen. Both Marshall and Roberts called for a distinctive and pure life that would proclaim the gospel, and stressed that this would be hard and involve sacrifice.[68] As was the case with similar statements made by progressives, part of the rhetorical function of such statements was to distance the emerging strands of Calvinist tradition from the myth of evangelical success that had been propounded by the mainly charismatic entrepreneurials. However, both Marshall and Roberts intensified this aspect of Calvinist tradition.

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[67] Vaughan Roberts, *Distinctives* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2003), Roberts was Rector of St Ebbe's Oxford, a popular student church, and a Council Member of Reform. Linda Marshall *Pure: Sex and Relationships God's way* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), Marshall was a UCCF staff worker.
[68] *Pure*, 136.

Roberts cast his discussion in an eschatological perspective, which encouraged a sense that the present and this world are insignificant by comparison to the future and the world to come. In this light, he argued that the primary callings of the Christian were to personal holiness and evangelism. Nothing with a tangible this-worldly element (social justice, doing a secular job, raising a family etc) was to be seen as a calling on the same level; indeed, these were distractions from this true calling. Roberts even stated that jobs and families were 'The things of this world, which will not last, [and] will be relatively unimportant to us'.[69] Clearly there was an implicit critique here of the broad Keele Calvinism of Stott and White, with its acknowledgement of Christian duty to family as something to be followed in all but the most rare and extreme of circumstances. It was also significantly narrower than the tradition presented by Ryle himself. Roberts was stepping beyond Ryle's description of the need for the Holy Man to fulfil his duty as husband and father and employee by taking the spirit of his 'valuing everything to the degree that it draws us closer to God' and applying it radically to undermine all demands of society.

If Roberts represented a radicalised step back from evangelical commitment to involvement in culture and society, then Marshall represented a radicalised understanding of the nature of Christian community, centred around an ideal of purity. Marshall suggested a 'holiness rule of thumb' as an aid to discerning when a course of action was inappropriate for a Christian:

> God's will is that we should be sanctified (made pure). Is this
> something that is God's will for me? Is it making me more like Christ?

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[69] *Distinctives,* 117.

Is it making me holy? Will it bring purity or impurity?[70]

The underlying approach presented was radical indeed - morality had become a nil sum game, in which any activity should be evaluated as either sinful or actively promoting holiness. There was no room for anything to be considered a matter of moral indifference, or an activity that was inescapably embroiled in fallenness but should be undertaken for the greater good. Ultimately this was a purity ethic whose main concern was ensuring that the Christian remained holy, rather than what actions might constitute love of God and neighbour.

This concern with purity also encouraged the drawing of a sharp line between members and non-members of the visible church. Marshall assumed that the church constituted a 'safe' community, free from impurity. This impression was cemented by Marshall's discussion of popular culture. *Pure* made continual reference to the way that 'the media' created a difficult environment for holy living, promoting sinfulness, and explicitly suggested that secular films and music undermined morality and made contentment difficult.[71] Marshall's radical ethic therefore suggested that the need to be pure required one to separate oneself from secular culture and live in a Christian ghetto.[72]

Exclusivist approaches to homosexuality were clearly of a piece with this intensified Calvinist tradition. The use of the issue as a shibboleth demonstrated a desire to draw boundaries around a 'pure' church distinct from the values of the world. The deep suspicion of a liberal conspiracy, especially centred in the

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[70] *Pure*, 84.

[71] Marshall, *Pure*, 91.

[72] There is at least some contradiction here, however, in that the book is self-consciously hip, referencing popular cinema throughout, clearly expecting Christian readers to follow the references.

media, characterised both exclusivist approaches to homosexuality and the heightened Calvinist tradition more broadly. In Nolland et al,'s *God, Gays, and the Church*, the ethic of separation and suspicion of the values and thinking of 'the world' clearly reinforced an image of liberals (within and without the church) as monstrous. The scandalised character of exclusivist writings on homosexuality cannot be understood simply as a localised distortion of the tradition, therefore. They reflected a deeper scandalisation of the whole understanding of sin and holiness within the exclusivist Calvinist tradition of spirituality. Exclusivists did not simply seek to draw boundaries between their own 'pure' church and those considered liberal on the issue of homosexuality. Rather, this shibboleth was viewed by them as symbolic of a wider and deeper cultural separation that must be enforced between the pure church and a monstrous church and society that had become enslaved to liberal values.

4.3.6 Progressives and Exclusivists as Dialogue-Partners with Late Modernity

The exclusivist and progressive spiritualities described above sound like polar opposites – a spirituality of cultural accommodation and one of cultural resistance. The rhetoric of both spiritualities, locked into a mimetic crisis, explicitly played on this image, presenting their own stance as faithful to the gospel, and the other as monstrous rejection of it. It must be recognised, however, that both in fact represented a carefully nuanced balance between accommodation and resistance as part of an ongoing dialogue with a modernity that they were thoroughly shaped by.

I have noted the rhetorical use of the language of engagement by progressives. Clearly progressives sought to engage with culture and with social issues (a significant part of the legacy of Keele) and were willing to make common cause with secular or other-faith groups in doing so, but this did not distinguish them from exclusivists. Characteristically, each group prioritised different issues. Claiborne highlighted war and pacifism, global poverty and ecological issues.[73] In his work with Oasis, Chalke has highlighted human trafficking and inclusion.[74] Exclusivists characteristically highlighted the importance of marriage and the family, and threats to the civil liberties of religious groups in the West through secular legislation, and globally through persecution.[75] Broadly, progressives aligned themselves with the left-leaning aspects of popular culture, and exclusivists with the right-leaning aspects. Rhetorically, it suited progressives to self-identify as engaging with the world and exclusivists to self-identify as resisting it. In fact, each adopted both stances to varying degrees. Claiborne showed a degree of awareness of this dynamic, writing not just of the need for a radical engagement with the world, but also a radical rejection of it, and, recognising that that radical rejection could constitute a too-easy accommodation with the cynicism of the counter-culture, he also wrote of the need to resist such accommodation.[76] Claiborne's distinctive call to a thoroughly engaged yet different way of life, taking

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[73] *Irresistible Revolution*, 101, 262-3, 348.

[74] 'The Oasis website', http://www.oasisuk.org [April 10,2012].

[75] 'Christian Concern website', http://www.christianconcern.com/ (April 10, 2012); 'The Christian Institute website,' http://www.christian.org.uk/ (April 10, 2012). The Coalition for Marriage, which launched in 2012, just after the end of our period, is a good example of exclusivist engagement with social issues, 'The Coalition for Marriage website', http://c4m.org.uk/ (April 10, 2012).

[76] *Irresistible Revolution*, 349.

monasticism as a model, was therefore a carefully nuanced stance.[77] He was

aware of both a need for complete immersion in the needs of the world and for

being a radically different presence within it. This parted ways most clearly

with the legacy of Keele (and exclusivists) in its embracing of a post-

Christendom identity.

Mirroring progressives, exclusivists, despite their rhetoric of withdrawal

and resistance, were also engaged in accommodation to the world. They

identified the cultural elites of the liberal intelligentsia (described as 'the media'

by Marshall, and clearly part of Hunter's 'new class') as the embodiment and

main agency of 'the world' they were resisting.[78] This identification of 'the

world' with liberalising strands of late modern culture (and par excellence in

liberal theology) allowed exclusivists to dis-identify other strands of late

modernity (those that progressives would identify with 'Christendom') as

worldly. This occurred in the recurrent tendency in exclusivist writings to view

pre-1960s culture as a sort of golden age. Roberts suggested that the worldly

evils Christians strove against were rooted in the permissive society of the

1960s, the materialism of the Thatcherite 1980s, and the relativism and

subjectivism of contemporary culture.[79] There was no acknowledgement that

the liberalising strands of late modernity could in fact be expressing a legitimate

critique of earlier worldliness, however distorted. The dis-identification as

'worldly' of the non-liberal, non-progressive cultural movements of

Christendom also manifested itself in a tendency to identify the church (and

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[77] *Irresistible Revolution*, 148-9.
[78] Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 107.
[79] *Distinctives*, 50, 40, 73.

evangelical tradition) as acultural, based in transhistorical eternal truths, where it was not obviously affected by the liberalising cultural strands of late modernity.

The rhetorical valuing of the eternal and devaluing of the temporary and worldly therefore allowed exclusivists to accommodate those strands of postmodernist culture that revisited the past with a wistful irony and sought to draw on them in investing contemporary culture with depth and meaning – in this case the institution of marriage and an ideal of family from the 1950s or earlier.[80] Roberts cited the rise in single parent families since the 1960s as a reason why people increasingly saw themselves as isolated individuals rather than belonging to a family or community, unproblematically identifying the decline of the nuclear family with 'the breakdown of family life'.[81] The historical and cultural specificity of the nuclear family was overlooked and it was asserted to be a biblical and acultural ideal.[82] The exclusivist tendency to rhetorically identify themselves as part of a faithful minority engaged in cultural resistance rather than the cultural mainstream similarly represented an accommodation to a postmodernist cultural mood, in which the imperialistic attempts of the mainstream to impose itself on dissenting minorities were increasingly problematised.[83]

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[80] I draw here on Umberto Eco's definition of postmodernism as revisiting the past with irony, noting his emphasis that such ironic revisiting always contains the risk that it allows an 'innocent' revisiting of the past. Umberto Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Minerva, 1994), 65-72. Exclusivist use of the motif of the 1950s family is in this respect comparable to its use in Cath Kidston products.

[81] *Distinctives*, 19.

[82] Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 107-8.

[83] Docherty, (ed.), *Postmodernism*, 36. The exclusivist preference for describing their position in anti-colonialist terms was especially apparent in the Jerusalem Declaration.

As exclusivist and progressive spirituality became scandalised, then, each became monstrous doubles of the other. For each tradition, the other represented faithlessness to the core message of the gospel (as interpreted in accordance with the spirituality of their own tradition) and blind compromise and accommodation to the values of the world.

4.4 The Charismatic Tradition

The charismatic movement that emerged in the twentieth century is the second major tradition of English evangelical spirituality during our period. As a modernist expression of evangelicalism it incorporated and intensified some aspects of the Wesleyan and Keswick spiritualities that preceded it.[84] Even those like Cartledge who claim that the movement has its origins in apostolic practice acknowledge that its spirituality is heir to these two traditions.[85] In important ways, however, the charismatic tradition is also the heir of the Keele Calvinist tradition, as might be expected from a movement that largely emerged from mainstream evangelical churches in the 1960s. (As practical theologian William Kay has shown, even amongst the leaders of the apostolic networks of Restorationism who separated themselves from existing denominations, the leaders were largely drawn from mainstream churches – with 36.6% of them being Anglican).[86] Cartledge argues that charismatics see the work of the Spirit in power going hand in hand with sanctification in the life of the believer, but significantly hold that conscious sin in the life of the believer does not prevent

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[84] On the charismatic tradition see Mark Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*; William K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain: New Ways of Being Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007); David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (Guildford: Eagle, 2nd ed., 1998).
[85] Cartledge, *Encountering*, 33; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 233.
[86] Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain*, 302-3.

the Spirit's reception.[87] Although he does not acknowledge it, this distances the

charismatic tradition significantly from the Wesleyan and Keswick traditions.

The emphasis on a second key moment of God's gracious work in the believer

after conversion is a key aspect of the charismatic tradition, but it is not a

moment of sanctification or repression of sin, but rather a baptism in the Spirit,

when the fullness of the Spirit's power is received, an experience often

associated with glossolalia.[88]

Although the charismatic movement does not identify the baptism in the

Spirit with sanctification as in Keswick, certain strands of it have made use of a

Keswick-type concept of the assurance of God's victory over sin in the life of the

believer, through 'claiming' the victory in their own lives, or in some cases

breaking satanic bondage or casting out oppressive spirits. Warner argues that

this is best understood as a conflation of the theological inheritance of Keswick

with therapeutic concepts of salvation borrowed from popular culture.[89] Percy

draws on the work of James Hopewell to make a similar point, that charismatic

spirituality differs fundamentally from Calvinist in the form of stories it centres

itself upon. Although both share a strong sense of the reality of God's work in

the world and the eternal significance of human action, charismatics are

characteristically (in classical literary terms) romantic, anticipating success and

victory at the end of the story. Calvinists are characteristically tragic,

anticipating struggle with no guarantee of success. [90] I will argue that this

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[87] Cartledge, *Encountering*, 97-8.

[88] As is apparent in the centrality of the 'Holy Spirit weekend' in Alpha.

[89] Warner, *Reinventing*, 70.

[90] James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Percy, *Engaging*, 157.

therapeutic theology of success through God's blessing has become profoundly

scandalised.

A further key aspect of charismatic spirituality, that set it apart from

both mainstream evangelicalism and earlier Pentecostalism (and as historian

Andrew Walker notes, something that distinguished the more influential R2

Restorationist movement from the stricter R1) was its willingness to

accommodate itself to modern culture, particularly in the form of consumerism,

rather than seeking to create a safe distance from worldly pleasures.[91] Pete

Ward's study *Selling Worship* demonstrates the ways in which the charismatic

movement was profoundly shaped by an engagement with the music industry

and consumer culture.[92] On a smaller scale, Mathew Guest's analysis of a

prominent Anglican charismatic evangelical church showed that a key part the

appeal of the church lay in its ability to accommodate itself to the middle-class

lifestyle of its worshippers.[93] This wholehearted willingness to engage with the

world and take on aspects of popular culture appears to be a result of the

influence of Keele, though it may also have owed something to the Keswick

tradition of H.C.G. Moule, which saw things of this world as potential avenues

for God's work.[94]. Charismatic tradition engaged enthusiastically with popular

culture without much conscious reflection on its theology in doing so. The

critical questions regarding accommodation to the world that seem to define

progressives and exclusivists were largely unexamined within charismatic

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[91] Cartledge, *Encountering*, 92-7; Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 103-7.
[92] Ward, *Selling Worship*.
[93] Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).
[94] Handley C.G. Moule, *Thoughts on Christian Sanctity* (London: Seeley & Co, 1888), 28, 109-10.

tradition.

The charismatic tradition of spirituality is therefore one that conflates
aspects of Calvinist, Keswick and Wesleyan traditions, distinguishing itself from
the various strands of Calvinist tradition by its significant (yet significantly
unexamined) engagement with popular culture. It has developed a therapeutic
character to its spirituality, moving away from a Calvinist sense of spiritual
struggle to focus on the possibility of divine blessing and fulfilment. Under the
influence of the crisis of undifferentiation (and the pressures of secularisation,
where church decline was an ever-present reality) this tradition has become
scandalised, as I will explore later.

In presenting the above summary of the charismatic tradition I am
deliberately rejecting Martyn Percy's influential interpretation of the
charismatic movement as a subtype of fundamentalism with a spirituality that
emphasises control and conformity.[95] As Warner argues, Percy's analysis is
based on a fundamental misreading of John Wimber, who Percy sees as
preoccupied with power.[96] Warner sees charismaticism as ultimately far more
closely aligned with therapeutic spiritual movements like New Age healing than
it is with crude fundamentalism.[97]

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[95] Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996).
[96] Warner, *Reinventing,* 70.
[97] Percy seeks to present Wimber as prototypical of 'fundamentalism'. I discuss Percy's approach to fundamentalism in more detail in chapter 5.

4.4.1 The Charismatic Tradition in Late Twentieth Century English Evangelicalism

The charismatic tradition of spirituality that emerged from the fracturing conservative evangelical hegemony in the 1960s was far more heterogeneous than the Calvinist tradition. There was a basic distinction between the charismatic Renewal movement within mainstream denominations (where charismatics still, to varying degrees, identified with the spiritual tradition of their denominational heritage) and the independent apostolic networks of the Restorationist movement. There were also distinct differences in theology and ethos between the various networks.[98] However, as Warner has argued, the typical charismatic focus on activism meant that even significant doctrinal difference could be tolerated. The entrepreneurials built networks and consumer cultures that fed a myth of evangelical success. The shift away from a focus on doctrine towards a focus on united action enabled the emergent cautiously-open conservatives to resist the bifurcating forces tearing the Calvinist tradition apart and remain closer to the earlier Keele tradition. However, the pressure of maintaining the myth of evangelical success in the face of late onset decline imposed its own stresses on charismatic spirituality, which increasingly exhibited a love/hate relationship with contemporary culture and the secular world.

Within the diversity of the charismatic tradition, there were two conflicting elements, sometimes held in uneasy combination: a moderate and

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[98] Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 334. Kay notes that New Frontiers is unique in combining Calvinist and charismatic theologies. Ichthus is amongst the most opposed to Calvinism, being heavily influenced by Wesleyan and Keswick traditions.

world-affirming openness, often explicitly linked to the Keele Calvinism of Stott, and a purity ethic, often linked to concerns of spiritual warfare, that encouraged a withdrawal from the worldly.

I will examine David Watson's *Discipleship*, an example of a charismatic approach from one of the Renewal movement's most influential early leaders, to illustrate the world-affirming strand of charismatic tradition, there clearly derived from Keele Calvinism.[99] I then examine the purity ethic in its most explicit form in Neil T Anderson's *The Bondage Breaker.*[100] Finally I will examine possibly the most influential and mainstream example of charismatic tradition in the twentieth century, which demonstrates both strands in a not-entirely comfortable tension: the writings of Nicky Gumbel, author of the Alpha course. As I outlined in the last chapter, Gumbel had a key role in popularising the consensus position. His work demonstrates the link between this scandalised spirituality and the consensus position.

4.4.2 The Keele Influence

Watson was an evangelical Anglican, a product of public schools and Oxbridge CUs, a background not markedly dissimilar to figures like Stott and Packer. An articulate pioneer of the Anglican Renewal movement, who was respected both within charismatic and non-charismatic circles, he wrote *Discipleship* from the charismatic tradition but for the church in its widest sense. The model of discipleship he set out was communal, Spirit-filled, evangelistic,

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[99] David Watson, Discipleship, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981).
[100] Neil T. Anderson, The Bondage Breaker, (Oxford: Monarch, 2000).

committed to a simple lifestyle, and centred in prayer and scripture.[101] There

was much in common with the broad Calvinist tradition of Keele, though

significantly Watson's vision was far more enthusiastic in its embracing of the

world and secular culture. Watson adopted Stott's argument for evangelism and

social action to go together, and was especially critical of those who sought

separation from the world:

> Evangelicals have frequently seen the church as a religious ghetto,
> separated from the world, pre-occupied with its doctrinal and moral
> purity, and regarding itself as the special object of God's favour and
> blessing. As such, Christians go out to the world in the style of
> spiritual commando raids, aiming to destroy its strongholds, weaken
> its defences, and generally preparing the way for the gospel, but
> living essentially apart from the world. Social and political
> involvements in the world are therefore viewed with suspicion and
> classified as 'liberal'.[102]

The world was to be enthusiastically embraced and seen as the Christian's home

ground, where the work of the gospel was to be done. Preoccupation with

doctrinal and moral purity was to be set aside in the interests of mission, a clear

statement of commitment to activism. Watson was clearly distinct from Stott

and the Keele Calvinist tradition, however. His emphasis on the need to seek

filling with the Holy Spirit to give the power to live holy lives resonated with the

Keswick tradition, and his insistence that victory over sin was a real possibility

in this life was Wesleyan.

The influence of Keele on the charismatic tradition was therefore to

encourage a whole-hearted engagement with popular culture in the name of

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[101] Watson, *Discipleship*, 18.
[102] Watson, *Discipleship*, 43-4.

mission, unhindered by traditional concerns with doctrine or moral purity. This was the foundation for charismatic entrepreneurialism, an enthusiastic embracing of consumerism.[103]

4.4.3 Spiritual Warfare and the Purity Ethic

If one strand of charismatic tradition was world-affirming, the other stressed the need for purity and separation from the world. Anderson's *The Bondage Breaker* was representative of a whole strand of charismatic holiness teaching that approached holiness, healing and deliverance from possession as aspects of sanctification and thus situated all of them within the realm of spiritual warfare. An international best-seller first published in the US in 1990, it was widely influential in the UK, being commended by key figures in the English Restoration movement like Gerald Coates of Pioneer Churches and Colin Urquhart of Kingdom Faith ministries. Anderson offered a ministry to Christians who were suffering from demonic possession, oppressive thought patterns, habits and behaviours. Without denying the ongoing need for God's work of sanctification in the believer he stressed the need for a crisis moment of divine blessing to free the Christian from demonic control and enable them to fulfil their full potential in Christ. It was the believer who had the power and authority to achieve this victory over Satan, by choosing to set aside the habits of sin. Anderson saw demonic oppression as the major spiritual problem faced by Christians, claiming that only about 15% of the evangelical Christian

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[103] Although Watson himself advocated strikingly counter-cultural positions like communal living that in some ways make him a forerunner of the progressives, he encouraged the establishment of groups like the Riding Lights Theatre Company – Christians creating a business with a missional focus in a secular arena.

community were living a free and productive life in Christ.[104] Any suggestion

that struggle against sin was the normal form of the Christian life (as the

mainstream Calvinist tradition did) was to give in to the lies of Satan.[105]

The Bondage Breaker clearly illustrates the extent to which the

charismatic tradition was therapeutic in character, but also the extent to which

it was focused on measurable success. Anderson measured holiness in terms of

productivity. The focus on self-belief and self-help, pushing charismatic

spirituality away from the Calvinist tradition, was in part a reflection of a

modernist therapeutic approach, where trusting the self became key, but also

reflected the influence of a wider secular genre of popular psychology and self-

help books.[106] The charismatic tradition was becoming preoccupied by

overcoming barriers to measurable success. A full half of the book was taken up

with strategies for remaining free from demonic bondage ('Steps to Freedom in

Christ'). The need to maintain the myth of evangelical success in the face of

decline and stagnation was placing increasing pressure on charismatic

spirituality.[107]

The strategy advocated by Anderson to avoid demonic bondage and

maximise a productive (holy) life was withdrawal and avoidance of areas of

potential demonic contamination. Exposure to the world, whether this took the

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[104] Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 121.
[105] Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 152.
[106] Illustrative of this tendency was Arterburn and Stroeker's *Every Man's Battle*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2005), a US evangelical bestselling self-help book for sexual temptation. Its presentation of victory over sin through choosing to change is clearly Wesleyan or Arminian, but is more assumed by the adoption of a therapeutic genre than argued for theologically.
[107] Percy's reflections on the Toronto Vineyard church's use of a narrative of heroic struggle to understand the apparent failure of the Toronto Blessing are illuminating here. Percy, *Engaging*, 157-79.

form of sinful activity or areas of life that were not sinful in themselves but could become idolatrous, posed a risk of demonization to the believer.[108] No guidance was given to discern when something had become an idol, and this lack of detail following a blanket warning tended to give the reader carte blanche to apply it in accordance with their own prejudices. In this regard it is interesting to note that a disproportionate number of the examples of demonic bondage provided by Anderson in the first half of the book dealt with sexual sin, creating the impression that sexuality was particularly associated with the demonic.[109]

It was also striking that Anderson appeared to view the church as a 'safe space' with the outside world being fraught with threat and claims on people and places by the demonic. Christians could lose their freedom by accidentally trespassing upon long-dormant yet still legitimate rights and claims of the demonic out in the world. Non-Christians were always under the claims of the demonic and might themselves be sources of contamination to Christians. The fearful and purity-focused worldview this set of ideas produced is expressed in a prayer Anderson provides asking for the divine protection which is necessary for the Christian to live safely in the world.[110]

Associating with the sinful was seen as particularly dangerous, opening the Christian to the possibility of demonization. Anderson illustrated this by

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[108] Anderson, *Bondage Breaker*, 207-210. The list of occult activities was broad enough to include 'movies that stimulated the flesh', and the list of areas that could be made wrong priorities included everything from financial security to children.
[109] Out of ten contemporary examples, 170-199, five involved sexual sins, and most of the rest were simply examples of possession with no specific sin mentioned.
[110] Anderson, *Bondage Breaker*, 250.

using the example of an evangelist to prostitutes 'and other questionable characters' who lived in the red light district:

> According to 1 Corinthians 15:33, anyone who stays in that environment too long will get into trouble...Does this mean we shouldn't minister to those with bad morals? No, we must share Christ with them. But if we immerse ourselves in their environment, our ministry will effectively diminish and our morality will be affected for the worse.[111]

There was a certain degree of pastoral common sense being expressed here, but the language being used was extreme: associating with those with 'bad morals' (a category of people that appeared to consist of non-Christians whose lifestyle contained visible or public sin) opened the believer to demonic influence and such association should therefore be avoided.

Anderson visibly struggled to reconcile this ethic of purity with the evangelical imperative to evangelism. The approach he advocated appeared ironically close to that critiqued by Watson: evangelicals engaging in spiritual commando raids whilst living essentially apart from the world. The implications of this spirituality are obvious: if a group within the secular world (like gays) are identified as a potential source of demonic oppression, then any individuals within the church who are in contact with or supportive of that group could be regarded as the cause of crisis and failure within the church. In other words, this is a spirituality that functions to mark out *pharmakoi*. The logic is that if the church is not enjoying the success and blessing that is God's intention, then this is because someone has brought demonic infestation through their impurity.

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[111] Anderson, *Bondage Breaker*, 173.

4.4.4 Alpha - An Unacknowledged Purity Ethic

Anderson offers an extreme example, but the ideas he presented explicitly were implicitly present in other more mainstream (and English) charismatic writings. The Alpha course was possibly the most influential introduction to Christian faith in England from the early 1990s, when it began, to the end of our period. By 2011, over 8,000 courses were running in the UK.[112] Its charismaticism was evident in the fact that the climax of the course was the Holy Spirit weekend, which focused on the need to be filled with the Spirit, rather than a more traditional evangelical emphasis on praying a prayer of commitment. The course included a session on spiritual warfare.[113]

There was little discussion of ethical issues in the main course, though these were covered in more detail in one of the many books of additional material Gumbel wrote to stand alongside the basic course: *Challenging Lifestyle*, a book based around exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, and setting out how to live the Christian life. Gumbel explicitly situated his discussion of personal holiness within the broad Calvinism of Keele – referencing Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* and describing Christians as called to eschew ghettos and be salt and light in the secular world.[114] Clearly, then, just as he had with his presentation of the consensus position on homosexuality, Gumbel wished to advocate the common ground of cautiously-open conservatism: world-affirmingly open Calvinism.

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[112] 'Alpha website', http://uk.alpha.org/facts-and-figures (25 May 2011).
[113] Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?* (London, DLT, 2001).
[114] Gumbel, *Challenging Lifestyle*, 34-36.

However, in his discussion of sexual sin, Gumbel appeared more inclined to call on Christians to withdraw from the world in the interests of avoiding temptation. Despite briefly giving a nod to the idea that sexual desires were good in and of themselves, and being clear that everyone should set their own boundaries, he set out a rigorous programme of avoidance of sexual temptation as the best approach. In a world he described as 'saturated with sexual stimulation', in films, TV programmes, books, magazines, and advertisements, this sort of avoidance seemed to require withdrawal to something resembling a ghetto.[115] Gumbel advocated avoiding certain places, and not making friends with members of the opposite sex:

> We need to watch the friendships we make. Of course, all our lives are enriched by friendships with the opposite sex, but it is unwise for a married person to get too close to someone of the opposite sex, whether it be a work colleague, tennis partner, secretary or confidante.[116]

The example of Billy Graham was approvingly cited, who since being married had never had a meal or ridden in a car alone with a woman other than his wife, and always kept the door open if he was in a room together with a woman. Gumbel advocated relationships of mutual accountability with a good friend of the same sex as a helpful safeguard against sexual temptation.

Clearly Gumbel's advice revealed a lot about who his ideal reader might be: married, straight, and in a work environment in which the number of members of the opposite sex they might find themselves needing to work alone

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[115] Gumbel, *Challenging Lifestyle*, 71.
[116] Gumbel, *Challenging Lifestyle*, 73.

with was small.[117] It also displayed the hugely disproportionate focus on sex and sexuality characteristic of Western culture, as is apparent when Gumbel's strict advice on sexual temptation is compared to his decidedly weak advice on fiscal temptation.[118] By and large Gumbel's teaching on holiness was moderate in the extreme. Sex and sexuality, however, provoked an excessively hard line, which was specifically displayed through the deployment of an unstated purity ethic similar to that observed in Anderson.

It is this unstated purity ethic that hovers in the background of Gumbel's uncritical restatement of the consensus position on homosexuality. The unqualified statement of the position as simply 'what the Bible says', noted in chapter 3, may not only suggest a typical entrepreneurial lack of interest in doctrine, but also that the force of the prohibition is not (as it would be for biblicist-crucicentrics) the need to follow a biblical ethic, but the need to avoid demonic corruption. This distinction between a concern with sin and a concern with contamination is the key to understanding a purity ethic.

4.4.5 Purity and holiness

I have used the term 'purity ethic' to describe the scandalised aspect of charismatic spirituality because, as a concern focused around the need to avoid demonic contamination rather than a concern with sin per se, it falls into the category of pollution behaviour. Anthropologist Mary Douglas has carefully

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[117] Gumbel's failure of imagination is clear here when it is considered how his advice would transfer to someone who might feel attracted to members of either sex (a surprisingly high proportion of the population, according to Kinsey).
[118] Gumbel's comparative lack of interest in accountability and refusal of the sort of strictly literal reading of scripture in regard to wealth that he advocated for sex is striking. *Challenging Lifestyle*,173

distinguished the categories of immorality (concern with sin) and pollution (concern with contamination) in primitive societies, and her work illuminates this scandalised dimension to charismatic spirituality.[119] Douglas argues that the concept of pollution is a cultural means of identifying dangerous anomalies in the categories and boundaries that define and order symbolic worlds. Purity laws and rituals are required to contain the danger and restore cultural order. They tend to overlap but not exactly concur with moral laws – being distinct from concern with morality or sin.[120]

This understanding of the way in which purity laws operate in relation to moral laws is suggestively similar to the way the charismatic tradition treats sexual temptation, as I have outlined it above. The whole category of 'demonic bondage' mirrors concerns with impurity very closely, as is seen in Anderson – to be oppressed by the demonic is not the same as being sinful (though the two may overlap), indeed it can happen almost accidentally, because of the activities of one's room-mate, extended family, even one's ancestors. In Gumbel, sex is identified as an area of potential pollution, necessitating rituals and pollution behaviours to prevent the possibility of contamination, despite an explicit recognition that sexual desire per se is good, and that the activities and behaviours he is advocating avoiding may not in fact be immoral.

Girard has also written on ritual and sexual prohibitions in primitive societies. In his *Violence and the Sacred*, he argues that all ritual is a means of preventing contagious violence, by containing and neutralising it, keeping it out

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[119] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[120] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 134.

of the community.[121] The seemingly arbitrary focus on objects and behaviours

that are logically disconnected from any threat to the community (a focus on

impurity rather than immorality) does not represent primitive confusion, but

rather a deliberate obscuring of who is really to blame in order that the cycle of

vengeance may be averted.[122] On sexual prohibitions, he argues that where sex

is given great significance by society (as it is in that of the modern West) it is

treated as a threat like violence – something to be carefully contained and

hidden.[123] In all of this, he argues that taboos and prohibitions act to 'maintain a

sort of sanctuary at the heart of the community, an area where that minimum of

nonviolence essential to the survival of the children and the community's

cultural heritage… is jealously preserved.'[124]

Clearly Douglas's work is here fully compatible with Girard's. Both would

see purity rituals as a means by which a community protects itself from the

threat of dissolution. Both would recognise that such a purity ethic does not

coincide with attempts to determine moral fault or apportion blame (i.e. it is

distinct from any understanding of 'sin'). Girard would go on to argue that a

purity ethic may deliberately obscure the connection between the very real

threat of the dissolution of the community in a crisis of undifferentiation and its

actual cause (as true knowledge here would open the way for the spread of

contagious violence within the community once again). The purity ethic is thus

an extension of the single victim mechanism – it is a means by which a potential

[121] Girard, *VS*, 98.
[122] Girard, *VS*, 22-33.
[123] Girard, *VS*, 230-3. See also Percy, 'Sweet Rapture: Subliminal Eroticism in Contemporary Charismatic Worship', in *Theology and Sexuality*, 6.
[124] Girard, *VS,* 233.

scapegoat, a *pharmakos*, can be marked out, ready to be sacrificed by the community in time of need. By transgressing purity taboos, an individual becomes seen as impure, even if they have not done anything immoral, and in the midst of a crisis of undifferentiation such impure individuals make good scapegoats, against whom the community can direct all its violence.

Identifying a scandalised charismatic spirituality as centred around a purity ethic enables us to understand its function within charismatic communities. Charismatic spirituality moved away from a more Calvinist sense of the spiritual life as marked by struggle towards a therapeutic theology of success, developing a purity ethic partly as a means of explaining perceived failure. This encouraged a disengagement from those perceived to be corrupted or in danger of being corrupted by sex or sexuality even when they were acting in a completely moral way. A charismatic might disengage from gay friends without necessarily seeing them as sinful in and of themselves because of the risk of demonic corruption. The purity ethic, rooted in a fear of demonic corruption, thus created a disconnection between the stated sexual ethics of charismatic evangelicals and their behaviour. Gays were not singled out in this regard except inasmuch as they were a group who self-identified by reference to sex and sexuality.[125]

The scandalised charismatic spirituality I have outlined here has shaped evangelical responses to homosexuality in various ways. In some instances the link appears obvious, as in White's treatment of homosexuality in *Eros*

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[125] This does not absolve charismatic tradition of the charge of homophobia, as the very fact that all forms of homosexual sexual expression, unlike heterosexual ones, were included in lists of potential sources of demonic corruption would suggest an unspoken homophobic stance.

Redeemed, that links it to demonic threat, but there have been more subtle influences too. The creation of a worldview in which failure, struggle or crisis can be interpreted as demonic attack for which someone (often someone associated with sexual sin) is to blame has had a wide-reaching influence, creating a justification for scapegoating. Finally, the disjunction created between sin and impurity encouraged charismatics to separate themselves from even those they regarded as innocent of sin.

The charismatic tradition was less consciously caught up in mimetic rivalry than the other traditions but was in fact just as much a mimetic rival within the crisis of undifferentiation. Progressives and exclusivists each in their own way sought to distance themselves from a spirituality based in success. The charismatic cautiously-open conservatives tended, by contrast, to present themselves self-consciously as representing the centre-ground of evangelicalism, heirs of Keele, in comparison to whom progressives and exclusivists were extremists. The unstated implication of rhetoric such as that of Anderson is that those evangelicals who do not carefully guard against demonic corruption (a category that almost by definition includes most non-charismatics) are themselves corrupted, and therefore prevented from experiencing the success God desires for them.

Although the language and structure of charismatic spirituality appears fundamentally different to that of exclusivists and progressives, a mimetic symmetry becomes apparent once they are regarded in relation to the single victim mechanism. There is in all three traditions a steady movement away from the moderate world-affirming stance of Keele towards a more extreme

scandalised position, in which they understand themselves as purer and more faithful than the rest of evangelical tradition. From these positions, each tradition has a tendency to demonise the others and to create scapegoats.

4.5 Conclusion

English evangelical spirituality has been distorted under the influence of the crisis of undifferentiation in which it is gripped. Although homosexuality is a focal point within that crisis, it is not the only aspect of evangelical belief and practice that has become scandalised. The crisis had a deeper impact on evangelical spirituality, expressing itself in distorted approaches to sin and holiness that have rejected the broad Calvinist tradition of Keele, and its world-affirming openness and penitential humility. In the Calvinist tradition, although the Keele tradition was still respected, progressives and exclusivists left it behind, finding its commitment to a mixed church increasingly difficult to sustain. Their rhetoric moved in opposing directions, though their actual stances were mimetically similar. Progressives criticised the worldliness of a church corrupted by its accommodation within Christendom. They sought to withdraw from this corruption by the world by creating a pure community that engaged with and prophetically critiqued the world, using a rhetoric of radical engagement. Exclusivists criticised the worldliness of a church corrupted by its accommodation to liberal critique of Christendom. They sought to withdraw from this corruption by the world by creating a pure community that engaged with and prophetically critiqued the world, using a rhetoric of radical disengagement. In the charismatic tradition, although allegiance to the Keele tradition was still affirmed, this was increasingly undermined by a therapeutic

theology of success accompanied by a purity ethic which functioned to explain failure by reference to demonic corruption. The fear of the demonic this created encouraged withdrawal to a safe Christian ghetto (in which Christian consumerism flourished, creating safe versions of worldly cultural products) and acted to identify potential scapegoats in a crisis. Each evangelical tradition mirrored the other in an increasingly violent mimetic crisis in which the monstrousness of the other pushed each to more extreme positions.

My Girardian analysis of English evangelicalism in the period 1960-2010 has therefore led me to the conclusion that the Jeffrey John affair as an act of scapegoating was symptomatic of deeper problems within the spirituality of English evangelicalism. Gripped in a crisis of undifferentiation, in which the rivalry between its traditions generated a sacred and contagious violence, homosexuality had become a key battleground in which evangelical identity was being contested. The crisis was not limited to affecting evangelical approaches to homosexuality, but evangelical understandings of sin and holiness as a whole. Evangelical spirituality had become scandalised, distorted by being drawn into mimetic crises and creating purity ethics that could identify potential scapegoats.

Chapter 5

Homophobia and Fundamentalism as Insufficient Explanations

> It [sensibility of difference and tolerance of the incommensurable] is what post/modernists aspire to in contrast to the negative, paranoid, fearful way of relating to the other which produces (for instance) misogyny, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia... Except that... the post-modern sophisticate is also the critic of these other, negative ways of relating to the other; he or she is the one who diagnoses their social and psychic economies. In the process the misogynist, the racist, and the homophobe have *as such* become the negative others of the post-modern... in the world we have, is it possible for us – any of us – not to have at least some inferior others?[1]

> - Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*

5.1 Introduction

I have been constructing an argument, drawing on the work of René Girard, that the stance adopted towards homosexuality by English evangelicals in the period 1960-2010 was in large part shaped by a crisis of undifferentiation, which I described in chapter 2. In chapter 3 I demonstrated the way in which this developing crisis and the tensions it created within the evangelical community, and between it and other Christian groupings, shaped evangelical writings on the subject. Homosexuality became a focal point for the crisis, and an area in which scapegoating easily occurred. The Jeffrey John affair, examined in chapter 1, is one of the more prominent examples of this. In

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[1] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 331.

chapter 4 I demonstrated the way in which wider evangelical understandings of holiness and sin became scandalised under the influence of the crisis. My argument therefore suggests that the widely-recognised problem inherent in English evangelical responses to homosexuality is broader than a problematic stance towards homosexuality alone, and yet is not to be uncritically identified with evangelical tradition and spirituality per se. This approach is therefore distinct from two more common explanations: homophobia and fundamentalism.

In this chapter, I will examine these alternative explanations of the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality, demonstrating both that they are inadequate explanations of the problem, and that they are themselves scandalised, seeking to identify evangelicals as scapegoats and thus blind to their own complicity in creating the problem. In critiquing the most common alternative explanations of the problem I also seek to validate my use of the work of Girard. I suggested at the outset that my analysis might seem vulnerable to the critique that it is an overly complex explanation of a far simpler phenomenon. Homophobia and fundamentalism are the most prominent simpler explanations of the problem: suggesting that the problem may essentially be described as either evangelical bigotry (with the implication that if they simply lost their prejudices then all would be well) or evangelical backwardness and immaturity (with the implication that they must change into some more mature and rational form of Christian.) In this chapter I suggest that my analysis has identified a depth and complexity to the problem that neither of these explanations can really engage with. Contrary to first impressions, the

problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is not a simple one, and the apparently over-complex explanation provided by Girardian analysis may actually provide the best chance at finding a solution to it. Girardian theory allows the problem and these common explanations of it to be set in a wider context in which both evangelicals and those who label them as homophobes and fundamentalists can be seen as caught up in a mimetic relationship in which both are simultaneously martyrs and monsters.

5.2 Homophobia

5.2.1 The Accusation of Homophobia

In 2011, Symon Hill, associate director of the Christian thinktank Ekklesia, went on a pilgrimage to repent of Christian homophobia and his own previous complicity in it. Prior to this, he gave an address on Christianity and homophobia to the Camden LGBT Forum, in which he made it clear that he saw much of the church (explicitly naming the evangelical-dominated Anglican Mainstream and Christian Concern) as bigoted and homophobic: 'Much of the Church is, to one extent or another, homophobic. This homophobia is perpetuated by bigots who define their faith by their hatred of gay people and by liberals who fail to speak up for inclusion out of a misplaced desire for unity.'[2] For Hill, heteropatriarchy, the dominance of straight men, was one of the defining characteristics of Christendom, and the Church was historically complicit in the construction of a society that excluded and ostracised gays. Christendom has crumbled, but the church, and other institutions accustomed

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[2] Symon Hill, 'Christianity & Homophobia in Britain Today' [May 18, 2011], text of address to Camden LGBT Forum's 'The Globalisation of Homosexuality' event [May 17, 2011], http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/14787 (August 10, 2011).

to the privileged position they once held, are caught in the past, expressing

outrage at LGBT demands for equality and inclusion. Clearly, from the examples

he stated, Hill had English evangelicals particularly in mind when he spoke of

'bigots who define their faith by their hatred of gay people.' It is significant,

however, that he held 'liberals who fail to speak up for inclusion' equally to

blame for the Church's homophobia. The reference was almost certainly to

Rowan Williams, who by 2011 was becoming a figure of hate for some in the

liberal constituency for his perceived refusal to promote his liberal views on

homosexuality as Archbishop of Canterbury, but the effect was to use

'homophobia' as a liberal shibboleth, a means of identifying potential

scapegoats.

The accusation of homophobia is a commonplace of liberal rhetoric in

response to evangelicals. It also occurred in the ethicist Andrew Linzey's

introduction to *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, a volume of responses to the

Windsor report, edited by Linzey and Richard Kirker (of LGCM) and published

in 2005.[3] Linzey argued that the Church of England as a whole (and evangelicals

and conservative catholics in particular) was homophobic, expressing a

thoroughgoing aversion to gays, giving multiple examples of homophobia within

the Anglican Communion to back up his accusation.[4] Linzey's argument was

passionate – seeking to draw connections between executions of gays in the

holocaust and the Church of England's failure to commit to full equality on

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[3] Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker (eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism: Responses to the Windsor report* (Winchester: O Books, 2005).

[4] The fact that the assertion and the evidence related to different bodies is an indication of the rhetorical excesses of his discussion. His examples were both too diverse to be obviously exemplifying a single phenomenon (a homophobic speech by an African Archbishop and the Church of England's negotiations with government to ensure religious exemptions from equality legislation) and insufficiently broad to convincingly represent the Church of England as a whole.

sexual orientation – but it addressed a stereotype of evangelicalism rather than making any serious effort to understand the nuances of evangelical positions on homosexuality. In his article 'In Defense of Diversity', Linzey argued that those 'evangelicals' (the quotation marks are Linzey's) who believe that practising gay behaviour is contrary to scripture and incompatible with Christian discipleship were in reality calling for all gays to leave the church, even if they seldom stated this position clearly.[5] Linzey's use of the perhaps purposefully vague 'practising gay behaviour' allowed him to elide the differences between sexually active gays and all gays. He then further suggested that the Jeffrey John Affair demonstrated that such evangelicals also wanted all those who took a different view to themselves (who they would define as 'false teachers') to leave the church, painting a dystopian vision of a church where all gays and those concerned to support them had been excluded.[6] The argument was clearly overstated, but presented a clear vision of evangelicals as homophobes seeking to exclude all that they hated from their pure church. Despite the excesses this was clearly a recognisable picture.

More examples could be given, but Hill and Linzey represent two attempts to explain the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality by reference to 'homophobia'. They also demonstrate some of the breadth of the term. Hill used the term homophobia to denote complicity in heteropatriarchy, not only

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[5] Interestingly, Linzey appeared to suggest that a more acceptable and historically widely-held evangelical position was that practising gay behaviour is wrong and contrary to scripture, but not incompatible with Christian discipleship (Linzey and Kirker, *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, 184). In fact, I have not found any evangelical writings adopting such a position. Linzey's mistake here may lie in his inability to recognise that for many evangelicals, identifying something as incompatible with Christian discipleship does not necessarily lead to calls for exclusion.

[6] Linzey and Kirker, (eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, 184-7.

suggesting the problem was one of culture and ideology but also that it was

intimately connected to sexism and other related problems. By situating the

problem not in an individual's psychology but in the culture of a society, he was

able to identify those not making efforts to stand against that culture as

complicit in homophobia regardless of their personal views. Before considering

its viability as an explanation of the problem, it is clearly important to define

what 'homophobia' might mean.

5.2.2 Definitions of homophobia

Homophobia is a relatively recent term, first used in the 1960s, but

popularised by the psychologist Kenneth T. Smith, who developed a scale to

measure homophobia in 1971.[7] In Smith's usage of the term, it clearly referred

to a complex of personal beliefs and behaviours expressing irrational hatred

and fear of gays. Smith's 'H' scale was widely recognised as inadequate (by

Smith himself amongst others) and after a number of attempts at improvement,

it was replaced as the measure most widely used by psychologists by the

Hudson and Ricketts Index of Homophobia (IHP) in 1988.[8] Despite offering

greater accuracy than Smith's 'H' scale, the IHP had recognized drawbacks.

Increasingly, psychologists and others felt the need to differentiate more

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[7] Kenneth T. Smith, "Homophobia: A Tentative Personality Profile" *Psychological Reports* 29 (1971), 1091-1094.

[8] Walter Hudson and Wendell A. Ricketts, "A Strategy for the Measurement of Homophobia." *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 5 (4). (Summer 1988), 357-372. See also Malcolm E. Lumby, "Homophobia: The Quest for a Valid Scale", *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 2 (1), (Fall 1976), 39-47; Christopher L. San Miguel and Jim Milham, "The Role of Cognitive and Situational Variables in Aggression Toward Homosexuals" *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 2 (1), (Fall 1976), 11-27; Jim Milham, Christopher L. San Miguel, and Richard Kellogg, "A Factor - Analytic Conceptualization of Attitudes Toward Male and Female Homosexuals", *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 2 (1), (Fall 1976), 3-10.

carefully between different degrees and aspects of homophobia.[9] Colleen Logan

conducted research that demonstrated a clear distinction should be drawn

between a genuinely phobic response to homosexuality (which characterised

very few individuals) and a broader expression of homonegativity that could

better be described as homoprejudice.[10] Others argued that responses to gay

men and lesbians were markedly different, suggesting that these different

homophobias should be carefully distinguished (and implying that further

distinctions should perhaps be made in regard to responses to bi- and trans-

sexuals).

Perhaps the greatest weakness of all studies has been the difficulty of

proving a causal link between attitudes and beliefs researchers believe to be

expressive of homophobia and actual acts of violence and abuse against

homosexuals. Most of the studies have been conducted on psychology students,

none of whom had been convicted of any hate-crime against homosexuals. In

2005, psychologists O'Donohue and Caselles were to sum up the field of study

by stating that 'existing psychometric measures of homophobia have been

inadequate and therefore it is not clear currently whether this construct can be

accurately measured. The development of the construct of homophobia appears

to be in its infancy.'[11]

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[9] Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen argue for phobic responses and aggression to be carefully distinguished as a means of winning over popular opinion, *After the Ball: How America will Conquer its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).
[10] Colleen R. Logan, "Homophobia? No, Homopredjudice", *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 31 (3), (1996), 31-53.
[11] William T. O'Donohue, and Christine E. Caselles, "Homophobia: Conceptual, Definitional, and Value Issues", 65- 83 in Rogers H. Wright and Nicolas A. Cummings, (eds.), *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 82.

Outside of the psychological study of homophobia, the term had developed a far broader popular meaning, particularly through its usage in political contexts. It is this broader popular and political usage of the term that lies behind its use by liberal critics of English evangelicals like Hill and Linzey. This linguistic development is described by Louis-Georges Tin in his introduction to *The Dictionary of Homophobia*:

> …the notion of homophobia has progressively broadened as research has allowed us to understand that acts, words, and attitudes that are clearly perceived as homophobic are nothing more than the by-product of a more general cultural construction representative of violence throughout society as a whole. As a result, the semantic extension of the word has obeyed a metonymic logic that has permitted the linking of the act of homophobia to its ideological and institutional foundations, which are also denounced under this term.[12]

Under this broader meaning of homophobia, individual psychology became far less significant than the cultural and ideological structures that nurtured and created it, and the most dangerous homophobes were now to be recognised as those complicit with the cultural structures propagating homophobia, who might well not personally hold to homophobic attitudes. The sociologist Eric Fassin has helpfully distinguished between the psychological and political uses of the term by suggesting that the first is equivalent to misogyny and is properly described as homophobia, whereas the second is equivalent to sexism and is

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[12] Louis-Georges Tin, (ed.), *The Dictionary of Homophobia: A Global History of Gay and Lesbian Experience*, trans. Marek Redburn (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2008) originally (Presses universitaires de France, 2003), 12.

better described as heterosexism.[13]

This diversity of meaning gives homophobia as a concept a depth and richness, albeit at the cost of some confusion and lack of precision. For the purposes of this study, I will adopt a broad definition that is primarily focused on heterosexism in Fassin's terms, as this matches best the popular use of the term homophobia, as used in Hill and Linzey. In examining homophobia as a possible explanation for the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality, I will draw on the definition used by the LGCM in their study of Christian homophobia. I am therefore considering the extent to which English evangelicals can be understood as a community formed by and nurturing 'an irrational hatred, disapproval, or fear of homosexuality, gay and lesbian people, and their culture' rooted in a culture upholding heterosexuality as the only valid (or perhaps existent) sexuality.[14] Clearly many of the evangelical texts we have examined express particular stances towards homosexuality as reasoned expositions of evangelical (and biblical) belief. It is important to recognise that commentators employing this understanding of homophobia regard theoretical arguments (whether philosophical, scientific or theological) as attempts to legitimate a pre-existing prejudice.[15] Therefore a hermeneutic of suspicion is applied to evangelical writings with more attention paid to the positions they advocate than the reasons given for them.

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[13] Eric Fassin, "Le outing de l'homophobie est-il le bonne politique?" in Daniel Borillo, and Pierre Lascoumes, (eds.), *L'Homophobie, comment la definir, comment la combattre* (Paris: Editions ProChoix, 1999), cited in Tin, (ed.), *The Dictionary of Homophobia*, 12.

[14] LGCM, *Christian Homophobia: The church's persecution of gay and lesbian couples* (London: LGCM, 2000).

[15] Tin, *The Dictionary of Homophobia*, 13.

5.2.3 Homophobia in English Evangelicalism - Some Preliminary Observations

My analysis of evangelical writings on homosexuality in chapter 3 identified many examples of homonegativity that would have to be called homophobic under this definition. From explicit calls for the exclusion of sexually-active gays from positions of leadership (or in some cases from the church as a whole) to implicit identification of gays with the demonic or shadowy liberal conspiracies, and denials of the reality of gay suffering, there is much that seems designed to nurture fear, hatred or disapproval of gays. Even those aspects of evangelical writings that might arguably be seen as falling short of homophobia generally do too little to guard against it. Perfunctory condemnations of homophobia in passing suggest a desire to protect evangelicals from accusations of homophobia more than a sincere concern for the welfare of gays. The reality of violence against gays and the injustices they face are not frequently referenced. In some cases evangelicals have gone out of their way to belittle or deny that suffering. Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury's 2004 letter to the Primates, reiterating the need for a moderation of language due to the real persecution faced by homosexuals worldwide prompted an open letter to the Sunday Times in response from Reform which stated that this was 'presumably a gesture to the gay community who love to peddle this line that they all feel under enormous pressure and they are all being persecuted which is not true.'[16] It was the need to face up to the reality of gay suffering that prompted the evangelical Andrew Goddard to write on

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[16] Sean Gill, 'We have been here before' in Linzey and Kirker, (eds,), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, 292; Reform, Letters, *Sunday Times* (November 28, 2004).

'Homophobia', urging those holding to the consensus position to take a clear stand against homophobia.[17] When Watson called for evangelicals to repent of their homophobia in the 1970s it was clear that he was thinking about real suffering and violence. Such sincere concern to express evangelical guilt and need for repentance is now unusual.

If there are good reasons to see homophobia as an accurate explanation for much of the evangelical response to homosexuality, its broadness as a term and the lack of precision as to what constitutes evidence of its presence creates some problems in applying it to the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality. No significant grouping of English evangelicals argue for anything but acceptance of non sexually-active gays. Indeed, there are some remarkable examples in the texts examined in chapter 3 of gays being held up as model Christians. When gays are implicitly demonised in more blanket terms (as occurs in the occasional references to a 'gay lobby' or 'gay-liberal conspiracy') it is as prototypical liberals (and liberals are demonised in other contexts in which homosexuality does not feature). It is the perceived liberalism of gays that provokes evangelical fears, not the perceived gayness of liberals, and it is gay sexual activity rather than gay identity that is the stated focus of evangelical concern.

Exclusivist evangelical calls for sexually-active gays to be excluded from the church are consistent with the position they generally adopt in regard to all unmarried sexual activity, making it in effect a stance against promiscuity

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[17] Andrew Goddard, 'Homophobia', Expanded version of Fulcrum newsletter, (May 2006), http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/20060524goddard.cfm?doc=108 (August 10, 2011).

within which the validity of gay marriage is denied, as is suggested by the results of an EA-commissioned Christian Research survey of evangelical attitudes in 2011.[18] This suggested that a clear majority of evangelicals did not see having homosexual feelings as wrong, and that their attitudes to homosexual sexual behaviour mirrored their attitudes to heterosexual sexual behaviour – a comparable number saw any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as wrong.[19] Indeed, the existence of a small minority who were prepared to countenance the blessing of same-sex relationships in church suggested that for some evangelicals the key issue was not homosexuality but promiscuity.[20]

Identifying these positions as homophobic may well be correct – gays, whether also seen as liberal or not are consistently being feared and excluded, and the validity of any gay sexual activity is certainly being denied, even if it is done so in the context of denying the validity of other forms of sexual activity – but it risks misunderstanding the internal dynamics of the stance taken. Homophobia as an explanation does not encourage paying attention to such subtleties, as was apparent in Linzey's summary of evangelical beliefs, where he

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[18] Christian Research, *21st Century Evangelicals – Data Report*, (Evangelical Alliance and Christian Research, 2011) accessed at http://christian-research.org/past-publications/the-beliefs-of-evangelicals.html (August 2011).

[19] Christian Research, *21st Century Evangelicals – Data Report*, 20, 24. 73% of the festival sample and 80% of the church sample saw 'homosexual actions' (as distinct from 'feelings') as always wrong. 79% of the festival sample and 81% of the church sample saw any sex outside marriage as always wrong. On the question of the blessing of same sex partnerships in church, 8% of the festival sample were for, and 11% unsure, and 6% of the church sample were for, and 10% unsure.

[20] This has been recognised even by some gay theologians like Robert Goss who argues that 'homophobia' is misleading, and should be replaced with 'erotophobia', to indicate the degree to which there is a cluster of interlinked areas of sexual discrimination. Robert E. Goss, 'Sexual visionaries and freedom fighters for a sexual reformation: from gay theology to queer sexual theologies', in Gill, (ed.), *The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement*, 187-202.

saw no need to distinguish opposition to gay sexual practice and opposition to gays per se.[21]

Treating such subtle distinctions as simply minor variations between forms of homonegativity (which is how homophobia as an explanation encourages them to be treated) risks misunderstanding evangelicalism. It creates a dividing line between those progressives who express no homonegativity (like Vasey or Marin) and all other evangelicals, who are all homonegative to varying degrees, and invests this dividing line with more significance than the subtler divisions noted above. This obscures the substantial common ground between all evangelicals of the period, but particularly between progressives and cautiously-open conservatives. As well as making this problematic as an analytical approach, it also makes it harder to work for change – the continuities between Vasey and Stott are de-emphasised by insisting that Stott and Gagnon are simply variations on the same theme.

The tendency to identify all non-homopositivity as expressing a form of homophobia also makes it difficult for this approach to recognise potential resources for homopositivity within evangelicalism, especially when they are expressed in ways that are different from homopositivity in gay culture. A clear example of this is evangelical denial of the validity of a gay identity, which characterises both exclusivist and some cautiously-open conservative positions. In some cases this occurs quite directly, as in the use of the circumlocution 'people with same-sex attraction issues', in other cases more subtly, as in the conventional 'hate the sin but love the sinner' which assumes that the person

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[21] Linzey and Kirker, (eds.) *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, 624.

concerned can easily be disentangled from the sexual practice they have chosen
to find their identity in.[22] This is generally viewed by liberal commentators as a
particularly toxic example of homophobia – a denial that gays even exist.
However, as is apparent from the St Andrew's Day statement, this denial derives
from a radical refusal to accept the validity of any identity except that rooted in
God.[23] Identity rooted in race, gender, class, age etc is all similarly undermined.
In effect, this is a radically egalitarian position, though as Jeffrey John notes in
his critique of the statement it is hard to avoid the suspicion that, despite
expressing a deep ontological truth, in more mundane terms what this is
supposed to suggest is that *really* we are all heterosexual.[24] The more radical
reading of this truth – that Christians should not see themselves as either
straight or gay but as God's adopted children – is best seen as a potential but
under-exploited resource for homopositivity within evangelical tradition.

The root cause of these misunderstandings of evangelicalism is the
hermeneutic of suspicion applied to any evangelical statements, which has the
effect of pre-judging evangelical self-understanding as lacking. It should be
noted at the outset that there is some justification for employing a hermeneutic
of suspicion in regard to the evangelical texts we have examined in chapter 3.
There is little difference in the reading of scripture between all three evangelical
groupings (progressives show a little more variety, but often this takes the form
of considering additional texts significant – as in Vasey's use of texts on
friendship) and yet the texts are applied in different ways (often without much

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[22] Nolland et al, (eds.), *God, Gays and the Church*.
[23] St Andrew's Day Statement, in Bradshaw, (ed.), *The Way Forward?*, 7-8.
[24] Jeffrey John 'Christian Same-Sex Partnerships', 44-59 in Bradshaw, (ed.), *The Way Forward?*,
45.

in the way of supporting argument, as in Gagnon and Stott reading the same

texts to call for exclusion of practising gays from membership of the church in

the one case, and the church as a place of challenge but acceptance for

practising gays in the other.)[25] Thus there is some evidence to support the idea

that there is a disconnection between the positions advocated and their

theoretical justifications. However, the examination of developments within

evangelical understandings of sin and holiness over the period in chapter 4

provides some explanation of this, by demonstrating that there are deeper (and

often unstated) differences in theology and spirituality between the different

evangelical groupings that lead them to apply a common understanding of

scripture in different ways.[26] The fact that differences in spirituality and

theology appear to underlie the differing stances of the three evangelical

groupings (so much so that there is good reason to believe, as I have argued in

chapter 3, that disagreement about homosexuality is in fact symbolic of deeper

differences) suggests that applying a hermeneutic of suspicion here leads to real

misunderstanding through a failure to engage in enough depth.

The concept of homophobia therefore seems to be accurate yet

potentially misleading. However, identifying homophobic behaviour and

attitudes in contemporary writings is only part of this approach. Identifying

evangelicalism as homophobic allows it to be situated within a certain historical

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[25] Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 118-24; Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 489-91; Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (1st ed.), 320-2.
[26] Church of England positions on homosexuality are actually more vulnerable to this critique – there has been a considerable shift in theoretical understanding (scientific, sociological and hermeneutical) between *SOSP* and *Some Issues*, yet the stated position of the church has remained virtually unchanged.

tradition, which sheds more light on its internal dynamics.[27]

5.2.4 Evangelicals as Inheritors of a Homophobic Tradition

One of the greatest strengths of homophobia as an explanation of the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is the historical perspective it provides. Although homophobia as a concept is a relatively recent construction the phenomenon it describes, persecution and oppression of people on the basis of same-sex sexual activity, is certainly not. The historical study of homophobia is controversial, however, not least because the historical study of homosexuality is controversial. Social constructivists like David Greenberg tend to follow Foucault in identifying the emergence of homosexuality in the modern sense – (egalitarian and exclusive) with its construction in medical discourse in the nineteenth century, and therefore assert that prior to this it was rare, with intergenerational homosexuality and bisexuality being more common.[28] This is contested by essentialists like Norton, who point to the fallacy of identifying the existence of homosexuality with heterosexual discourse about it. Norton argues that the historical prevalence of bisexuality is a myth when there were social pressures towards heterosexual relationships for family and dynastic reasons, so that those who clearly preferred homosexual relationships found it impossible to avoid heterosexual ones.[29]

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[27] Philip Kennedy, 'God's Good News for Gays', 299-314, in Linzey and Kirker (eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*.
[28] Colin Spencer, *Homosexuality: A history* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995); Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*; Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality* volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), first published 1976.
[29] Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 1-18, 99.

With the existence of homosexuality prior to the 1800s contested, the existence of homophobia is likewise contested. Attempts to persecute or control exclusively on the basis of same-sex sexual activity are not easily discerned. Prior to 1885 the only legislation prosecuting same-sex sexual behaviour was the 1533 law against buggery, which did not distinguish between homosexual or heterosexual offences (or indeed buggery committed with an animal).[30] The category of 'same-sex sexual activity' was seemingly not one perceived to be significant, making it difficult to assert that hatred or violence was directed against it.

This has not prevented many from observing that, however contemporaries perceived or defined it, those who physically expressed a same-sex attraction have historically been subject to violence and oppression and that there is a consistency about such treatment of gays in the historical culture of Western Europe. Gay studies pioneer Byrne Fone showed that the historical roots of this homophobia lie with Christianity.[31] Fone argues that although there may also be a psychological component to it, the content of homophobia is transmitted culturally through specific historical traditions, and those traditions have been Christian. Although there were instances of anti-gay sentiment in antiquity no pagan philosopher saw homosexuality as sinful and no pagan state enacted laws against it.[32] It was with Christendom that active persecution of

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[30] Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, 91-7.

[31] Although Fone here appears to support Norton's argument, his basic approach is rigorously criticised by him – Norton sees the study of laws against homosexuality as telling us almost nothing about either homosexuality or the actuality of persecution. He notes that in England especially the gap between legislation and enforcement is large – in the first hundred years of the death penalty for buggery there were only 3 prosecutions, and these were almost certainly politically motivated. Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, 139.

[32] Fone, *Homophobia*, 60-1, 114-7; Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 89, 183.

gays began, and it was undoubtedly Christianity that inspired it.[33]

Developments in Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages led to buggery being regarded as a far more serious sin than had previously had been the case, prompting its becoming a matter for secular law (as an offence that certainly included male homosexual practice, even if it was a wider category).[34] In Calvin's Geneva sodomites were tried and executed.[35] Notably, although in other countries the Enlightenment prompted a liberalisation of laws on homosexuality (with France decriminalizing it in 1791), in an England in which evangelicals had risen to dominate the moral life of the nation the rate of prosecutions increased.[36] The death penalty was dropped only in 1861, and homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1967.

Abuse and violence against those identified as gay (whether self-identified or identified as such by others) is a historical and contemporary fact, once carried out by official representatives of church and state with the full force of law behind it, now carried out in far more amorphous (though not always less violent) ways by groups and individuals far less easily identified. In 1999 the Admiral Duncan pub in Soho (known to be a gay bar) was nailbombed. Three were killed, and many more injured in an attack deliberately designed to stir up hatred against gays. Following the attack, Stonewall received more homophobic phonecalls in a day than they had in the previous six months.[37]

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[33] Fone, *Homophobia*, 177.
[34] Fone, *Homophobia*, 127, 137.
[35] Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 312.
[36] Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 360-8.
[37] Vanessa Baird, *Sex, Love, and Homophobia* (London: Amnesty International UK, 2004), 45.

The historical perspective I have outlined forces evangelicals adopting the consensus position to face difficult questions: is the stance that they adopt sufficiently clearly distinguished from the church's homophobic past to ensure that they cannot be seen as legitimating homophobic violence just as those who went before them did? LGCM's survey of Christian homophobia makes for sobering reading. The report, the first to conduct research into homophobia within the church, argued that the Christian church supported the majority of homophobic abuse and discrimination within society, and instanced occasions when gays have been expelled from congregations, excluded from using church-run welfare and housing organisations, and denied the use of church premises.[38]

Although few of the evangelical writings I have examined would explicitly advocate this (though some might legitimise it by their call for separation in the name of purity or distinctiveness), many of the texts I have examined do see a homosexual lifestyle as sinful, incompatible with Christian discipleship, harmful to self and others, and leading to the moral decline of society.[39] Evangelicals have often done too little to distance themselves from their complicity with the violent history of homophobia – giving the impression that the suffering of homosexuals is a matter of indifference to them. Indeed, as evangelical writings have shifted from having a pastoral to an apologetic focus, there has been a corresponding tendency to engage with homosexuality as an abstract ethical issue, a symbol of liberal cultural movements in church, biblical interpretation, and society, rather than as something that marks out a

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[38] LGCM, *Christian Homophobia*. See also Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 468-75.
[39] Holloway (ed.), *The Church and Homosexuality*; Schmidt, *Straight and narrow?*; Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*; John White, *Eros Redeemed*; St Andrew's Day Statement, Application I, in Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward?*, 7.

victimised community. Evangelicals are often guilty of refusing to see gays as people rather than as ciphers for wider cultural struggles – something that Marin has highlighted in his defiantly people-focused evangelical engagement with the gay community.[40]

This tendency on the part of evangelicals to react to the wider issues symbolically expressed by gay identity rather than to gays themselves could suggest that 'homophobia' is a misnomer, however. Inasmuch as evangelicals are expressing fear and animosity, it could in many cases more correctly be seen as displaced fear and animosity towards liberalism and radical permissiveness (expressed especially in sexual permissiveness), the cultural movements of modernism that they see as a threat to church and society. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the fact that homophobia amongst evangelicals appears to be linked to other broader prejudice absolves evangelicals of complicity with it. As Fone demonstrates, homophobia has always been linked to other forms of prejudice, whether sexual, racial or religious. There are remarkably few examples of 'pure' homophobic prejudice, and the linking of homosexuality to heresy, conspiracy, and wider threat to society is an ancient one. Accusations of sodomy were commonly added to other accusations – the Knights Templar were accused of sodomy as well as heresy, and critics of the ecclesiastical establishment tended to see corrupt monks and priests as stereotypically sodomites. The English term 'buggery' itself points to this connection, being an anglicised form of 'bougrerie', which refers to the Bulgar or Albigensian heretics of the thirteenth century, who were accused of

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[40] Marin, *Love is an orientation*.

homosexual offences.[41] The link between sodomy and heresy is historically particularly close, and the literary critic and cultural theorist Jonathan Dollimore notes that the word 'perverse' has historically been applied primarily to the sodomite and the heretic.[42]

Similarly, the church has hardly ever been directly involved in violence against gays (though Calvin's Geneva, significantly for those who trace a theological inheritence to his thought, was one such instance). The general pattern throughout history has been that the church has simply taught its disapproval of homosexuality, imposed penance on those engaging in it, and left it to others (generally the secular state) to engage in violence. It is easy to argue that evangelicals are not really homophobic when what they are 'really' concerned about is heresy and its corrosive effects on society, and they are not themselves carrying out violence. However, there are good grounds historically for asserting that this is exactly what the church has always done.

5.2.5 A Girardian Reading of Homophobia

Much of the above explanation would also be affirmed by a Girardian approach. The fact that evangelicals are complicit in a history of homophobic persecution would also be affirmed, but the links to wider patterns of persecution and scapegoating I have highlighted become more significant from this perspective. Gays, Jews, witches and heretics have historically been readymade scapegoats throughout European history, functioning as a class of *pharmakoi*. Accusations of buggery or witchcraft have tended historically to be

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[41] Fone, *Homophobia*, 152.
[42] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 120.

used slanderously against political opponents. This does not make the homophobia any less real, though it does suggest that persecution of gays occurred historically to relieve communal tensions whose real source was elsewhere, and that on occasion the accusations of sodomy (like accusations of Jewish infanticide) were completely groundless. In Girardian terms, then, although it is unquestionably right to draw attention to the reality of homophobic violence, it is a mistake to examine it in isolation from wider cultural tensions. It is only by understanding the reasons why a mob forms, becomes incensed, and turns on individuals or a group that it portrays as monstrous that it can be prevented, not by focusing on the excuses and justification the mob itself gives – the deep mechanisms provoking violence operate independently of any explanations offered.

Establishing the reasons why people are homophobic (and therefore what is required to stop homophobia) is a recurring issue for homophobia as an explanation. Cultural critic Jonathan Dollimore argues that both of the most common explanations: psychological illness and superstitious cultural relic from an unenlightened past, are problematic because they attempt to treat homophobia in isolation.[43] He sees it as a mistake to see the historical conjunction of homophobia with other forms of prejudice as a loose association requiring no deeper investigation. Rather, this signifies that gays have come to

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[43] Fone, *Homophobia*, 418-21, suggests homophobia is a 'disease of the psyche'. Andrew Village, 'Staring into the chasm: Patterns of homonegativity', 67-75, in Peter Francis (ed.) *Who pays the price?* (Hawarden: Monad Press, 2008), notes that survey results show homophobia to be less prevalent amongst young churchgoers and suggests it is a cultural relic that will wither away over time. However, he is so in thrall to the myth of liberal progress that he is reduced to doing this against the figures – which demonstrate a counter-trend amongst the youngest generation and that homopositivity is strongest in those sections of the church that other studies suggest is declining quickest.

symbolically represent a range of displaced anxieties for the dominant culture

through the construction of conventional representations of homosexuality.

Stereotypes of homosexuality, often identified as characteristic of homophobia,

are constructed by the dominant culture over an extended period of time,

allowing political crisis to be displaced onto the deviant in periods of intensified

conflict.[44] This gives the persecuted deviant the opportunity to see the

limitations of the dominant, to glimpse alternatives, and to model new ways of

being.

Dollimore is here, of course, far closer to Girard than he perhaps realises,

as this is as clear an exposition of the single victim mechanism and the model

provided by the martyr as is found anywhere in Girard's writings. As Dollimore

says elsewhere 'the obsession with homosexuality is always about much more

than homosexuality'.[45] The dominant culture condenses its non-sexual fears

into the homosexual, so that homophobia is always to do with a whole range of

other sorts of transgression that are intrinsic to the very way that

homosexuality is understood, constituting a surplus of meaning, whether or not

they describe any individual homosexual.

Yet this is not the most serious weakness of homophobia as an

explanation for the evangelical stance towards gays. A Girardian analysis

encourages a wider approach, which reveals aspects of the problem concealed

by the accusation of homophobia: namely the fact that the concept of

homophobia itself has a history. It is not a value-free concept, but one that was

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[44] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 235-7.
[45] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 29.

developed in the US in the 1960s and 1970s in the midst of the cultural struggle for the acceptance of the gay identity and as a part of that struggle, and is generally used by liberals to identify conservatives as the problem, those who are driven to persecute gays. In 1973, after a sustained campaign by pro-gay groups, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders. Prior to this point, gays had been officially perceived as sick deviants by the medical community, which had therefore studied their condition with a view to curing it. At around the point that the APA stopped regarding homosexuality as a disorder, psychologists began undertaking research into homophobia, as a recognised medical disorder, with a view to curing this sick disorder.[46]

As Girard has argued, the accusation of scapegoating is itself a form of scapegoating, the last and most acceptable within modernity. Dollimore describes the charge of homophobia suggestively as 'a kind of reverse discourse', noting the way it mirrors homophobic discourse precisely, suggesting that it is the heterosexual rather than the homosexual who may be sick, by reference to a list of stereotypical characteristics.[47] Both Dollimore and Girard are highlighting the fact that accusations of homophobia occur within a dialogue in which the two parties are increasingly mimetic. Each sees the other as monstrous and so the cycle of mimetic violence accelerates.

It is apparent that this sort of mimetic relationship binds together liberals and evangelicals in the crisis currently gripping the Anglican

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[46] O'Donohue and Cassells in Wright (ed.), *Destructive Trends in Mental Health*, 67-8.
[47] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 233.

Communion, and frames accusations of homophobia. Linzey, in his introduction,

sets out reasons for holding the Church of England to be homophobic.[48] He

argues that the acrimonious spirit involved and undue prominence given to the

issue of homosexuality by conservatives demonstrates a deeply

disproportionate understanding of morality. Then, having established to his

satisfaction that such theology is homophobic, he goes on to give their position

on homosexuality just the sort of disproportionate attention he has condemned

as indicative of phobic obsession: arguing that it demonstrates an unchristian

theology. Linzey appears to be unconsciously mirroring the evangelical

statements he condemns.

5.2.6 Homophobia - Conclusions

Homophobia has two great virtues as an explanation for the stance of

evangelicals towards homosexuality: simplicity and historical plausibility.

However, on closer inspection it has serious difficulties as an analytical tool.

Firstly, its lack of subtlety as a tool of analysis (caused largely by the

hermeneutic of suspicion that is applied to those identified as homophobic)

leads to genuine misunderstanding and poses barriers to working for change.

Secondly, it is not a value-neutral tool, but itself constitutes a key aspect of an

acrimonious and violent dialogue between liberals and evangelicals, the

mimetic aspects of which are apparent.

Homophobia remains a useful concept as a means of focusing attention

on the human cost of some forms of evangelical rhetoric and interaction. It is

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[48] Linzey and Kirker, (eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, xxxii, xxxvi.

commendable for its firm focus on violence and hatred, identifying the real problem as suffering. As a tool of analysis, however, it is sorely lacking, tending to create misunderstanding and blind to the ways in which it as a concept forms part of a wider mimetic struggle.

5.3 Fundamentalism

5.3.1 The Accusation of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism has become an unhelpfully elastic and derogatory term. Originally, it was the term adopted by a religious movement mainly found within American conservative Protestantism that came to prominence in the 1920s. As the historian George Marsden makes clear, it is largely this fundamentalism that gave birth to contemporary American neo-evangelicalism.[49] He sees fundamentalism as the product of earlier evangelical pietist traditions (linking it to the Keswick holiness tradition and giving it an ambivalent relationship with the Calvinist tradition), linked to aspects of Scottish Common Sense Realism (an early Modern epistemological outlook that pitted them against emerging late Modern epistemologies).[50] It was set apart from earlier and later evangelicalism by its militancy. Although fundamentalism's ability to influence American society shrank in the late 1920s (a failure linked to the so-called 'monkey trial' at Dayton, Tennessee in 1925), fundamentalism itself remained strong, and fundamentalist tendencies

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[49] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The shaping of twentieth-century evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
[50] Common Sense Realism asserted that truth is a trans-historical reality, and that sensory perception gives reliable and direct access to it, so that any person of common sense can and will perceive the same things. Late Modern epistemologies increasingly problematised this approach, by highlighting the relativity of truth to historical context.

persisted even within the evangelicalism that self-consciously separated itself

from fundamentalism. Neo-evangelicalism, of which Billy Graham is perhaps the

best-known example, differed from fundamentalism largely through its

rejection of separatism. However, as Harriet Harris has demonstrated,

mainstream evangelical doctrines of scripture remained all but identical to

those of fundamentalists.[51] Although British evangelicalism did not have such a

direct connection to fundamentalism, there were strong links between the two

movements.[52] Most British evangelicals preferred not to identify themselves as

fundamentalist, but as J.I. Packer acknowledges, they shared the same key

concerns: maintaining traditional orthodox Christian belief in opposition to

modernism.[53]

The term 'fundamentalism' has more recently become used rather more

widely, however, to demonise those so defined, as the sociologist Steve Bruce

notes: 'especially when used by liberals within the same religious tradition,

"fundamentalist" has become a term of abuse suggesting a lack of intellectual

maturity on the part of those who hold more conservative views.'[54]

The accusation of fundamentalism is one that has a long history within

British evangelicalism. Billy Graham was attacked as a fundamentalist when he

first came to Britain to give his evangelistic addresses, with Michael Ramsey,

then Bishop of Durham, accusing him of heresy and sectarianism in an article

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[51] Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39-44.
[52] Ian S. Rennie, "Fundamentalism and the Varieties of North Atlantic Evangelicalism", in Noll et al. (eds), *Evangelicalism*.
[53] J.I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), originally published 1958, 29.
[54] Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2nd ed., 2008), 12.

entitled 'The menace of fundamentalism.'[55] English evangelicals who welcomed

him were seen as fundamentalist by association. Later, James Barr's

Fundamentalism was widely interpreted as an attack on evangelicalism,

prompting Packer to publish his *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* in its

defence.[56] The term in both cases denoted narrowness and anti-intellectualism.

'Fundamentalism' is a term that has been employed frequently in

attempts to understand evangelical approaches to homosexuality, not least in

the context of the current crisis in the Anglican Communion. One of the most

sustained attempts to do this has been that by the liberal Anglican theologian

Jonathan Clatworthy, General Secretary of Modern Church (formerly the

Modern Churchpeople's Union) in his *Liberal Faith in a Divided Church*, where

the accusation of fundamentalism is an accusation of dogmatism, though

Clatworthy prefers to describe evangelicals with the more precise

'foundationalist.'[57] Clatworthy explicitly sets his argument in the context of the

current crisis in Anglicanism over homosexuality, yet he refuses to simply

dismiss the evangelical position as expressing homophobia, seeing it as

symptomatic of a deeper malaise. He argues that the crisis was manufactured by

conservatives, for whom the issue of homosexuality is essentially opportunistic,

a pattern that had previously been followed regarding alcohol and then

abortion.[58] Clatworthy's analysis suggests that although evangelicals see

themselves as defending traditional faith, in fact they are imposing an

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[55] Pollock, *Billy Graham*, 206-7.
[56] McGrath, *To Know and Serve God*, 80-2. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), originally published 1958.
[57] Jonathan Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith in a Divided Church* (Winchester: O Books, 2008), 102.
[58] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 7-10.

innovative form of it, and in so doing crippling the church, making it intolerant, exclusive, and unable to accept doubt. His critique is clearly recognisable in Bruce's terms as an attempt to suggest that conservatives are intellectually (and spiritually) immature.

Martyn Percy is another liberal Anglican theologian who has critiqued evangelicalism by reference to fundamentalism, though he has offered no direct critique of evangelicals in relation to homosexuality. Aware of the demonising use of 'fundamentalism' as an accusation, Percy has recently advanced the claim that he has always avoided using it of evangelicals.[59] However, this claim is a little disingenuous. In his earliest study of fundamentalism, Percy lists evangelicals, alongside charismatics, Pentecostals, and those happy to own the title of fundamentalists, as all part of the 'diverse family' of fundamentalism.[60] In his earlier works, Percy cites the Evangelical Alliance (widely recognised as a moderate and mainstream evangelical grouping) as a key example of a fundamentalist umbrella organisation, and uses the restorationist charismatic John Wimber (influential amongst much mainstream charismatic evangelicalism including the Alpha Course) as his main exemplar of a fundamentalist.[61] On the basis of Percy's own definition of fundamentalism, then, it seems nonsensical to assert (as he does) that Reform (who are committed to far narrower doctrines of scripture and atonement than the EA) are not fundamentalist.[62] Percy's claim to carefully distinguish

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[59] Percy, *Engaging*, 188.
[60] Percy, *Words*, 6-7.
[61] Percy, *Words*, 11; Percy, *Power and the Church* (London: Cassell, 1998); Randall, *One Body in Christ*; Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?* (London: DLT, 2001), 18.
[62] Percy acknowledges that his definition is broad enough to make much mainstream Christianity historically fundamentalist. *Words*, 13.

fundamentalism from evangelicalism is therefore not supported by his writings.

Thus, as with accusations of homophobia, accusations of fundamentalism are vulnerable to the Girardian critique that they are themselves an expression of a scapegoating mechanism, and have been produced as part of the mimetic crisis that binds evangelicals and liberals together. However, as with homophobia, the charge demands a more in-depth response. Even charges made within the context of a scapegoat mechanism can be true. Girard's argument is not that those scapegoated are necessarily innocent of all that they are accused of, but rather that the truth or falsity of the charges is irrelevant to the accusation. The historical intertwining of fundamentalism and evangelicalism makes this charge particularly plausible.

I will examine two broad approaches to fundamentalism. The two clearly overlap to a certain extent, but most approaches are essentially recognisable as taking one form or the other. First, there is the approach (followed by Gilles Kepel, Steve Bruce and Martyn Percy) that understands fundamentalism in largely sociological terms. This approach downplays the specifics of fundamentalist beliefs and the particulars of different historical traditions, seeing fundamentalism as a wider tendency that spans a number of (or possibly all) religions and is centred around opposition to modernity. Second, there is an understanding (followed by James Barr, Harriet Harris and Jonathan Clatworthy) of fundamentalism in its more specifically Christian form in terms of its doctrinal or underlying philosophy – describing it by reference to its specific beliefs as a mentality or philosophical tendency centred around approaches to scripture and doctrine.

5.3.2 Sociological Approaches: Fundamentalism and Modernity

In his introduction to the concept, Steve Bruce notes that in academic study as in common parlance, the concept of fundamentalism has come to be applied across religious contexts to mean something far broader than the philosophy of a group of largely American conservative Protestants. [63] It is applied to a phenomenon that has been explored in depth by the comparative work of the Fundamentalism Project.[64] Although there are difficulties in transferring understandings of fundamentalism from one tradition to another, the Project identified recurring characteristics of fundamentalism across different religious traditions: reactivity to the marginalisation of religion, selectivity, moral dualism, absolutism and inerrancy, millenarianism and messianism, elect membership, sharp boundaries, authoritarian organisation, and behavioural requirements.[65] The similarities noted between these different religious traditions in very different contexts suggest that the phenomenon described as fundamentalism is rooted not in any doctrinal specifics but rather in responses to the modern situation. It is important to recognise that

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[63] See for example Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1990); Richard T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements* (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2001); Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (London: HarperCollins, 1989).

[64] The Fundamentalism Project (1987-1995) was an international investigation of conservative religious movements worldwide directed by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, whose findings were published in 5 volumes all edited by Marty and Appleby alongside others: *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1993); *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1993); *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1995).

[65] Christopher H. Partridge, *Fundamentalisms* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), xvi-ii.

understanding fundamentalism as a certain characteristic form of religious
response to modernity does not mean seeing it as pre-modern in nature. Bruce,
drawing on Marty and Appleby's research, argues that fundamentalism is best
understood not as natural conservatism, or as a relic of the past untouched by
the modern age, but as a self-conscious reassertion of religious tradition
creatively reshaped in response to the problems of modernisation.[66]
Fundamentalism is a product of the modern age – modern people responding to
modernity by modern means (and the use of modern technology to evade the
controls on media and communications imposed by the establishment they seek
to resist is especially characteristic of fundamentalism.)[67]

As I have outlined in chapter 2, modernity creates particular challenges
for religion, challenges that demand a response. The approach to
fundamentalism described by Bruce, with fundamentalists as moderns engaged
in a negotiation with modernity, assimilating some aspects and resisting others,
is remarkably similar to my own understanding of evangelicalism, drawing on
Girard, Bebbington, and Tawney. I have argued that English evangelicals are
engaged in the same sort of exercise described by Bruce: self-consciously
reasserting a creatively-reshaped religious tradition in response to the
challenge of modernity. The main difference between our understandings is that
I have argued that evangelicals are best understood as part of an internal
dialogue within a multi-vocal and ever-changing modernity. Bruce and others
would see fundamentalists, even if themselves modern (as is the case with
Western fundamentalism) as engaged in resistance to a uni-vocal modernity

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[66] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 13; Marty and Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms and Society*, 3.
[67] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 14.

inexorably progressing. A further implication of such arguments is often that given time evangelical opposition will fade as evangelicals accommodate themselves to modernity. Bruce makes the point starkly: 'Protestantism is so committed to individualism that it cannot for long present a solid front against... modernizing trends... A religion that not only permits but requires individual conscience cannot serve as the justification for a theocracy.'[68]

The substantial overlap between my own analysis of English evangelicals and Bruce's approach to fundamentalism makes the broad outlines of that approach hard to refute. If evangelicals can be described in sociological terms as adopting a position in relation to modernity that is characteristically fundamentalist, and which aligns them with a number of other fundamentalist groupings within different religions and different contexts, then this becomes a plausible alternate explanation of the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality to my own. Evangelical attitudes to homosexuality could be understood as a characteristically fundamentalist response to modernity rather than inspired by anything more specific to English evangelicalism.

Bruce argues that as change in gender relations is a central part of modernity, and religion has a central focus on family and sexuality as part of its social teachings, such change is particularly difficult for religion to adapt to (unlike change in regard to race relations, which involves a far more peripheral area of tradition).[69] Drawing on the work of the sociologist Giddens on sexuality

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[68] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 126.
[69] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 31.

within modernity, this argument can be developed further.[70] It could plausibly be argued that the modern emergence of plastic sexuality (which he identifies as being exemplified by the emergence of gay social identities) is a huge challenge to traditional evangelical social teaching, and the importance of homosexuality as an issue for evangelicals is directly related to this. This being the case, evangelical opposition to gay sexual practices could be seen as reflecting a resistance to modernity and the cultural change they represent to the family and sexuality, rather than loyalty to scripture or internal conflict.

It is clear at the outset then, that whatever the difficulties of using fundamentalism as a concept, the findings of scholars working in this area cannot lightly be dismissed, as they are working within the categories I have already identified as key to an understanding of evangelicalism within our period.

5.3.3 Sociological approaches - Bruce, Kepel and Percy

To assess this argument in more depth, it is necessary to examine the description of fundamentalism offered here more closely. There are differences between the theories of different scholars, but there is considerable overlap. I present here a composite picture of sociological theories of fundamentalism drawn from Steve Bruce's introduction to the subject, Giles Kepel's classic *The Revenge of God*, a study of fundamentalism as it has emerged in a variety of different religions and cultural contexts during the 1970s, and Martyn Percy's *Words, Wonders and Power*, a study of Christian fundamentalism.

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[70] Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*.

There are three points that all three writers emphasise. First, fundamentalisms are centred on the claim that some sacred source of ideas is complete and without error, able to provide a perfect guide to the believer. In most cases this sacred source is scripture, though a particular line of tradition seen as perfect interpreter and guide is often included.[71] Second, this sacred source is believed to have been embodied in the true religion at some point in the past, meaning that present belief and practice should be rooted in a return to the past (though as Bruce notes, the 'return' is in effect a re-creation of the essence of the past in the present, not an attempt at exact duplication). Fundamentalism is therefore, in Percy's terms, a backward-looking legitimation of present practice.[72] Thirdly, fundamentalisms are implacably opposed to modernity, particularly the corrosive effect it has had on religion, the relativism it produces in society, and the liberalism it has fostered within mainstream religion.[73] Western fundamentalism is distinct in the nuanced approach it adopts towards modernity, however. Fundamentalists are themselves modern, employing modern technologies and techniques.[74] Percy stresses that it is certain modern trends that are opposed, rather than modernity as a whole, and those trends that are opposed (that challenge the legitimacy of fundamentalist sources of authority) are addressed in a forceful monologue. Withdrawing from society and engaging in dialogue with it are both rejected as options.[75] This nuanced stance towards modernity is characteristic only of Western (Jewish

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[71] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 12-13; Giles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, trans. Alan Braley (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), first published 1991, 2-4; Percy, *Words*, 9-10.
[72] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 12-13; Kepel, *Revenge*, 2-4; Percy, *Words*, 9-10.
[73] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 31-4; Kepel, *Revenge*, 133-5; Percy, *Words*, 10-11.
[74] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 13-15; Kepel, *Revenge*, 4, 11, 192; Percy, *Words*, 10.
[75]Percy, *Words*, 10.

and Christian) fundamentalism, however. Bruce is clear that for non-Western fundamentalisms, such as Islamic fundamentalism, the opposition to modernity takes on a post-colonial character – modernity is seen as a tool of imperialism.[76] Beyond these common emphases, each of these scholars has different elements they emphasise in their own descriptions of fundamentalism.

Bruce addresses some of the explanations offered for the appeal of fundamentalism, particularly addressing the critique that it is irrational, and therefore requires explanation by reference to authoritarian personalities or status anxiety. Contrary to this, he argues that it is completely rational, albeit unusual from the perspective of secular Western thought. Fundamentalists insist on active agency: that nothing happens without someone choosing for it to happen. Social change is thus personalised – particular groups in society (notably those who campaigned for changes) are to blame for them. They also tend to consolidate their opponents into a single all-powerful enemy conspiring against them (following the demise of communism, US fundamentalists identified this enemy as 'secular humanism'), irrespective of how different and incompatible these groups might be. The consolidating of enemies into a single all-powerful enemy makes it easier to justify action against them, as the horror of the greatest threat (extreme gay rights groups advocating the abolition of the family and complete deregulation of sexual activity) could be transferred to the least (the moderate liberal gay clergyman Jeffrey John who argues for gay

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[76] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 34-9.

Christians to commit to lifelong exclusive partnerships analogous to marriage or remain celibate.)[77]

Bruce notes that the argument that fundamentalism is the result of faulty reasoning or no reasoning is a common presupposition in Social Studies, but is based on little evidence.[78] In fact, although fundamentalist thinking is strange, and readily demonises opponents, it only seems abnormal from the secular perspective of those who normally study fundamentalists. Yet in religious terms fundamentalists are normal and the liberals and secularists who do not share their presuppositions are the abnormal innovators.[79] 'Fundamentalism is a rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world. Liberals may find the tone of fundamentalist polemic offensive but fundamentalists have not exaggerated the extent to which modern cultures threaten what they hold dear.'[80]

Kepel's study of fundamentalism documents the existence of two different fundamentalist strategies across different religions: 'from above', where efforts are made to introduce religion into public life, seeking to transform modernity and 'from below', where religion is introduced to individuals who are encouraged to reject the values of modernity and establish an alternative society.[81] Although Christian fundamentalists have attempted the first strategy, evangelicals are described as having primarily followed the

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[77] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 114-5.
[78] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 116-9.
[79] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 119-20.
[80] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 120.
[81] Kepel, *Revenge*, 192-8.

second.[82] Attempts to bring re-Christianization to Western society from above have failed, demonstrating the difficulty of expelling secularism, but he sees the possibility of success of re-Christianization from below as impossible to predict.[83] Using Kepel's work, then, it is clear that evangelical approaches to homosexuality are focused largely within the church, where an attempt is being made to establish an alternative society. Only by this approach can the greater task of transforming modernity succeed. This choice to adopt a strategy of transformation 'from below' explains why evangelicals are so focused on homosexuality within the church.

Power plays a central role in Percy's analysis, and as I outlined above, Percy defines fundamentalism as a tradition in which doctrines are used as a controlling mechanism to establish order and boundaries. The use of doctrine for control and a conception of truth as absolutely certain are the key means of distinguishing fundamentalism from non-fundamentalism.[84] Doctrines are used as a means of authenticating and validating members (showing who is in or out) and the certainty of truth leaves no room for alternative interpretations.[85] For Percy, fundamentalism is a tendency rather than a movement, the tendency to oppose modernity and liberalism by reference to a set of fundamentals, leading to a programme to be imposed on church and society, clear patterns for mediating authority and power, and authenticating procedures that validate and recognise members.[86] Percy's focus on the use of doctrine within

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[82] Kepel, *Revenge*, 108-11.
[83] Kepel, *Revenge*, 203.
[84] Percy, *Power and the Church*.
[85] Percy, *Words*, 10-11.
[86] Percy, *Words*, 9-12.

Christianity appears to align him more with doctrinal approaches to fundamentalism, but in fact his approach is sociological: he is interested in how doctrines are being used within fundamentalism, not in what those doctrines actually are. He explicitly rejects Barr's understanding of fundamentalism in purely intellectual, doctrinal terms as inadequate.[87] Percy's understanding of fundamentalism as using doctrine to control is suggestively close to the way the consensus position on homosexuality functioned within English evangelicalism within our period.

5.3.4 Sociological Understandings of Fundamentalism - Conclusions

All three writers I have examined (once it is recognised that Percy's explicit disavowal cannot be taken seriously) regard fundamentalism as a key matrix through which evangelicalism should be understood in its relating to contemporary culture. However, drawing comparisons between English evangelicalism and other conservative religious groupings worldwide under the heading of fundamentalism results in some serious misinterpretations. The broadness of the definition of fundamentalism, linking the EA to the Taliban, whilst apparently marking it as decisively different from (for example) Inclusive Church, creates a category so broad as to be almost unusable. The subtleties of evangelicalism's interrelationship with modernity are mystified rather than illuminated by describing it as fundamentalist. And finally, from a Girardian perspective it is obvious that the use of a sociological understanding of fundamentalism as a means of explaining the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is a liberal strategy within a mimetic crisis: it allows liberals to

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[87] Percy, *Words*, 2.

characterise evangelicals as dangerous and lacking in spiritual maturity. I will examine each of these points in turn.

First, the broadness of fundamentalism as a category: the definition of 'fundamentalism' presented in these works is one that makes little sense except from a liberal or secular perspective, from which all these groups can be seen as 'to the right'. Bruce acknowledges this in recognising that what is being described under the label of fundamentalism as a strange distortion of religious tradition is actually the historical mainsteam. Percy shows the most awareness that the definition is far too wide and potentially includes both moderates and extremists, by seeking to add more precision. His carefully nuanced definition (which is directed at Christian fundamentalists) speaks of fundamentalists rejecting some trends within modernity (whilst accepting others) because these threaten the authority on which fundamentalism is based, and avoiding dialogue on these issues in favour of forceful monologue. Not only does this description appear to actually represent a dialogue (albeit an unacknowledged one, given fundamentalist preferences to see themselves as resisting the pressures of the world) it is hard to see how any tradition with a desire to retain its own identity can fail to resist challenges to its sources of authority. To open themselves to genuine dialogue in Percy's sense would appear to involve fundamentalists abandoning fundamentalism. The argument effectively becomes circular – all fundamentalists are non-dialogical, therefore if any fundamentalists engage in dialogue either the dialogue is not genuine and must be described as a monologue, or they are no longer really fundamentalists.

Secondly, the complex inter-relationship of evangelicalism and modernity is obscured by describing it as fundamentalist. In fact, the relationship of dialogue between evangelicalism and modernity that exists within the West is described by Tamney as 'modernised traditionalism', which he carefully distinguishes from a 'traditionalism' that refuses dialogue, but which on Percy's definition would be lumped together with it as 'fundamentalism.'[88] As well as oversimplifying the nature of religious groups, sociological approaches to fundamentalism tend to oversimplify the nature of modernity. As I discussed in chapter 2, it is a mistake to understand modernity as monolithic and monodirectional, or to understand decidedly modern religious groups like evangelicals as somehow existing outside of it. Like other modern groups (including decidedly non-fundamentalist liberals), evangelicals are engaged in a dialogue with modernity, which shapes both them and modernity itself.[89] The fact that evangelicals (and fundamentalists) have a rhetorical preference for describing their relationship to modernity in terms of resistance and liberals have a rhetorical preference for describing their relationship with modernity in terms of accommodation should not be allowed to guide critical analysis. The sociological understanding of fundamentalism glosses over this kind of subtlety in favour of presenting a rather simplistic picture of a fundamentalism bent on resisting modernity that can plausibly be presented as describing a phenomenon across many different religions and cultures.

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[88] Tamney, *Resilience of Conservative Religion*.

[89] Kepel comes closest to suggesting that fundamentalism might have something positive to contribute to modern society, suggesting that fundamentalists are reacting to genuine problems within modernity that others are not able to articulate. *Revenge*, 11.

Finally, sociological definitions of fundamentalism are formed within the context of a mimetic crisis. Although the critics examined highlight interesting parallels between responses to modernity in a variety of different religions, sometimes they give the impression of doing little more than seeking to conflate all conservative responses and demonising them as extremist. There is an implicit belief that the correct and rational response to modernity is to accept all the inevitable changes it brings, and a denial that any non-fundamentalist religious groupings engage in resistance to it. All those seeking to resist or challenge modernity in favour of their own previously-held worldviews are seen as 'fundamentalist.'

Differences between comparative moderates and extremists (which can be considerable – like the difference between those willing to respect those who disagree and work within the conventions of modern society and those advocating the violent opposition of all its manifestations) are seen as insignificant next to this key difference between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. All fundamentalists can be regarded as having the potential to manifest or legitimate the most extreme examples of fundamentalism and are thus seen as completely different from non-fundamentalists. This sort of thinking, implicit in the definition of fundamentalism itself, (which focuses not on violence or the advocacy of it, but on far wider conservative attitudes believed to lead to it), is the mirror-image of the sort of fundamentalist thought described by Bruce: 'by amalgamating all the things they do not like into a single force, fundamentalists make it easier to defend any action or campaign, because

they can transfer the horror of the greatest threat to the slightest.'[90] The

mimeticism evident here suggests that accusations of fundamentalism should

be understood as part of a mimetic cycle in which both the 'fundamentalists'

and the 'liberals' they are opposed to are implicated.

As an understanding formed within a mimetic crisis, approaching

evangelicalism as a form of fundamentalism is ultimately intended to

demonstrate the inadequacy of evangelicalism and is unhelpful as a way of

encouraging evangelicals towards positive change. Sociological understandings

suggest that fundamentalism is best understood as a temporary road-block in

the path of modernity that must ultimately fail, at which point its extremism and

violence will cease. Therefore signs that fundamentalism is taking steps to

engage or moderate its excesses are dismissed. This is clear in Percy's

description of fundamentalist engagement with society as a 'forceful

monologue.' Being unable to argue that fundamentalists are disengaged from

society when many of his examples (like the EA) clearly engage with it, he

argues that their engagement is somehow invalid because it is not open to

genuine dialogue where the values of modernity are allowed to dissolve

fundamentalism. When applied to evangelicalism, this results in the unhelpful

suggestion that evangelicals should address their advocacy of violence (explicit

or implicit) towards homosexuality by ceasing to be evangelical. The problem is

identified not as violence, but evangelicalism itself. Understandably, this is not

an approach likely to encourage evangelicals to change.

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[90] Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 115.

5.3.5 Doctrinal approaches to fundamentalism

The second approach to fundamentalism focuses on its doctrinal and philosophical nature and works within the historical understanding of fundamentalism as a development within conservative Protestantism. This approach is dominated by the work of James Barr. Barr is a biblical critic, originally from a Scottish evangelical background (he was part of a CU in Glasgow), who in 1977 published his *Fundamentalism*, an analysis and critique of a particular tradition of theology and biblical interpretation that he saw as dominating some churches. Although Barr insisted on using the term 'fundamentalism', it was clear that those he was critiquing were not self-identified fundamentalists but rather evangelicals, something he made clear in his later *Escaping from Fundamentalism*.[91] As Harriet Harris makes clear, Barr's intent here has been frequently misunderstood.[92] He is not claiming that evangelicalism is identical to fundamentalism, but rather that a fundamentalist mentality pervades much of contemporary evangelicalism (which he sees as historically broader).[93] Barr may be criticised for his refusal to allow evangelicals to self-identify, but such critiques miss the point if they ignore the deeper points he makes about a fundamentalist mentality that is pervasive even if the name is not used. Despite the fact that Barr's critique has been largely rejected by evangelicals, as an approach that clearly asserts that non-fundamentalist evangelicalism is possible it is in potential a critique that could be more easily accepted than that of theorists offering a more sociological

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[91] James Barr, *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London, SCM Press, 1984), 156.
[92] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*,19, 55-6.
[93] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 55-6.

understanding. I will examine Barr's understanding of fundamentalism largely

as presented through Harris, whose work has been endorsed by Barr. Where

she departs from his argument, Barr has accepted the correction.[94] Neither Barr

nor Harris has specifically applied this understanding of fundamentalism to

explain evangelical approaches to the issue of homosexuality. However,

Clatworthy has addressed the issue explicitly, drawing on their work and

broadening it slightly to include both evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. I

therefore begin with an examination of Clatworthy's argument.

5.3.6 Fundamentalism or Foundationalism?

Clatworthy's central argument is that conservative groupings of

evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics within the Church of England are heretical in

that they are foundationalist (a term he regards as preferable to fundamentalist

as more clear on the philosophical roots of their heresy), and that this strand of

thought represents a deviation from the historical tradition of the Church of

England which he characterises as coherentist (a term he uses to describe a

liberal position).[95] He makes this argument specifically in the context of the

debate over homosexuality, seeing the characteristic conservative position, that

the Bible condemns homosexual practice and this obviates any need for further

discussion, as essentially foundationalist.[96]

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[94] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, cited on back cover.

[95] Notably, Harris is far less quick to identify fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and foundationalism. In particular, she notes that some evangelical distinctives (the stress on personal relationship with Christ and charismatic emphasis on emotion and the guidance of the Spirit) militate against foundationalism. Harriet A. Harris, "Fundamentalism in a Protestant Context", 7-24 in Martyn Percy and Ian Jones (eds.), *Fundamentalism, Church and Society* (London: Pilgrim Press, 2002).

[96] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 13.

In philosophy, foundationalism is a form of epistemic justification that holds that 'knowledge of the world rests on a foundation of indubitable beliefs from which further propositions can be inferred to produce a superstructure of knowledge.'[97] Foundationalists (of whom Descartes would be a classic example) hold that a secure foundation of knowledge is simply perceived (through reason or experience) to be true, requiring no further justification. Other knowledge must be justified by appealing to this foundation.[98] Foundationalism is commonly critiqued for its basis in the 'myth of the given' – the belief that certain forms of knowledge are privileged and need no justification. Clatworthy appears to operate with a specific version of foundationalism in mind.[99] For Clatworthy, foundationalism in the Church of England separates reason and nature (leading to a rejection of natural theology, a conflict with science, a privileging of the non-physical, an orientation to the past, exclusivity, and authoritarianism as truth cannot be questioned by reason), is ahistorical (in that the history of doctrinal development is ignored and doctrines are simply accepted as revelation), and irrelevant (in that it takes as its source of truth something that does not directly address contemporary issues). These beliefs encourage foundationalists to seek to impose their own views upon others and to demonise their opponents, refusing to engage with critical scholarship because to do so what endanger their own beliefs. Ultimately, he believes foundationalist's beliefs make them spiritually immature, having an over-

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[97] Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2005), 310.
[98] See also Nicholas Bunnin and Jujuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 102&3.
[99] He never sets it out directly in any one place, but it may be reconstructed, in some places by identifying the fault that coherentism is intended to challenge or correct.

confidence and pride in their own beliefs, which acts as a defence against an inner fear and an unwillingness to trust.[100]

In philosophy, coherentism is an opposed theory of truth to foundationalism, holding that a body of knowledge may be known to be true not by having a foundation in certainty, but by the interlocking strength of its individual parts.[101] In Otto Neurath's classic illustration, rather than a building that starts from firm foundations, knowledge is a boat that must be repaired at sea. Coherentism is commonly critiqued for its isolation from direct experience - its denial of the possibility that a coherent set of beliefs might nevertheless be untrue because they do not correspond to reality. It is also critiqued because of the possibility of contradiction between one coherent account of reality and another in a plural world – coherentism provides little basis for choosing between mutually incompatible yet coherent accounts of reality. Clatworthy glosses this basic description by arguing that unlike foundationalism's belief in a single guaranteed source of truth, coherentism encourages a sense of uncertainty, humility, and a respect for the views of others, with truth being seen as provisional, and subject to revision and change. Significantly, in relation to the homosexuality debate, he argues that coherentism, unlike foundationalism, holds to the idea that God may lead to new insights not contained in either scripture or tradition.[102]

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[100] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 10, 29-31, 48-54, 58, 63, 65, 75, 128.

[101] Nicholas Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford Unversity Press, 1973).

[102] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 217-20. It should be noted, however, that if the coherentist finds truth by its likeness to truths already held to, and the foundationalist by building from firm foundations in what is certain, neither are particularly likely to accept something completely innovatory as true.

Having identified two opposed epistemologies within the church, Clatworthy then argues (notwithstanding the fact that they are ideal types and that real individuals and groups are likely to show a mixture of approaches) that it is a mistake to see the two as points on a spectrum along which individuals can be placed, but rather that they must be seen as contrasting options between which a choice must be made. His argument is that foundationalism is inherently intolerant of alternative views and will force a polarisation and then the expulsion of the inherently tolerant and accommodating coherentist position.[103] Therefore, Clatworthy sees foundationalism as an innovatory and deficient tradition and argues that ultimately it must be forced out of the Church of England in order to allow it to retain its natural coherentism.[104] His rather tendentious reading of Anglican history to suggest that the coherentist position (which by his own admission has never been clearly stated by those who did not also hold to the supreme authority of scripture until the nineteenth century and has never been held by a majority of Anglicans) represents the mainstream historical tradition of Anglicanism is one of the least convincing elements of his argument.

Clatworthy's use of his altered categories of foundationalism and coherentism (where foundationalism is redefined to suggest rigidity and intolerance and coherentism is redefined to suggest humility and flexibility – neither of which are necessarily true of those philosophical positions) forces him to understand English evangelicalism through a particular frame of

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[103] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 11-13, 207.
[104] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 239-41.

reference that ultimately distorts it.[105] To demonstrate the degree of

misunderstanding, I will examine his argument that foundationalism (of which

exclusivist evangelicalism would be a proto-typical example) is characterised by

an intolerant pride and refusal to engage with critical scholarship because it is

rooted in a belief in the revealed truth of scripture (whereas coherentism is

based in humble acceptance of doubt and the lack of certain knowledge). An

examination of Packer's classic '*Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* makes it

clear that not only are doubt and lack of certain knowledge accepted, Packer

makes humility the whole basis of evangelical acceptance of biblical

authority.[106] There is, in fact, a different (and seemingly mutually

incomprehensible) understanding of the nature of humility operative in Packer

and Clatworthy. For Clatworthy, humility is primarily understood as humility

towards others and consists in the intellectual humility that acknowledges that

one's beliefs (and those of one's church) are provisional and uncertain. For

Packer, humility is primarily understood as humility before God and his word in

Scripture, and consists in the submission of one's reason (including one's

doubts and questions) to the authority of God, acknowledging that it is fallible

and prone to sinful distortion.[107]

     The difference stated here is a real doctrinal difference between

evangelical and liberal, though not one that really conforms to Clatworthy's

stereotype of humble coherentist versus proud foundationalist. Both Packer and

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[105] This is particularly obvious in his insistence that evangelicals (who founded Tearfund) have never been at the forefront of campaigning on issues of global justice and poverty. Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 195.

[106] As Harris argues, this book represents English evangelicalism at its most fundamentalist, decisively aligning it with the US fundamentalism of Warfield, making it a fair comparison to Clatworthy's idealised coherentism. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 52.

[107] Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, 129.

Clatworthy recognise that the fallibility of human reason calls for humility, both recognise that there is legitimate disagreement between Christians, both argue that biblical criticism is important and that the reader's own tradition may distort interpetation. Packer even states that all theologies and doctrines drawn from scripture (including evangelical ones) may be mistaken.[108] However Packer, unlike Clatworthy, sees sinful rebelliousness and self-deceit as a far more significant problem in human seeking after truth than human fallibility and limitation, and sets the need for submission to the authority of scripture in this context.

It is clear that Clatworthy demonises foundationalism. In regard to the homosexuality debate he argues that foundationalist's blind belief in revealed truth leads to a refusal of meaningful debate and demands to exclude those who disagree is directly responsible for the crisis in the Anglican Communion. He states that foundationalists have deliberately chosen the issue of homosexuality as an issue to unite them and draw a clear boundary between them and secular society, and denies that liberals (except for the minority involved in campaigning organisations on the issue) have done anything to create a crisis.[109] It should be noted that evangelicals tend to make parallel statements – that the issue has been promoted by liberals who seek to impose an agenda driven by secular society (or satanic conspiracy) and that apart from those in campaigning groups evangelicals on the whole would rather not engage with

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[108] Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, 48, 69-70, 96, 130, 136, 141.
[109] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 7-10, 103, 195, 201.

the issue at all.[110] This parallelism in regard to assigning blame for the crisis is indicative of the mimeticism of Clatworthy's position. As Girard argues, 'the aggressor has always already been attacked.'[111] Both sides seek to blame the other for the conflict.

Clatworthy's argument has clearly been structured by the mimetic crisis, as is obvious by reflecting on his insistence that the only solution for Anglicanism is to expel the foundationalists before they expel the coherentists. He arrives at this conclusion by his insistence that coherentism and foundationalism are not points on a spectrum but polarising alternatives. This means that the majority of evangelical Anglicans who he recognises are partial foundationalists are understood to be holding to an inherently unstable position that will always degenerate to 'true' foundationalism.[112] This is his justification for coherentists working to exclude foundationalism from the Anglican communion. It should be noted that this is the sort of 'slippery-slope' argument he recognises and rejects in evangelical rhetoric when applied to liberals.[113] Clatworthy's argument for coherentism, based on the fact that it is morally superior because it is unafraid, inclusive and acknowledges doubt and a lack of certainty, therefore leads to the argument that these same coherentists must exclude those who advocate even partial foundationalist beliefs because they

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[110] Evangelical Alliance, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*,29. In purely factual terms, it is clear that it is changes in wider society that have raised the issue, with the dates of publication suggesting that liberals wrote first on the subject, with evangelicals writing in response.
[111] Girard, *BE*, 18.
[112] The partial foundationalism of evangelicals is clear in their tendency in debates on homosexuality to give considerable weight to empirical medical evidence, rather than simply stating a few verses of scripture. Eg. Stanton L. Jonas, Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Westmont: IVP, 2007).
[113] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 15.

are dangerous.[114] As Girard says: 'more violence is always needed before reconciliation'.[115]

5.3.7 The Fundamentalist Mentality

Barr and Harris, unlike Clatworthy, focus on fundamentalism within English (or British, given Barr's Scottish background) evangelicalism alone, and argue that it represents a currently dominant mentality that is fundamentally alien to the tradition – born of an unlikely union between nineteenth century American evangelicalism and Scottish Common Sense Realism, brought to Britain decisively through Packer (though as we have seen he himself is a far more complex figure theologically than this would suggest), and being an unnatural development of either. They argue that fundamentalism sits in an uneasy tension with historical evangelical spiritualities. Harris, following Barr, resists offering a comprehensive definition of fundamentalism, recognising the variety within it, but describes the characteristic elements of the fundamentalist mentality:

> a commitment to a priori reasoning that scripture cannot contain any error because it is inspired by God; an almost contrary commitment to demonstrating empirically that scripture is indeed inspired because it contains no error; a feeling that in moving away from either commitment one is making concessions to modern scholarship; and a hesitancy to make such concessions lest they detract from the authority of the Bible and so threaten the very foundations of the Christian faith.[116]

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[114] Clatworthy, *Liberal Faith*, 240-2.
[115] Girard, *BE*, 45.
[116] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 14-15.

Clearly aspects of Harris' characterisation are echoed in Clatworthy's understanding of foundationalism, but in engaging more deeply with a single historical tradition, rather than discussing philosophical categories that operate over several, Harris is able to bring out subtleties within evangelicalism that have the potential to undermine fundamentalism, like the uneasy pairing of a foundationalist commitment to infallibility with an empirically-demonstrated argument for it, and the contrast of both with an experiential spirituality. However, Harris and Barr are just as convinced as Clatworthy of the prevalence of a fundamentalist mentality within evangelicalism, even when it is explicitly denied. In regard to understandings of scripture, which Barr and Harris focus on in their understanding of fundamentalism, they demonstrate that evangelicals and fundamentalists are often functionally identical.[117]

Although Barr focuses on fundamentalist approaches to the bible, Harris points out that he actually views fundamentalism as centred not on the bible but on its own tradition of interpretation, which distorts the meaning of scripture. Although fundamentalists see themselves as looking to scripture for authority (and notably condemn those who look elsewhere), in fact they unconsciously look to a tradition that protects itself from challenge by employing the doctrine of inerrancy to disallow methods of interpretation that might produce different meanings from scripture. Being a true Christian is measured by reference to this body of tradition, not scripture.[118] This is, of course, exactly what happened with the consensus position on homosexuality – a newly-minted tradition was looked to as representing 'what the Bible says', and forms of interpretation that

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[117] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 69-71.
[118] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 62-3.

might yield a different position were disallowed. It is significant that in Barr and Harris's terms, the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is in fact rooted in a failure of evangelicals to be true to their own principles.

Barr understands fundamentalism as a characteristically rationalistic rather than fideistic tradition, and therefore characteristically modern rather than traditional. It understands truth in empirically verifiable ways, develops its doctrines through inductive reasoning, and has an apologetic tradition that focuses on evidence. It operates as if there were no personal relationship element to faith, and displays a domino mentality – assuming that if any part of scripture were factually disproved, then faith as a whole would fall.[119] This means that defence of scripture against liberal and higher critical attack becomes hugely important, as occurred in relation to homosexuality.[120]

Barr and Harris offer a more constructive critique of fundamentalism than Clatworthy, being clear that the fundamentalist mentality exists on a spectrum. They avoid Clatworthy's degeneration into an oppositional categorisation between foundationalist and coherentist, and Harris is able to suggest ways in which evangelicals can escape fundamentalism without having to cease being evangelical. Barr had previously written of this possibility, but Harris takes this further by exploring the resources within the evangelical tradition that might enable an escape from a fundamentalism that she describes as an unnatural development, to the non-fundamentalist evangelicalism that

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[119] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 64.

[120] Barr argues that this principle is responsible for fundamentalist scholars adopting what he scathingly refers to as the 'maximal conservative' approach – recognising a need to engage with critical scholarship they engage in ersatz critical study, predetermining the outcome to approximate to the conservative position as closely as possible. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 64-7.

preceded it and still exists on its fringes.[121] She suggests two movements within

evangelicalism that might facilitate such a change whilst remaining true to

evangelicalism: the Neo-Calvinism of Kuyper and Dooyerweerd that has had an

influence through Francis Schaeffer, Os Guinness and Greenbelt, and the

phenomenological hermeneutics advocated by Anthony Thistleton, promoted

by Stott and Packer, both of which have the potential to undermine

fundamentalist presuppositions, though she notes that in both cases this

potential has not been realised.[122]

Harris's sympathetic interpretation highlights the tensions inherent in a

British evangelicalism dominated by a fundamentalist mentality. The strongly

rationalistic approach characteristic of the fundamentalist mentality tends to

see subjectivity as the greatest threat to truth (a tendency obvious in Packer's

call for submission to scripture). This is in tension with the relational

experience of faith that is at the heart of the evangelical tradition (and is implicit

in Packer's glossing submission to scripture as trust in Christ).[123] Thus, Harris

argues,

> Evangelicals do not think that their standing before God hinges directly
> on their view of scripture, but they do believe that their submission to
> scripture – the Word of God – manifests the correct attitude towards
> God himself. Moreover, they perceive a connection between submitting
> to the authority of scripture and experiencing a conviction of its truth...
> the motivation behind their biblical conservatism derives, to some
> extent, from a concern to maintain that spirit which enables them to get
> life from the scripture. That spirit, which they might describe as a spirit

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[121] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 317.
[122] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 260-73, 281-5.
[123] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 87-9, 180-3, 191-204.

> of humility or submission, they feel is sapped by research which calls
> into question what 'the Bible says.'[124]

Her insight here into the inner dynamics of evangelicalism explains much of the

'all-or-nothing' approach that characterised the Jeffrey John affair. This was far

more than a dispute over sexuality, sexual ethics, or church order. It was felt by

many evangelicals to be a conflict between the faithful who submit to the plain

meaning of scripture and those who question it and seek to avoid such

submission.

Harris and Barr offer a subtle and insightful reading of evangelicalism as

fundamentalism, demonstrating (as I have argued) that the problem of

evangelicals and homosexuality may be caused by tensions internal to

evangelicalism itself. Harris notes that evangelicalism is formed by modernity

and happy with it.[125] In its approach to homosexuality, then, evangelicalism is

not straightforwardly waging a war against homosexuality as an aspect of

modernity as the sociological theories suggest. Rather, it is inclined to oppose

approaches that challenge submission to scripture because this is perceived as

endangering faith as a whole.

Using Harris's understanding, then, it is possible to construct an analysis

of English evangelical approaches to homosexuality that sees evangelical

violence (real or implied) as caused by their perception that the issue is the

survival of the Christian faith. A fundamentalist mentality encourages the

perception that the widespread acceptance of a liberal hermeneutic in regard to

homosexuality (even within evangelical ranks) threatens to fatally undermine

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[124] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 186.
[125] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 334-5.

the authority of scripture, and thus the plausibility and validity of Christianity as a whole. That homosexuality was the issue rather than multi-faith worship or abortion, or any other area where the fundamentalist mentality would suggest that scripture is clear yet certain Christians choose to disregard it, was no more than historical accident. Clearly this is an approach substantially in harmony with my own analysis.

5.3.8 Doctrinal Understandings of Fundamentalism - Conclusions

As is evident from the above, doctrinal understandings of fundamentalism avoid some of the problems associated with sociological understandings. The focus on specific doctrines or philosophical ideas creates a far less generalised description of fundamentalism. Harris's study gives considerable insight into evangelicalism, suggesting a plausible reason why some evangelical responses to homosexuality appear disproportionate. Explaining evangelical opposition to homosexual behaviour by reference to the authority of scripture has the additional virtue of corresponding to the public statements of evangelicals on the matter. Harris's analysis suggests that evangelicals are right in denying that homophobia is their motivation (homosexuality per se is largely irrelevant to the conflict), but also that their opponents are right in affirming that the conflict reveals a flaw within evangelicalism. Moreover, in pointing to resources evangelicals can draw upon within their own tradition in moving beyond a fundamentalist mentality, Harris avoids the tendency to identify fundamentalism and evangelicalism so strongly that abandoning one inevitably involves abandoning the other.

The strengths of Barr and Harris's approach in explaining the dynamics of evangelical approaches to homosexuality and in leading to constructive solutions to the problem are evident. Ultimately, however, it presents only one side of the story. If used as an explanation for the mimetic violence expressed in the Jeffrey John affair, Barr and Harris's work still suggests, like Clatworthy, that it must in some sense be all the fault of the evangelicals, who have been overtaken by a fundamentalist mentality.

This explanation, however insightful, brackets out some aspects of events as essentially unimportant in understanding them. In particular, doctrinal understandings of fundamentalism, by focusing on doctrines which are common to almost all evangelicals rather than on violence (which theories of homophobia make central), make it hard to understand why some evangelicals who shared the same doctrinal beliefs did not exhibit a disproportionate and violent response. Clatworthy's approach in particular cannot explain the diversity of opinion and response within evangelicalism without asserting either that progressive evangelicals and some cautiously-open conservatives are closet coherentists or that they are partial foundationalists who will inevitably degenerate into full foundationalists. Even Barr and Harris, who find it easier to situate fundamentalists on a spectrum, would find it hard to acknowledge the depth of the divisions between evangelicals who in terms of understandings of inerrancy are all clearly fundamentalist. In their terms there is little difference in the degree of fundamentalism between Reform or Anglican Mainstream and Fulcrum. Clatworthy's accusation of foundationalism is clearly itself implicated in the

mimetic crisis he is critiquing, but understandings of fundamentalism do not provide the critical tools to recognise this.

5.4 Alternative Explanations for Evangelical Approaches to Homosexuality

Girard's mimetic theory can appear to offer an overly-complex explanation for evangelical approaches to homosexuality as manifested in the Jeffrey John affair. Liberal critics, particularly within Anglicanism, have tended to pursue two simpler explanations: homophobia and fundamentalism. Andrew Linzey and Jonathan Clatworthy are examples of each accusation. Each explanation offers some real insight and yet remains problematic in certain respects, blinding those who use it to the full nature of the conflicts out of which these evangelical approaches to homosexuality arise.

The concept of homophobia is notable for its insistence on placing violence against gays at the centre of its analysis. This is a real strength for this explanation when compared to fundamentalism, which focuses either on the sociological characteristics of fundamentalism or on fundamentalist doctrines. Clatworthy's critique of foundationalism can give the impression that the violence inflicted on gays is less problematic than foundationalist insistence on certainty in their beliefs. As Harris notes, Barr downplays the degree to which militancy is a key characteristic of fundamentalism, being more concerned with the degree to which fundamentalists distort scripture.

The concept of fundamentalism, by contrast, can give real insight into the inner dynamics of evangelicalism, helping to explain why something so apparently inconsequential to central aspects of evangelical faith can be

experienced as threatening to undermine everything. The depth of engagement with the particularity of evangelicalism contrasts with the tendency of homophobia as an explanation to present generalities. Although Linzey or Fone give plentiful evidence that gays suffer as a result of the actions of evangelicals amongst others it is hard to see why evangelicals in particular are to blame for this.

The greatest weakness of all of these explanations, however, is their complicity in the conflict. Critics like Clatworthy or Linzey are clearly caught up in a mimetic cycle with those they critique. Those who come closest to recognising the existence of the mimetic crisis, like Dollimore, significantly also adapt their theoretical understandings to the point where they have very close similarities to Girard's mimetic theory. Explanations based on the concepts of homophobia or fundamentalism, by focusing on evangelicalism as the problem, blind themselves to their own complicity within a mimetic conflict that evangelicals only represent one side of.

Those critiques that see evangelicalism as the problem often reveal their blindness to the wider mimetic cycle in their refusal to address seriously the question of solving the problem without effectively destroying evangelicalism. Some critics seem convinced that evangelicals will eventually wither away. Others seem to call for evangelicals to leave the evangelical tradition. Harris shows the most promising response, in suggesting resources from within the evangelical tradition that might allow evangelicals to successfully escape a fundamentalist mentality. In the final chapter, I turn to examine how a Girardian

critique might respond to this challenge: what can evangelicals do to escape the

mimetic cycle and stop the escalation of violence?

Chapter 6

Unafraid Evangelicalism

> The crucifixion was something done by us before it was
> something done for us.[1]
>
> John Stott

6.1 Introduction

The Girardian analysis of English evangelicalism I have been offering has much in common with analyses of contemporary Western religious culture offered by prominent Girardian scholars James Alison and Walter Wink. However both of these writers offer a critique that cuts deeper in one significant respect: they regard a penal substitutionary theory of the atonement as irredeemably compromised with violence and scandal. In Wink's words, 'God not only allegedly demands the blood of the victim who is closest and most precious to him, but also holds the whole of humanity accountable for a death that God both anticipated and required. Against such an image of God the revolt of atheism is an act of pure religion.'[2] It is a marker of the sort of sacrificial Christianity (Christianity that has become scandalised and persecutory) that Girard critiques in *TH*.[3] To put their argument in terms that resonate with the line of argument I have been offering it can be stated thus: to the extent that evangelicalism centres its spiritual life on the cross of Christ understood in

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[1] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 59-60
[2] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 149.
[3] Girard, *TH*, 224-7.

penal substitutionary terms it is inherently violent and far from offering possibilities of resisting scapegoating it will create scandal and encourage sacrifice.

It is helpful at this point to offer a clear definition of the doctrine of penal substitution. The American evangelical Roger E. Olson gives the following succinct definition:

> According to this account of the work of Christ on the cross, Jesus Christ suffered the wrath of God against sin and endured the punishment due to sinful humanity. This was an act of God's love and justice; God's holiness demanded that sin be punished and God's love desired that humanity (or the elect) be forgiven. Christ's sinless, undeserved death was a voluntary act of passive obedience that satisfied the demands of God's holiness and assuaged God's wrath; it is imputed by God to those who receive Christ by repentance and faith in conversion.[4]

Variants on this description in language that is tighter or looser can be found in most evangelical statements of faith. It is widely recognised that the doctrine derives from Anselm's satisfaction theory, as adjusted by Calvin and various Reformed theologians.[5]

In Chapter 2 I argued that penal substitution (far less particular forms of it) could not be used as a marker of authentic English evangelical identity, despite vigorous argument from some that it should.[6] The degree of looseness of

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[4] Roger E. Olson, *The SCM Press A-Z of Evangelical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 149.

[5] The degree to which the doctrine is scriptural and the antiquity of its historical pedigree is disputed within evangelicalism at present. Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, demonstrate at length that in some form the doctrine has its origins in the earliest of the church fathers,161-204. This aspect of their study is notably commended by N.T. Wright "The Cross and the Caricatures: a response to Robert Jenson, Jeffrey John, and a new volume entitled Pierced for our Transgressions" (Eastertide, 2007), Fulcrum website, http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2007/20070423wright.cfm?doc=205 (September 22, 2011).

[6] Stephen R. Holmes, 'Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven: Evangelical accounts of the atonement' 267-92 in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (eds.), *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids:

language describing atonement theology in some evangelical bases of faith

reflects an unwillingness on the part of many English evangelicals to exclude

those from the fold who object to certain aspects of the doctrine (or certain use

of language in framing it) whilst being content with its general outline.[7]

However, it is impossible to survey English evangelicalism without recognising

that for the vast majority of evangelicals a penal substitutionary approach to the

atonement, held with whatever qualifications, is central to their spirituality.[8]

The enduring popularity of works such as Stott's *The Cross of Christ*, and the

frequent use of penal substitutionary language in evangelical hymns and

choruses testifies to this. Wink and Alison's argument, then, is a serious

challenge to the thesis I have developed. For them, and for Girardian scholars

like them, core aspects of evangelical doctrine and devotion exhibit the

distorting influence of sacred violence. Evangelicalism makes Christians into

scapegoaters. It is satanic, and must be transformed by the true message of the

gospel. To an extent, this line of argument mirrors my own: I too have discerned

aspects of evangelical spirituality that show signs of being scandalised,

predisposed towards scapegoating. However, by suggesting that the root of the

problem lies in penal substitutionary theories of the atonement, Wink and

Alison go further, suggesting that not only a few branches but the whole tree is

rotten. If Wink and Alison are correct, then the Calvinist tradition of spirituality

itself, which in Chapter 4 I identified as the classical evangelical tradition, is an

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Zondervan, 2008). Substitutionary understandings have always been central to evangelical theology, but whether they are expounded in penal terms has historically been felt to be less important. See also Warner, *Reinventing*, 235. Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 89 (referencing Packer) argues that it is an evangelical identity marker.

[7] See David Hilborn (former EA head of theology) discussing the handling of penal substitution in the various revisions of the EA basis of faith in his introduction to Tidball et al. (eds.), *The Atonement Debate*, 22-8.

[8] Tidball et al. (eds.) *The Atonement Debate,* 15, 23-7

expression of sacred violence. My thesis, that the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality has been created by a crisis of undifferentiation within an otherwise healthy spiritual tradition, would have woefully underestimated the depth of the problem.

In this chapter, I will first examine Girardian approaches to the atonement, identifying two central areas of critique of penal substitution. Then I will examine evangelical atonement theology, which is itself an area of lively debate at present (a debate that appears to be another prominent manifestation of the English evangelical crisis of undifferentiation I identified in chapter 2), and in some places shows signs of having been influenced by Girardian critiques. I will show that the Girardian critique of penal substitution represented by Wink and Alison draws attention to some genuine problems within evangelical understandings (which some evangelicals are themselves critiquing). However, the argument as a whole is overstated, and overlooks the extent to which penal substitution offers resources for resisting sacred violence within evangelical spirituality. If evangelicalism is to overcome its distortion by sacred violence in its treatment of gays, its best chance of doing so lies in a recovery of its own spiritual tradition, becoming an unafraid evangelicalism that can find a way to meet with its enemies in vulnerable love at the foot of the cross.

6.2 Girard and Penal Substitutionary Approaches to the Atonement

Girard himself has not written any systematic work on atonement theology, though he discusses the atonement in passing in a number of his books, and his interest in sacrifice, violence, and the revelation of the scapegoat

mechanism all throw light on it. The lack of a systematic discussion of the subject by Girard creates difficulties in establishing a single Girardian approach that are compounded by shifts in his position in some of these key areas. In *TH* he offered a clear critique of the sacrificial system presented in the Old Testament as sacred violence, stated categorically that the death of Christ should not be understood as a sacrifice, and asserted that Hebrews is fundamentally mistaken and that historical Christianity has followed it into a sacrificial theology that has given it a persecutory character, losing sight of the gospel and becoming corrupt.[9] This has tended to be the text engaged with by those evangelicals who have engaged with him at all, though frequently their critique has focused almost entirely on his refusal to accept the authority of certain biblical passages.[10] In Girard's later works however, he has made it clear that his understanding of sacrifice and of the history of the church has become more nuanced. He stresses more the possibility of a positive sense of 'sacrificial' as self-giving out of love for the other, and has come to accept that Christianity is inescapably historical and inescapably compromised so that it is pointless to contrast it with an idealised version of itself as he did in *TH*.[11] These two shifts in position make it harder to state exactly what form a Girardian approach to the atonement might take. There are three key elements present in all Girardian approaches: humanity is characterised by the omnipresence of mimetic desire, leading to scandal and crises that are resolved through acts of sacred violence that contain unlimited violence and build society at the cost of the suffering of

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[9] See particularly *TH*, 154-8, 180-4, 224-31.

[10] Holmes, 'Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven', in Tidball et al. (eds.) *The Atonement Debate*, 282-3, 291-2; Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 236-7.

[11] *EC*, 214-6, 259. Note that here Girard describes Jesus' death as sacrificial, whilst distinguishing it carefully from acts of sacred violence. *BE*, 35.

innocents. The church is not immune to these tendencies, and has at times manifested a distorted sacrificial Christianity. Jesus is understood as exposing the mechanism of sacred violence and making a new way of life possible. However, in different theologians these elements are deployed in different ways, creating a variety of interpretations of Girard in this area. Clearly Alison and Wink follow the trajectory of the critique of sacrificial Christianity found in Girard's earlier works in formulating their critique of penal substitution. Others, like Schwager, seem to see less need to depart from it so radically.

6.2.1 Girardian Critique of Penal Sustitution

James Alison is a gay English Roman Catholic theologian, writing from an explicitly Girardian perspective. Much of his work addresses issues around homosexuality and faith. It is central to his thought that the church (and specifically the Roman Catholic church) has become compromised by violence, and its doctrine and practice needs to be challenged in this light. His critique of penal substitutionary approaches to atonement appears in several of his works, but I will examine it primarily through his discussion in *On Being Liked*.[12] Alison, although now a Roman Catholic theologian, had grown up in an English evangelical Anglican setting, and it is clearly the doctrine of penal substitution as held by English evangelicals at which he aims his critique. Walter Wink is an American Methodist biblical scholar best known for his work on the language of the Powers. Unlike Alison, Wink explicitly departs from Girard in several areas,

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[12] James Alison, *On Being Liked* (London: DLT, 2003).

but the overall pattern of his thought is clearly Girardian.[13] A further point

should be stressed here, because it becomes highly significant when evangelical

appropriation of Girardian thought is considered. By and large, evangelicals

have tended to approach Girard through Wink (who as an American Protestant

theologian is far better known in English evangelical circles than various

European Catholic Girardians or Girard himself), and largely through his

discussion of Girard in *Engaging the Powers*.[14] Although Wink explicitly

describes the ways in which he departs from Girard's thought, his presentation

of Girard's thought does not carefully distinguish between Girard's own

approach and Wink's interpretation. He therefore gives the impression that

Girard explicitly rejects penal substitution, whereas as I have suggested this is

not necessarily the case.

The critiques that Alison and Wink present have distinct emphases, but

there are also some clear areas of common concern. For both of them, a

fundamental flaw of penal substitution is that it presents God as violent and

vengeful, which is not only blasphemously misleading, but also encourages

those who hold to the doctrine to see violence as righteous. Alison notes that the

theory (which he glosses as derived from Anselm, implying that it should not be

seen as present in patristic or apostolic teaching) works on the basis of

retribution or vengeance – salvation does not involve discovering a God who is

not violent, but discovering that the wrath of a violent God can be avoided. It

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[13] Wink discards Girard's theory of origins (which Alison notably defends), sees scapegoating as simply a subset of 'violence' which is the fundamental problem, emphasises the human capacity for reconciliation as well as rivalry, and is critical of Girard's 'Christian triumphalism', seeing Christianity as deeply problematic. Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 153-5.
[14] See for example the discussion in Jeffery et al. *Pierced*, 235-8.

sees violence as an inescapable and therefore necessarily good part of God's nature, rather than something bad that is part of human nature but which God seeks to free us from.[15] In addition, it reduces the proclamation of God's love to a form of emotional blackmail - God has killed his own Son to save us, so we had better act as if we are worth it.[16] For Wink, penal substitution represents a far earlier and more basic misunderstanding of Jesus' message, a misunderstanding that is written into the New Testament itself. He argues that Jesus' mission was embodied in his resistance to the Law and the Temple, which with their divisive concern for purity and their sacrificial system embodied the Powers in Jesus' day.[17] The early church, correctly understanding Jesus' crucifixion as exposing the wrongness of the sacrificial system with its vision of a God who wants sacrifice, interpreted it in the only way they knew how: as a sacrifice to end all sacrifices. For Wink, therefore, some of the New Testament fails to grasp the extent of Jesus' rejection of sacrifice, interpreting the significance of his death in limited and misleading ways. Indeed, he argues that Paul shows signs of confusing the idea of Jesus' death as ending sacrifice with the idea that it in itself constituted a final expiatory sacrifice, an understanding that Wink sees as fundamentally flawed.[18] Whereas Alison sees penal substitutionary understandings as inadequate, and potentially creating scapegoats for further violence, Wink sees them as simply presenting the doctrine of the Powers all but unaltered. Substitutionary and objective understandings of atonement are rejected by Wink as literally satanic – they represent divine approval of the

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[15] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 22-3.
[16] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 25.
[17] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 120-6.
[18] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 154.

myth of redemptive violence: salvation comes through a final act of righteous

violence, which God mercifully chooses to inflict upon Jesus rather than

humanity. In penal substitutionary approaches, God is presented as the divine

lawgiver, giving his authority to the Powers, and sin (depicted as the breaking of

divine commands) is understood as rebellion against their authority. The

highest virtue becomes obedience. Thus penal substitution underwrites

oppression and satanic violence. Wink argues that the rise of penal

substitutionary approaches coincides with the rise of Christendom, and that

essentially they represent a rejection of the challenge to the Powers that Jesus

represents.[19]

If critique of penal substitution as underwriting violence and oppression

is common to both Wink and Alison, Alison has a further concern: that penal

substitution is a purely intellectual theory, abstracted from the lived experience

of Christian life, and is positively harmful to those who approach faith through

its presuppositions.[20] This is in line with his underlying assumption that

doctrine should be open to modification by practice, and that in fact doctrine is

best understood as a narrative that inducts into the practices of life within the

church community.[21] Alison argues that the concept of sin and penitence

created and promoted by penal substitution is completely abstracted from the

lived experience of trying to live a good life, with potentially persecutory

consequences. In penal substitution, a problem the believer has no direct lived

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[19] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 150.
[20] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 20-2.
[21] Clearly this approach is not likely to be accepted by many evangelicals, who expect doctrine to expound and interpret scripture, but the critique he offers cannot easily be sidestepped by them, as evangelicals also expect scripture and lived experience to cohere, so that if a doctrine is preventing scripture from speaking to the lived experience of a believer this is legitimate grounds for questioning it.

experience of (God's unavoidable need to punish them for their original sin) is met by a solution that is abstracted from their own experience of penitence and forgiveness (the forgiveness they experience in relation to their conscious sin is only made possible because this earlier and far more significant problem has been solved in a pre-packaged deal). Alison argues that this abstract understanding of sin and forgiveness discourages any genuine wrestling with sin in the believer's life, instead encouraging them to simply hold fast to their faith and their right beliefs, which are what guarantee their forgiveness. This is spiritually harmful to the believer, but also has the effect of isolating them from others who have different beliefs: if right belief is somehow connected to their salvation, then exposing themselves to beliefs and values that might challenge that belief risks their own salvation. The others must be excluded, or controlled or sacrificed.[22]

Although neither Wink nor Alison are engaged in direct critique of English evangelicals and the problem of homosexuality, the implication of their argument is clear. English evangelicals have a spirituality which (as I have shown in chapter 4) is heavily influenced by a Keele Calvinist tradition that is rooted in penal substitution. Alison argues that this results in a lived experience of faith in which sin and forgiveness are abstract concepts, far less significant than the need to hold firmly to one's beliefs. When confronted by groups (like liberals and gays) who challenge these beliefs, evangelicals will be predisposed to react to them as a threat rather than seek common ground as sinners in need of forgiveness. In addition, penal substitution encourages a perception that

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[22] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 26, 47-8; *The Joy of Being Wrong* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1998), 7-8.

violence, seen as an attribute of God, is necessary and sometimes good, and that sin requires punishment. These core beliefs encourage violent and unforgiving responses to gays as perceived sinners.

Wink and Alison's critiques of penal substitution lead them to propose alternative understandings of atonement. For Alison, a key difficulty is in the abstract and intellectualised understanding of original sin that is propounded by penal substitution, creating an abstract problem that requires penal substitution as the solution. This whole theology reintroduces a God of the violent sacred, becoming a way of marking out those 'in' from those 'out', and is thus complicit in the creation of scapegoats whose sacrifice is seen to be demanded by God. Instead, he asserts that original sin is best understood as the propensity to sacred violence inherent in humanity's inescapable mimeticism. Salvation should therefore be understood as redeeming our mimeticism by induction into a new mimetic relationship with Jesus, the non-rivalistic Other, who shows a new way of life that points beyond sacred violence.[23]

On a more basic level, however, Alison suggests that there is something fundamentally wrong with an understanding of salvation that begins with original sin and then introduces God as the solution – sin is treated as foundational and is allowed to limit and define God and his actions. Instead, he argues that the order of salvation as presented in the gospel is that the resurrection is foundational. The resurrection is the revelation of God's solution in the person of the crucified and risen Christ offering forgiveness, in the light of

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[23] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 64, 140; *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 44-6.

which the believer slowly comes to recognise the nature of the problem.[24] The

resurrection is the irruption of a new creation, a new way of being and relating

that gives hope. It is only as the depth and strength of this new creation begins

to be felt that the true nature of the old creation is made clear.[25]

For Wink, the basic vocabulary of atonement must be structured and

determined by the biblical worldview he has established through his scholarly

study of the language of the Powers. The Powers, understood as the inner

spiritual being of the omnipresent political and economic powers of the world,

form a domination system that has a clear control over all human life, and

operates through the myth of redemptive violence – the belief that we can only

save ourselves through violence. Wink works from a far more positive and less

complex anthropology than Girard or Alison, downplaying mimetic rivalry and

stressing human capacity for reconciliation, meaning that the basic human

problem is not internal but external: oppression by and complicity with the

Powers. He presents a variation on the 'Christus Victor' approach to atonement,

drawing explicitly on the work of Gustaf Aulen. Jesus dies challenging the

Powers, his death not in itself unique (and thus able to be identified with by

those in every situation), but becoming universal through the effect that it had.

By forcing the Powers, who presented themselves as all that was good in

society, to reveal their hidden violence and destroy him, he exposed them,

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[24] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 8.
[25] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 212-22.

revealing human complicity with violence and God's absolute opposition to it. Humanity is thus enabled to reject their deceit and oppression.[26]

6.2.2 Girardian Appropriation of Penal Substitution

Girard's thought clearly contains within it the seeds for a vigorous critique of various aspects of penal substitutionary approaches to the atonement as sacrificial Christianity. However, not all Girardians are so unambiguously critical. The American Baptist theologian S. Mark Heim, for example, offers a more equivocal evaluation of penal substitution. He argues that the cross must be understood simultaneously as both a sinful human act and as a salvific divine act, and it is the difficulty of holding both of these aspects together that creates apparent ambiguities in regard to the cross in scripture. This inherent ambiguity has created a constant tendency for atonement theologies to become degraded, presenting sin as divine intent, but also constantly subverts deficient and distorted atonement theologies by inadvertently opening up salvific possibilities. It is his insistence on the second of these possibilities that sets Heim's work apart from that of Wink or Alison. Heim insists that penal substitution contains within itself the resources to encourage resistance to sacred violence, and argues that historically it has done so. The worst excesses of sacrificial Christianity (and his major example here is anti-semitism culminating in the complicity of the German church with Nazism) have been associated with other atonement theologies, specifically those that

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[26] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 139-143.

are not so crucicentric.[27] Penal substitution, by contrast, has historically been

associated with groups working for the liberation of the oppressed. His central

example here is the abolition of slavery, where penal substitution acted both as

a liberating doctrine for the oppressed (characterising black spirituality) and

encouraged a spirit of renunciation amongst the powerful (characterising the

evangelical spirituality that inspired abolitionists).[28] He thus dismisses some of

the more polemical critiques of penal substitution out of hand. Contra Wink, it

was Christus Victor (that tended to downplay the crucified saviour in favour of

an enthroned Christ) that was associated with the rise of Christendom, and in

the east, where Christendom endured far longer, penal substitution never

developed. Heim notes that attempts to demythologise the atonement and make

the cross less central are often attempts to conceal the victim.[29]

In line with this understanding of penal substitution, Heim presents

much of the same critique offered by Wink and Alison, but affirms its potential

for resisting sacred violence and seeks to retain its central features (in

particular the sense that Jesus' death is both objectively effective and

substitutionary). He argues that penal substitution accepts too much of the logic

of sacred violence, rejecting sacrifice on a human level only to reintroduce it as a

righteous requirement of God on a cosmic level, where humanity must be saved

from God by human sacrifice.[30] Whilst rejecting the idea of a cosmic bargain,

however, Heim still argues for an objective understanding of the atonement in

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27 S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 201-14.
28 Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 187-191.
29 Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 7, 31, 110, 178-9, 273-6.
30 Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 300-1.

which Jesus dies as a substitutionary sacrifice whose death brings an end to sacrifice by exposing the scapegoating mechanism.

Raymund Schwager, a Swiss Roman Catholic theologian, presents a rather different approach to atonement from any of those thus far examined. Schwager's fundamental problem with penal substitution is the sense that by it, Jesus is punished by God to satisfy God's righteousness. He sees this as a dangerous mixture of the truth of God's love for humanity with the human need to project violent motives onto God to justify our own violence.[31] The gospel, by contrast, reveals God accepting and forgiving without the need for punishment, as seen in Jesus' ministry. Therefore, penal substitution undermines the gospel Jesus proclaimed, seeing God's violent wrath as the central problem confronting humanity, not humanity's own hatred and violence.[32] In his *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* he argues for an understanding of the atonement that grounds it in Jesus' mission as it is presented in the gospels (an approach that gives his work considerable common ground with the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus and the New Perspective on Paul, as argued for by N.T. Wright).[33] For Schwager, scripture is a gradual and progressive revelation of the evil of human violence and of God's non-complicity in it, culminating in the recognition that God is non-violent love. Approaches to the atonement that draw uncritically on Old Testament understandings of justice and sacrifice, not recognising the ways in

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[31] Like Wink, he identifies the mixture of the two with Christendom. Raymund Schwager, *Must there be Scapegoats?: Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), 231-2.

[32] Schwager, *Scapegoats*, 206-9.

[33] Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999), 15-16; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 83-124.

which scripture redefines these terms, risk presenting an atonement theology that contradicts Jesus' own theology.[34]

In contrast to Wink or Alison, Schwager does not seek to abandon an objective (or, indeed, substitutionary) understanding of the atonement, simply seeking to approach it in a way that does not prioritise penal imagery and the language of judgement, which he sees as not being the image prioritised in scripture.[35] In his *Must there be scapegoats?,* Schwager argues for an understanding of the atonement as God choosing to become the victim of the scapegoat mechanism in order to break the cycle of violence. In the cross, God suffers the sin of human violence, carrying it and refusing to reciprocate, instead showing forgiveness.[36] In his later *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, he seeks to add depth to this understanding of the atonement by demonstrating that it is an expression of Jesus' teaching and mission in microcosm. Jesus saves by costly identification with sinners, entering into their self-judgement, their sense of abandonment by God, in order to open up a way to God from there.[37] In both versions of the argument, he asserts that Jesus objectively bears the consequences of humanity's sin and suffers judgement as a substitute, with the judgement being divinized human judgement operating through the scapegoat mechanism. The difference is whether the judgement is humanity's resentful judgement of God expressed through the scapegoat mechanism or whether it is humanity's condemnatory judgement of itself. He further argues that in scripture all reference to judgement is in reality human in origin. God does not

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[34] Schwager, *Drama*, 96-101, 117-84.
[35] Schwager, *Drama*, 159-161.
[36] Schwager, *Scapegoats*, 209-11.
[37] Schwager, *Drama*, 96-108.

judge, humanity does, condemning itself to isolation from a God who refuses to compel even when the consequence is abandoning those he loves. [38] Scripturally, judgement is critiqued, and God seeks to save humanity from its own condemnation. In the crucifixion, Jesus reveals the true nature of the judgement he faces and that those victimizing him are themselves victims. In actively choosing to accept the father's will for him, he surrenders himself to suffering the fate that his oppressors condemn themselves to, choosing to identify with them even to death and abandonment by God in an act of non-retaliatory love. This breaks the cycle of violence and opens up a way back to God's love even from the darkest depths of humanity's self-condemnation.[39] Jesus identifies in his death with all those who are victims (as is made explicit in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats), but also with all the victimizers, recognizing that they too are victims of their own self-judgement. Thus the church in its earliest understandings of the atonement in Acts identified itself both with the persecuted Jesus and with those who persecuted him.[40] Therefore the atonement demands a personal response – it demands the recognition on the part of sinners that they are both victim and victimizer, and that they can be set free from condemnation.[41]

Schwager seeks to avoid the understanding (found in Luther and Barth), that sinners can somehow transfer their guilt onto another (seeing this idea as

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[38] Some evangelical scholars have shown similar signs of moving towards an understanding of the biblical categories of judgement and the wrath of God as impersonal and extrinsic to God, seeing it as either (or both) the natural consequence of sin or human self-judgement. C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Moffat, 1932); A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957); Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1996), 68-70.

[39] Schwager, *Drama*, 117-8.

[40] Schwager, *Drama*, 157, 192.

[41] Schwager, *Drama*, 193.

complicit in the scapegoating process), as well as the idea that God acts violently towards Christ (which suggests that God saves through acting sinfully).[42] He is also wary of sacrificial understandings of atonement, discerning a scriptural strand of prophetic critique of sacrifice that makes it an ambiguous concept. Where Jesus' death is interpreted in terms of sacrifice, as in Hebrews, it is only where notions of sacrifice itself are being thoroughly reinterpreted.[43] Understanding Jesus as self-sacrificially choosing to die underwrites a self-destructive spirituality. Therefore, Schwager is careful to present Jesus as choosing to identify himself with those who are suffering a self-imposed death, and dying as a consequence of staying true to that identification.[44]

Schwager's approach, which is thoroughly committed to scripture, shows many similarities to evangelical understandings, whilst rejecting penal substitution largely on the grounds that it is not sufficiently scriptural. He critiques approaches adopted by other Girardians (like Wink) who seek to dispense with notions of hell or the need for individual response to atonement, and is particularly critical of Christus Victor approaches that interpret the resurrection as triumphant vindication of the victim, when it must logically also be a vindication of those Jesus gave himself for – the victimizers.[45]

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[42] Schwager, *Drama*, 162-8.
[43] Schwager, *Drama*, 174-83.
[44] Schwager, *Drama*, 184-9.
[45] Schwager, *Drama*, 135-7, 198-9. Note that Wink himself attempts to tone down this aspect of Christus Victor by suggesting that the Powers themselves will ultimately be redeemed (*Engaging the Powers*, 319-324).

6.2.3 Girardian Approaches to Atonement Considered

The critique of penal substitution offered by various Girardian theologians is clearly rooted in a close engagement with Girard's work and a rereading of scripture in its light, and reflects very real concerns about the effects that doctrine can have on legitimating oppression and violence. Each of the scholars examined have distinct emphases, particularly in regard to the proposed alternate models of atonement, which makes it hard to assert that any one proposed alternative is a definitive Girardian approach. However, there is clearly a common set of concerns being presented, which can perhaps best be understood as two broad areas of critique.[46] The first is the concern that penal substitution legitimates violence that imitates the sacred violence of the atonement. All the Girardian critics surveyed above highlight the need for care in formulating understandings of salvation from this perspective. Alison's concern that penal substitution, as commonly expressed, seems to present a violent God who rightfully demands sacrifice, is echoed by Heim and Schwager. The killing of Jesus by human beings is in some sense seen as good and righteous and approved of by God, which effectively legitimises divine violence at human hands. Wink and Heim both demonstrate a clear awareness, echoing Girard's own work, of the ways in which distorted Christian doctrine has historically influenced Western culture and society, leading the church to collude in and justify violence, becoming a channel of a form of satanic, anti-Christian sacrificial Christianity. Even when some, like Heim, emphasise that

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[46] Indeed, it should not be assumed that the divergence between Girardians leads them to reject each other's work. Alison commends Heim's *Saved from Sacrifice* on the back cover as 'a very accurate reading of the thought of René Girard as it relates to the cross and a superb reworking of the doctrine of the atonement'. Wink quotes from Schwager in his *Engaging the Powers*, 151.

penal substitution also contains the liberating truth of the gospel that has led to the church initiating transformation in society, this has not obviated its negative aspects. Some Girardians (Wink and Alison) regard such objective substitutionary understandings of atonement as more distorted theology than liberating truth, and some (Schwager and Heim) vice versa. Although Heim's careful work moderates many of the rather sweeping polemical claims of Wink, even he suggests that there is genuine cause for concern.

The second broad area of critique concerns the way in which the salvation presented in the doctrine is bad theology – distorting the central truth of the gospel. By focusing on a mechanistic abstract transaction that produces absolution, the doctrine loses its connection to any historical reality, meaning that the process of salvation and forgiveness is made abstract from the lived experience of the individual Christian. Bluntly speaking, this is the argument that for those holding to penal substitution, knowledge and experience of forgiveness and restitution to holiness has nothing to do with the way an individual acts towards those around them, with the result that they need not view those relationships as having anything to do with their salvation and forgiveness. Therefore salvation becomes privatised, part of a private spiritual transaction that is of overwhelming significance and which does not imply a new relationship with those around them. Penal substitution therefore emphatically discourages reflection on the way the saved individual relates to those they regard as sinners. In addition, the overwhelming emphasis is placed on the problem of sin which required the cross as a solution. This distorts understandings of salvation and of God's essential nature, demonstrated

particularly in a downplaying of the significance of the resurrection and of eschatological hope.[47] This critique is presented most starkly by Alison, but is present also in Heim.

6.3 The Crisis in Evangelical Approaches to Atonement

Girardian critique of penal substitution therefore centres on two broad areas. I now turn to examine how English evangelicals have commonly understood penal substitution, to see how justified such a critique might be. However, this is problematic, as atonement theology was, along with homosexuality, a fracture point in evangelical identity, where the crisis of undifferentiation became visible and scapegoats were made. Evangelical understandings of atonement in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were a site of considerable internal division and debate, though some disunity on the subject was apparent even earlier in the twentieth century, with some English evangelicals expressing a preference for the language of 'representation' over 'substitution' and 'expiation' over 'propitiation', attempting to move away from the image of a vengeful God.[48] As with debates over homosexuality, the debates were caused in part by the new openness to the wider church and wider scholarship that began at Keele. Progressives used the principles of Keele to advocate ideas associated with non-evangelical theologies, whilst exclusivists retreated from and declaimed those principles, adopting an ever more strict Calvinist theology, whilst proclaiming that they

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[47] The point here is Alison's, who emphasises the significance of the resurrection in his *The Joy of Being Wrong*. However, it could similarly be argued that evangelical emphasis on the cross has also been at the expense of the incarnation – Jesus is often presented as a man whose only true significance is that he died for our sins.

[48] Olson, *The SCM Press A-Z of Evangelical Theology*, 149-50.

were defending the position that evangelicals had always held. Both sides

demonstrably felt that they were in a moment of crisis where clear

demarcations were breaking down, and were responding by creating

scapegoats – whether these were liberal pseudo-evangelicals abandoning the

time-honoured truths of scripture or neo-fundamentalists seeking to impose a

harsh theology alien to the evangelical tradition. Both of these stereotypes

resonate within evangelical culture and can be readily drawn upon to create

scapegoats. In chapter 2 I have already discussed the division caused amongst

English evangelicals by Steve Chalke's *The Lost Message of Jesus*, and the way in

which doctrines of atonement and acceptable bounds of disagreement within

evangelical community were clearly being used there as identity markers by

exclusivist and progressive evangelicals. It was clear that for many, Steve Chalke

had become a potential scapegoat to bring unity. It was the EA's refusal to make

him one that led to a very public and painful split between UCCF and the EA.

If the crisis in English evangelicalism is caused by the conflict between

progressives and exclusivists, there is also a significant body of evangelicals

who have sought to remain true to a centrist tradition. This cautiously-open

conservatism looks to Keele, neither seeking to follow its trajectory further, nor

retreating from it as a mistake. The key figure for these centrists is John Stott,

one of whose best-known books is *The Cross of Christ*, an exposition of a penal

substitutionary approach to the atonement from the 80s that still has

widespread respect within evangelicalism. Notably, exclusivists like Jeffery et al.

reference it approvingly, despite seeking in their own work (perhaps

unconsciously) to move beyond it.[49] Any understanding of current English

evangelical understandings of the atonement has to start with this key text.

6.3.1 *The Cross of Christ* – Cautiously-Open Conservative Understandings of Atonement

Stott's *The Cross of Christ* was written partly as a work of evangelical

biblical theology, and partly as a work of evangelical devotion. This gives it a

rather different tone to the later polemical works of progressives and

exclusivists, who were seeking to critique or defend a certain understanding of

penal substitution within the context of a crisis. In Stott's work, the cross is

primarily presented as a spiritual challenge to evangelicals, not as a marker of a

certain sort of contested identity. Thus Stott emphasises early on that biblically,

'the crucifixion was something done by us before it was something done for

us.'[50]

In his exposition of penal substitution, Stott starts with a closely-argued

exegesis of some key gospel passages to establish a basic understanding of the

meaning of the cross. This initial work of exegesis bears striking similarities to

Schwager's discussion of the same passages (as is apparent by comparing, for

example, their interpretation of the Last Supper), the main difference between

them being Schwager's decision to set his exegesis within a broader reading of

the narrative of salvation history and Jesus' mission, as opposed to Stott's

comparatively narrow focus on the passion narratives.[51] Following this,

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[49] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 27.
[50] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 59-60.
[51] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 66-81; Schwager, *Drama*, 112-8. It is notable that both Stott and Schwager interpret the cry of desolaton as indicating Jesus' real experience of judgement and

however, Stott proceeds to establish a case for penal substitution largely

without further exegesis, sometimes on the basis of bald assertion alone, at

times revealing a set of underlying assumptions about sin and the nature of God

(and in particular his impassibility) that are allowed to shape Stott's logic.[52] This

becomes apparent in his discussion of the true significance of sin, where he

states that it must be understood primarily as offence against God (effectively

conforming to Alison's critique that the problem resolved in atonement is seen

as one invisible to humanity as a whole).[53] Similarly, he argues without explicit

scriptural support that human and divine anger are completely different, and

that God's perfect nature prohibits him from setting aside his anger: 'He is

always himself and never inconsistent. If he were ever to behave

"uncharacteristically", in a way that is out of character with himself, he would

cease to be God, and the world would be thrown into moral confusion.'[54]

In other places his use of textual support seems curiously selective, as in

his argument that biblically 'God cannot be in the presence of sin, and that if it

approaches him too closely it is repudiated or consumed', which draws

extensively on the Old Testament, but seems not to engage with the way in

which this sort of understanding might have been challenged by Jesus' ministry

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abandonment by God, though Stott argues that Jesus was coming under God's judgement, and Schwager that he was entering into a radical identification with the human experience of self-judgement.

[52] The ultimate source of these assumptions is clearly Anselm of Canterbury's *Why God Became Man*, which presents arguments for sin being understood primarily as offence against God, for God not being at liberty to forgive this offence without seeking recompense, and that what is appropriate to God is not appropriate to humanity. Anselm of Canterbury, 'Why God Became Man', trans. Janet Fairweather, in *The Major Works*, Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282-6.

[53] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 90.

[54] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 106, 128.

of table fellowship with sinners.[55] Stott argues God's righteous wrath towards

and inability to coexist with sin is the central obstacle to be overcome in

redemption, so that salvation becomes an act internal to God's own nature:

atonement is divine love triumphing over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.

This argument, as I have shown, depends in part on an unacknowledged use of

Christian tradition to fill out Stott's basic exegesis.[56]

Arguing the case for penal substitution is only part of Stott's concern,

however. He is just as concerned to set out the spiritual significance of belief in

penal substitution, and here his writing is both strikingly atuned to the

significance of the atonement for issues of human oppression and injustice, and

confounds Alison's fears by showing a rigorous concern for the significance of

everyday acts of forgiveness and repentance. He argues passionately that the

cross points the way towards a way of life marked by self-denial, humility and

service, following the example of the crucified Christ.[57] He explicitly speaks of

the way in which a Christlike mission must include fighting injustice and

oppression, including the oppression of women and denial of equal opportunity

for all, an emphasis that is unusual in an evangelical writer.[58] However, Stott's

discussion of the implications of the cross for a life of discipleship highlights a

deep ambiguity in regard to who is being imitated: the Father who cannot

ignore sin even to save his own Son, or the Son who is willing to be counted

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[55] A practice that both Schwager and the New Perspective view as hugely significant in its implications for the gospel's understanding of sin. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 108.

[56] It is notable, however, that his presentation of the substitutionary (as opposed to penal) element of the atonement is far more clearly rooted in scripture, and here he is particularly concerned to guard against misinterpretation of atonement in the 'cosmic child abuse' vein, preferring to speak of God himself on the cross. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 134-55.

[57] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 256, 275-88.

[58] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 292-3.

amongst the sinners in order to save them. Stott, guided by his understanding

that the atonement is essentially an act internal to God's own nature, seeks to

set up the Cross as modelling both love and justice: radical inclusion and radical

exclusion. He argues that forgiveness should not be extended where there is not

repentance, that parents express their love through discipline, anger and

hostility towards negative aspects of their child's behaviour and character, and

that discipline is appropriate in a church context where the aim is reclaiming

and restoring the offender.[59] In all these things, Stott appeals to the example of

the cross, pointing to the Father as the one to be imitated. Assertions that evil is

to be overcome with good, and the punishment left to God, are set alongside

assertions that we cannot bypass the punishment of evil and implicit arguments

that at times we must punish evil on God's behalf.[60]

The Cross of Christ therefore has a highly ambiguous legacy, containing

much within it that meets Girardian concerns, yet also containing implicit ideas

and attitudes that suggest those concerns are well-founded. I turn now to

consider the ways in which the understanding of penal substitution outlined

there has been transformed by English evangelicalism's bifurcation between

progressives and exclusivists.

6.3.2 Progressive Approaches: N.T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul

The progressive tradition in English evangelicalism followed Keele's

openness to critical scholarship, leading to the problematisation of a penal

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[59] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 268.
[60] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 300-10.

substitutionary understanding of the atonement within progressive evangelical

circles, a development that came to light clearly in the debate around *The Lost*

Message of Jesus. Figures like N.T. Wright and Steve Chalke, who have a high-

profile identity as evangelical leaders, are making these concerns known to a

wider audience. As the cross is commonly understood as a focal point of

evangelical unity, the result is to challenge evangelical identity as a whole,

provoking episodes of scapegoating like that created by the 'cosmic child abuse'

claim. A similar crisis was created in American evangelicalism by concerns over

the apparent universalism in Rob Bell's *Love Wins*.[61] Two deeper theological

currents lie beneath progressive evangelical questioning of penal substitution.

The first is the New Perspective on Paul, which problematises traditional

evangelical understandings of New Testament passages crucial to their

atonement theology and, just as significantly, challenges evangelical tradition in

the form of the theology of the Reformers. The second current may be broadly

labelled 'postmodern' but includes feminist and Girardian perspectives, and is

concerned with the way in which doctrines can be complicit in oppression,

justifying and creating patterns of behaviour and attitude in the culture around

them.

The New Perspective on Paul is an approach to the New Testament

pioneered in the work of E.P. Sanders, J.D.G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright.[62] Although

the three have different emphases, they are united in wishing to challenge the

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[61] Notably, John Piper, a key figure in opposition to N. T. Wright, was also a key figure in this crisis, an example of the way in which these debates have become trans-atlantic.
[62] E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985); J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making vol.1* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making vol. 2* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

dominant understandings of Pauline theology rooted in the Reformed tradition, and in developing a fresh understanding of Jesus within his historical context.[63] Both Dunn and Wright are British evangelicals who taught in English universities, and their work has therefore had considerable impact on English evangelical theology. N.T. Wright in particular has created controversy within evangelical circles by arguing for a new understanding of Paul that challenges the evangelical tradition at its spiritual roots. As the evangelical Reformation historian Alister McGrath notes 'if Wright is correct, then Luther is wrong.'[64] The influential American evangelical pastor and devotional writer John Piper has critiqued Wright at length, attacking him for abandoning the Calvinist legacy of evangelical tradition.[65] His critique was significant enough that Wright felt compelled to write specifically defending himself from these evangelical critics (as opposed to his critics within academia).[66] Wright's argument is that it is anachronistic to interpret Paul in a way that sees him critiquing the Jews of his day for being pseudo-Roman Catholics. However valid Luther's interpretation of Romans to the theological debates of his day may have been, no Second Temple Jew believed salvation came by works righteousness apart from God's grace.[67]

In regard to the atonement, Wright's approach suggests that certain aspects of penal substitution as commonly understood by many evangelicals lack biblical foundation. His central assumption (like Schwager) is that Jesus' mission prior to his passion must form the basis of any atonement theology. In

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[63] Indeed, the differences between them are such that Wright denies that there is such a thing as The New Perspective. Tom Wright, *Justification* (London: SPCK, 2009), 12-13.
[64] Cited in Carey Newman (ed.,) *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 169.
[65] John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).
[66] Wright, *Justification,* vii.
[67] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 280.

his *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Wright describes this self-understanding as Jesus coming to bring a final return of the people of YHWH from exile by defeating Satan through his martyrdom and vindication after death. His death, which he understood as embodying Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant, would bring redemption by taking Israel's judgement upon himself, bringing victory over Satan and functioning as a Passover sacrifice, enabling a liberated Israel to fulfil its vocation to the world.[68] In this context, the central problem being solved in the atonement is not God's wrath against the personal sin of individuals, or his righteous anger against sin in some more generalised sense, but his wrath specifically against the whole people of Israel for their unfaithfulness, which had led to judgement in the exile. For Jesus, forgiveness of sins was primarily a way of speaking about the return of the people of Israel from exile (which could happen only when the sins that caused the exile had been forgiven).[69] In his later *Justification*, Wright then argues that Paul's understanding of salvation is also rooted in these very Jewish ideas of the return from exile, but that Paul's key concern is to demonstrate that salvation is for both Jew and Gentile, and that he therefore presents a radical inclusivity as God's intention.[70]

This reinterpretation of Jesus and Paul necessitates a reinterpretation of the key terms used in penal substitution. Thus Wright argues that God's 'righteousness' must be understood as his faithfulness to his covenant promises,

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[68] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 596-604.
[69] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 268-72.
[70] Wright, *Justification*, 26-7.

not as his holiness and concern for moral uprightness.[71] He sees 'justification' as purely and simply 'being declared in the right' in a lawcourt. There is no sense in a lawcourt in which the personal righteousness of the judge is imputed to an acquitted defendant, and Wright therefore argues that the concept of imputed righteousness (key to most understandings of penal substitution) is absent from scripture. He argues that Paul's opposition to the law is not because he saw works as insufficient for salvation but because it created a barrier between Jew and Gentile that frustrated the covenant. On the contrary, he argues that final judgement will be on the basis of works (though the believer has already been declared in the right through their incorporation into Christ) and that salvation through faith is not a Pauline concept.[72] The overall effect of this reinterpretation is to render penal substitution as traditionally described largely incoherent. Indeed, Wright argues that it is a mistake to see the lawcourt as the most basic image of Pauline soteriology. The image of God seated in judgement is an eschatological one, and should therefore be set within the wider context of the expectation of the fulfilment of covenant.[73] For Wright, penal substitution as understood by the majority of evangelicals is simply insufficiently biblical. It prioritises a set of images (the lawcourt) that scripture does not, drawing on concepts like 'imputed righteousness', 'justification', and 'salvation by faith' that have little basis in either Jesus or Paul's understanding of atonement.

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[71] Wright, *Justification*, 41-4.

[72] Wright, *Justification*, 210-1. He further argues that final judgement will be on the basis of works, yet with a verdict declared in advance because the believer is found in the Messiah who was faithful – a formulation that preserves much of the meaning of 'salvation by faith', 165, 177-8, 188-9.

[73] Wright, *Justification*, 68-81.

Wright's approach has covenant at its centre, and emphasises the openness and inclusivity of God's love as shown in Jesus' ministry. The model of atonement he presents is objective and substitutionary, and includes penal aspects, yet resists using this as its controlling image. Wright's approach is far less focused on individual sin and forgiveness than traditional penal substitutionary approaches and instead focuses on God's wrath and forgiveness directed at humanity's unfaithfulness, and his unwavering commitment to an outward-facing generous love. Interestingly, like Stott, he interprets God's wrath as an expression of his love, preserving that ambiguity as to whether atonement speaks of love or anger:

> It isn't that God basically wants to condemn and then finds a way to rescue some from that disaster. It is that God longs to bless, to bless lavishly, and so to rescue and bless those in danger of tragedy – and therefore *must* curse everything that thwarts and destroys the blessing of his world and people.[74]

Essentially, Wright preserves the ambiguous message that salvific divine love not only does not preclude violence against some of those loved, but actually requires it, yet he wishes to stress that this is simply an undesired impersonal consequence of God's intention to bless. Wright is evidently aware of critiques such as that of Alison and is concerned to avoid an approach to atonement that presents God as saving some by finding a way to rescue them from his own violence.[75] Wright's solution is to stress that God's wrath is not personally directed – God does not save his favourites and curse the rest, rather his love for

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[74] Wright, *Justification*, 52.
[75] "…a deal whereby someone who was remote and angry remained remote and angry, but created an exception for those lucky enough to be covered with the blood of his Son." Alison, *On Being Liked*, 22.

all necessitates that some must be cursed.[76] Girardians might well counter that

this is simply the logic of the single victim mechanism made explicit – a few are

sacrificed for the good of all. Wright reveals some similarly limited sensitivities

to Girardian concerns in his understanding of Jesus' death as sacrificial. His

understanding here is that Jesus' death is a voluntary fulfilment of the role of

suffering servant and the ultimate act of covenantal faithfulness, not a

satisfaction of the requirements of divine law, an understanding that comes

very close to shifting from Girard's sense of the archaic sacrifice to his sense of

the Christian sacrifice.[77] Wright thus avoids Schwager's critique that the

atonement is presented as satisfying a requirement that Jesus himself declared

unnecessary, though he is less sensitive than Schwager to the dangers of

presenting redemption as self-destruction.[78] Like Stott, Wright is careful to

avoid notions of atonement as either demanded by a bloodthirsty God or

accepted begrudgingly to placate a wrathful God, seeing it ultimately as an

expression of divine love.

Wright's significant engagement with the resurrection in his *The*

Resurrection of the Son of God is another important element of the New

Perspective.[79] His central concern is to examine the New Testament writings in

the context of the thought world of their day in order to establish that the early

Christians believed that Jesus had risen bodily from the dead. However, he also

gives significant prominence to the meaning of the resurrection within the New

[76] Thus still coming under Alison's de-personalised version: "Before, God was a hurricane, and now God is still a hurricane, but Jesus has revealed that there is an eye to the hurricane, and so long as you hang in there, in the eye, you won't be destroyed." *On Being Liked*, 22-3.
[77] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 555-,63, 592-7. As Girard defines the two senses in his discussion of the judgement of Solomon. *EC*, 214-5.
[78] Wright, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 172-191.
[79] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 726-36.

Testament, arguing that it represented the fulfilment of eschatological hope, inaugurating a new covenant, affirming the essential goodness of creation in an act of new creation, constituting Jesus as messiah, and pointing to the reality of his divine nature. In re-emphasising the significance of the resurrection (as opposed to the crucifixion), and linking it firmly into the non-penal theme of covenant faithfulness which he has argued must control any understanding of salvation, Wright shifts the centre of gravity of an understanding of atonement decisively away from a penal substitutionary act of sacred violence. In so doing, he meets many of Alison's concerns about evangelical distortion of the gospel without ever explicitly engaging with them.

In Wright's version of the New Perspective, then, there are some signs that progressive evangelicalism is moving towards an understanding of atonement that might seem more sympathetic to some Girardian concerns (whilst seemingly remaining impervious to others), albeit not under the influence of Girardian thought. Although some evangelicals seem determined to reject even the basis of the New Perspective (in Wright's language showing themselves determined to place evangelical tradition over scripture), Wright's continued standing within progressive evangelicalism suggests that his approach will have a continuing influence.

6.3.3 Progressive approaches: Feminists and Girardians

If the New Perspective is a longer-term influence on evangelical approaches to the atonement that has provoked some more marginal discontent, then the controversy produced by the publication of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's *The Lost Message of Jesus*, points to a set of influences that has

provoked more immediate and mainstream resistance within English evangelicalism. As Hilborn makes clear in his summary of the controversy, the book is representative of a wider movement of evangelical engagement with non-evangelical theologians (that he describes as 'feminist' but which include Girardians too).[80] It is important to note, however, that it is not primarily a work on the atonement. It is essentially a book written at a popular level and concerned with addressing misapprehensions about Christian faith held both by Christians and non-Christians. In doing this, Chalke and Mann draw explicitly on the work of a wide variety of evangelical and non-evangelical scholars, including those influenced by feminist approaches, those representing the New Perspective, and also Walter Wink, through whom some Girardian approaches are appropriated.

In their brief discussion of the atonement, Chalke and Mann argue that much of the popular presentation of penal substitution is flawed, repeating many of the critiques raised by Girardian scholars. They suggest that stress on original sin has obscured the biblical message that humanity is made in God's image, that Jesus (and they explicitly draw on Wink's language here) challenged the myth of redemptive violence which cruder forms of penal substitution present, and that the atonement was a non-violent means of establishing the kingdom by soaking up the evil and violence of humanity.[81] This notion of atonement through the soaking up of humanity's evil, strikingly similar to Schwager's understanding in *Must there be Scapegoats*, is further explained by

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[80] David Hilborn, "Atonement, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Alliance" in Tidball et al. (eds.), *The Atonement Debate*, 17.
[81] Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 67, 125, 179.

the use of the example of a woman forgiving her husband's adultery to save the

relationship.[82] It is in this context that the phrase 'cosmic child abuse' is used, as

a description of a deficient understanding of atonement that presents a

distorted picture of a God engaging in actions that would be seen as immoral if

committed by a human being. Broadly the argument here is the same as that of

Alison and Heim: what is recognised as unacceptable on a human level is

proclaimed as acceptable on the divine level as a means of our salvation. As

Chalke makes clear elsewhere (drawing on Wright for support), despite

assertions of others to the contrary he is not necessarily abandoning penal

substitution, just certain forms of it that he sees as open to abuse.[83] Broadly,

then, Chalke is a high-profile representative of a progressive evangelical

movement that draws on broader scholarship from a variety of sources to

critique received understandings of the atonement.

A fuller presentation of this sort of progressive evangelical perspective

on atonement can be found in Green and Baker's *Recovering the Scandal of the*

Cross, cited by Chalke and Mann, and whose thinking has clearly influenced

them.[84] Green and Baker are most concerned about the degree to which penal

substitution is identified with dominant Western cultural values and is

complicit with oppression. They argue that it is dependent on Western

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[82] Schwager, *Scapegoats*, 210-4; Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 180-1. Although not highlighted in subsequent debate, it is surely not insignificant that Chalke and Mann here subvert Stott's argument of the cross as a model of love and justice – for Stott the cross teaches that forgiveness cannot be offered without repentance. Chalke and Mann offer the example of forgiveness being offered with no regard for repentance and then apply this as a model for understanding the cross.
[83] Steve Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross" in Tidball et al. (eds.), *The Atonement Debate*, 34-45.
[84] Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

conceptions of justice, which have a concern to assign blame and hold

individuals accountable for actions. This leads to an individualistic soteriology

and a downplaying of Jesus' solidarity with the suffering in favour of asserting

the rightfulness of his punishment.[85] In turn, this affects understandings of sin,

associating it with disobedience, problematising resistance to oppression.[86]

They further argue that it creates an abusive image of God as the one who

brings retribution for disobedience, and that it downplays the importance of

transformation as a necessary part of salvation.[87] They demonstrate the cultural

specificity of penal substitution by exploring the ways in which it has been

incomprehensible in other cultural contexts and required considerable

adaptation.[88] The central argument here (similar to that of Alison and Heim) is

that penal substitution requires people to first accept a series of problems they

are neither conscious of nor concerned about in order to appreciate the solution

the theory offers. It is therefore not connecting to people's felt need for

salvation.[89] The point is argued most strongly in relation to non-Western

cultures, but Green and Baker argue that penal substitution has lost its

relevance to a changing Western culture too. Its complicity with the justification

of the structures of power within society means that it has lost its critical

distance and is irrelevant or even offensive towards those oppressed by those

structures.[90]

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[85] Green and Baker, *Recovering*, 24-7.
[86] Green and Baker, *Recovering*, 174-5.
[87] Green and Baker, *Recovering*, 201-2.
[88] They examine Kraus' adaption of atonement theology to a shame culture in Japan (155-63), and a feminist reappropriation of a Christus Victor model by Darby Kathleen Ray (172-9).
[89] Green and Baker, *Recovering*, 161-2.
[90] Green and Baker, *Recovering*, 32-203.

6.3.4 Exclusivist Evangelical reassertion

If progressives can best be understood as responding to modernity through continuing the trajectory of Keele, building a reciprocal dialogue with modernity, then the response of exclusivists is best understood as a retreat from Keele to create an oppositional dialogue with modernity (which is in itself an expression of modernity). Exclusivists present as traditionalists, defending a historical tradition, but this masks the extent to which the oppositional dialogue in which they are engaged has forced a reformulation of that tradition.

In the 'cosmic child abuse' debate, this exclusivist evangelical perspective had clear expression in Jeffery, Ovey and Sach's *Pierced for our Transgressions*. This book was written by a tutor and two students from Oak Hill, one of the more conservative evangelical Anglican theological colleges, and published by IVP with a forward by John Piper. It explicitly presented itself as an 'orthodox' restatement of penal substitution, defending the doctrine from the challenge presented by Chalke, Green and Baker and others. Jeffery et al.'s account of the rise of 'liberal' attacks on penal substitution make it clear that in their view all such challenges are in truth refusals to accept the authority of scripture (effectively defining their own position as defending the 'clear truth' of scripture rather than one interpretation amongst many). They acknowledge that many of those making such claims see themselves as evangelicals and claim to respect the authority of scripture, but refuse to accept this, seeing the issue as an

identity marker for evangelicals (and indeed for faithful Christians of any tradition).[91] As Gary Williams states:

> I find it impossible to agree with those who maintain that the debate is just an intramural one which can be conducted within the evangelical family... when it has been acknowledged by all parties that we are arguing about who God is, about the creedal doctrine of the Trinity, about the consequences of sin, about how we are saved, and about views which are held to encourage the abuse of women and children. So long as these issues *are* the issues... then I cannot see how those who disagree can remain allied without placing unity above truths which are undeniably central to the Christian faith.[92]

As I noted earlier, Jeffery et al. commend Stott's exposition of penal substitution and clearly see their assertion of it as a simple restatement of the same doctrine. However, there are significant differences between the two. Broadly speaking, *Pierced for our Transgressions* represents a hardening of Stott's position, where much of the ambiguity and generous openness found in a cautiously-open conservative position has been removed. In their biblical exegesis, they use selective quotation to elide much real ambiguity and diversity within scripture.[93] In addition, they fail to engage seriously with recent biblical scholarship including the New Perspective, something that is obvious in their confident assertion that the work of Leon Morris in the 50s and 60s refutes all more recent biblical scholarship.[94] The more general hardening of position in relation to Stott is shown in their discussion of God's nature. As I have described, Stott's understanding of the atonement centres on the cross as the resolution to a struggle within God's own character, allowing him to remain true

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[91] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 24-5.
[92] Gary Williams in Tidball et al. (eds.), *The Atonement debate*, 188.
[93] As N.T. Wright (who they appear to have misunderstood as abandoning penal substitution) argues in his "The Cross and the Caricatures".
[94] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 26.

to himself whilst still allowing his love to triumph over his need for justice. In this regard he has no difficulty in speaking of struggle between various aspects of God's character, citing Hosea 11 as a scriptural example.[95] In striking contrast, Jeffery et al. insist that in the cross divine mercy and divine justice are held in balance, denying that one triumphs over the other.[96] The divine internal conflict that created a tension central to Stott's understanding is resolved in Jeffery et al. into an immutable being within whom there is no conflict, and an atonement in which neither love nor judgement can be said to have triumphed but the requirements of both have been fulfilled.

There is also a significant difference in their approach to alternative models and theories of atonement. Stott, in a rigorous effort to be true to the diversity of imagery within scripture, describes four complementary biblical images of objective salvation, in which penal substitution (as the essence of all of them) is capable of being explained in several different incompatible yet complementary images.[97] Alongside this, he then acknowledges the biblical basis of both Abelard's subjective understanding and Aulen's Christus Victor model, arguing that all three are capable of being harmonized, with none set above the others.[98] By contrast, Jeffery et al. effectively ignore Stott's distinction between a number of incompatible yet complementary biblical images for substitutionary atonement, conflating them all into a single biblical doctrine of penal substitution, and although they acknowledge the existence of different

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[95] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 129-30.
[96] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 159.
[97] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 202-3. Holmes in Tidball et al. (eds.), *The Atonement Debate,* 267, argues that this has historically been characteristic of English evangelicalism – that penal substitution is recognised as one (perhaps the most significant) amongst many models of atonement. *Pierced for our Transgressions* therefore represents a definite shift away from inherited tradition.
[98] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 230.

biblical models of atonement, they see approaches like Christus Victor as secondary understandings, dependant on a prior acceptance of penal substitution and deficient if accepted on their own.[99]

Writing to refute a progressive approach, Jeffery et al. explicitly engage with Green and Baker's culturalist critique, demonstrating the origins of penal substitution in the earliest Christian traditions and noting that if penal substitution is less comprehensible outside of a Western cultural context, this may be because that cultural context has been shaped by the values of the gospel. Thus, if it is dependent on a prior acceptance of notions of individual responsibility, this is in part because these notions are central to the gospel.[100] The key to Jeffery et al.'s defence of penal substitution against postmodernist critique, however, is the assertion that penal substitution does not advocate an ethic of retribution and justice as punishment that contrasts with Jesus' own ethic of love and forgiveness (the very issue that Schwager wrestles with in *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*). Jeffery et al. argue that there are many areas where God is explicitly not to be taken as an example for the believer to follow, and that seeking retribution for the sins of others is one of them.[101] Although God is righteous in responding to sin with violence, human beings are not to emulate him.

However, this argument is undermined by their apparent assumption elsewhere that God's violent justice is to be emulated. In critiquing Girard, they

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[99] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 98, 210-11.
[100] Jeffery et al. *Pierced*, 220. This rebuttal is, however, less effective in regard to the cultural critique offered by feminists than it is to that from Japanese culture, in that feminism clearly springs from the very Western cultural values Jeffery et al. acknowledge to have been influenced by the gospel.
[101] Jeffery et al. *Pierced*, 234-5.

present an extraordinary argument that the violence of the Old Testament sacrificial system did not prevent it from having redemptive benefit, and specifically reference the execution of Zimri by Phinehas as an example of divinely-sanctioned violence that brought redemption (Numbers 25). Clearly this argument betrays a misunderstanding of Girard, in that in Girard's terms sacrifice by definition is real redemption established through violence. Girard's point is not that sacred violence does not offer real redemption for those saved by it, but that it is redemption at the cost of those sacrificed, and thus cannot be the model for God's redemption (unless that is understood as redemption only for the elect), which must instead be understood as redemption from these forms of violent redemption. However, the argument offered also undermines Jeffery et al.'s claim that biblically God's retributive violence is not to be imitated – Phinehas is commended for doing precisely that. For the sacred violence of Phinehas to be presented as a way of illuminating the actions of God in the atonement suggests that Jeffery et al. do see sacred violence as an acceptable imitation of God. This seems to also be implicit in their argument that a firm belief in penal substitution gives the believer a passion for God's justice, which will manifest itself in a concern for social injustice.[102] A similar argument that divine justice seen in the cross is a model for the believer's passion for justice was found in Stott, but there the approval of sacred violence was undercut (perhaps unconsciously) by Stott's ambiguity over whether the cross speaks more of God's justice or his love and mercy triumphing over that justice. Here, that ambiguity has been lost, and the sacred violence of the cross appears to be being implicitly presented as a model for the believer to follow. Although

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[102] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 157.

significant, the significance of this interpretative development for the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality should not be overstated. Jeffery et al. wrote comparatively late in our period, when exclusivist positions in regard to homosexuality were already clearly marked out, and sacred violence had already occurred. This is therefore a late development and likely reflects a tacit justification for sacred violence already engaged in rather than acting as a cause of sacred violence in itself.

Jeffery et al. explicitly address Girardian critiques, albeit largely through an engagement with Wink, without much evidence that Girard has been studied independently. As is clear from above, their entire discussion demonstrates a considerable degree of misunderstanding. Thus, Girard is asserted to dismiss Israelite religion as 'organised violence in the service of social tranquility', which misunderstands the nature of his insight entirely.[103] Girard, after all, sees *all* social tranquillity as essentially guaranteed by organised violence. Religion is distinctive in this regard only by its antiquity, and Israelite religion only by the extent to which it problematises the social tranquillity created by sacred violence. The most heinous offence in the eyes of Jeffery et al., however, appears to be Girard's alleged disregard for the authority of scripture (which they understand purely in terms of an acceptance that it is historically accurate) in that he regards various stories as 'legendary' and they suppose that he would reject any notion of final judgement.[104] This objection, which works from a doctrine of the authority of scripture that is considerably higher than that

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[103] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 237. The quotation is taken (out of context, in that it is there a general description of all religion) from Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 146, and attributed to Girard.
[104] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 237

adopted by many evangelicals, appears to deny outright the possibility that a writer who does not share evangelical presuppositions can contribute any useful theological insight.[105] It should of course be noted that they appear to have misinterpreted Girard yet again by approaching him through Wink, whose understanding of the authority of scripture is certainly more liberal than Girard's.

6.3.5 Evangelical Approaches to Atonement Considered

It is impossible to survey evangelical approaches to atonement without recognising the degree of diversity that evangelicalism now contains, even amongst those who still nominally adhere to a doctrine of penal substitution. Some progressives call for penal substitution to be abandoned, others affirm a form of penal substitution that challenges and undermines many of the conventional assumptions of penal substitution. Some even show signs of having been influenced by Girardian thought. Cautiously-open conservatives affirm a penal substitution theory derived from Stott that, as Heim recognises, contains elements that both legitimise and problematise violence. Stott's ambiguous presentation is increasingly coming under pressure from progressives on the one side and exclusivists on the other. Exclusivists protect themselves against the critical challenge by advocating a modified form of penal substitution, removing the suggestive ambiguity of Stott's approach.

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[105] Even J.I. Packer, who is happy to adopt the terms 'infallible' and 'inerrant', acknowledges that scripture contains different genres of writing which should be understood appropriately, and quotes writers of varied traditions in many of his works. *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, 98.

It is clearly not sufficient to simply see all those who advocate any form of penal substitution as especially prone to scapegoating. Some Girardians themselves clearly adopt models that are closely related. There is substantial common ground between the model of atonement proposed by Schwager and that proposed by Wright, for example. Both propose an objective and substitutionary model that includes key elements of a penal substitutionary model, although they employ a different interpretative framework: for Wright the story of Israel and the return from exile, for Schwager the story of humanity's rejection of God and scapegoating of Jesus. Both see salvation as ultimately consisting of Jesus suffering sacred violence as both representative of and substitute for humanity, though for Schwager this violence is human in origin, whereas for Wright it is divine.

However, it is clear that exclusivist evangelicals like Jeffery et al. are particularly vulnerable to the Girardian critique, despite their attempts to defend themselves against it. I have identified above a tendency, apparent both in Jeffery et al. and to a lesser extent in Stott, towards advocating the imitation of a God of vengeance. Both take pains to explicitly state that God is not to be imitated in his sacred violence. However, the double-bind created by a relationship with a violent God who does and does not want to be imitated creates a destructive tension within their writings. Bluntly, if violent retribution for personal and collective sin is seen as a necessary expression of God's justice and holiness (which both Jeffery et al. and Stott argue), and biblically this is an act of God often performed through human vessels (as Jeffery et al. appear explicitly to argue in their reference to the actions of Phinehas), it is hard to

sustain an argument that the Christian believer would never be called to exercise it. Indeed, in such a context, the disavowal of human vengeance appears to be little more than an instruction that the Christian believer should not undertake vengeance on their own behalf but only when they do so for a greater good.

In fact, there are signs that those holding to this form of penal substitution recognise some instances in which the Christian is called to exercise sacred violence on God's behalf. Heim's analysis, that penal substitution allows on the divine level what it disallows on the human level, appears to have been overly optimistic in this respect. Penal substitution as presented in some evangelical writings actually holds open the possibility that the sacred violence displayed at the divine level might legitimate sacred violence at a human level.

Stott explicitly argues this to be the case in his discussion of the authority of the state in the light of the cross. He rejects any idea that the representative of the state may punish evil because a church/state distinction or private/public distinction mandates a different set of ethics, and instead argues that 'in the light of the cross, Christians cannot come to terms with any attitude to evil which either bypasses its punishment in an attempt to overcome it, or punishes it without seeking to overcome it.'[106] His argument is that the cross, which is the example for Christian life and ethics par excellence, mandates the punishment of evil alongside (and never obviated by) the need to redeem the evil-doer. Jeffery et al. by contrast seem so oblivious to the issue that when they seek to answer the charge that penal substitution can legitimate sacred violence they

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[106] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 309.

consider citing Romans 12:17-19 (the very passage Stott draws his above position from) to settle the question.[107] It should be noted by contrast that Stott is sufficiently aware of the potential difficulties here that he takes the time to discuss the legitimacy of civil disobedience to an abusive state in the context of affirming the state's God-given authority as an agent of sacred violence.[108]

It seems hard to deny that the form of penal substitution held by a majority of evangelicals necessitates that divine sacred violence be seen as righteous and necessary, and that it contains at least an implicit legitimation of human sacred violence. In Stott's discussion mercy may still triumph, but the justice it triumphs over is equally divine and he offers little guidance as to when love should be allowed to triumph over justice on a human level. In Jeffery et al. justice expressed in sacred violence is held to be perfectly compatible with and indeed an expression of God's loving mercy, so that God's love is demonstrated in and through his sacred violence. Although none of this constitutes an explicit legitimation of the use of sacred violence by church leaders, it certainly nurtures a spirituality within which sacred violence cannot easily be recognised as sin.

All the above suggests that the first broad area of Girardian critique of penal substitution has some truth to it. The second broad area of Girardian critique, expressed in Alison's concern that penal substitution distorts the gospel, appears to be undeniably true as a tendency in some evangelical approaches. The absence of any discussion of the resurrection in relation to salvation in evangelical writings is apparent. The resurrection is engaged with

[107] Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 321-3.
[108] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 305-9.

largely as an apologetic problem, as in the Alpha course, rather than as an integral part of salvation.[109] The degree to which Stott's understanding of the atonement can be best expressed as God's resolution of a problem arising within his own nature has already been noted. Penal substitution as expounded by Stott and Jeffery et al. can seem at times to have the character of a logic puzzle rather than a description of the experience of redemption. A problem abstracted from lived experience (the offence that sin causes to God's majesty) is mooted to be irresolvable except by a means abstracted from lived experience (Christ's historical death on the cross). However, this critique could appear a little forced: a degree of abstraction seems unavoidable if redemption is to speak to wider issues than personal sin, as both evangelicals and Girardians insist that it should. The proposed alternatives offered by different Girardian critics all exhibit some degree of abstraction from lived experience. Schwager speaks of the death of Christ as an expression of humanity's unconscious rejection of God. Heim describes the atonement as representing divine forgiveness for all humanity's sin. Wink sees the atonement as taking the form of a victory over supernatural Powers humanity is barely conscious of. The need to understand the atonement as having universal significance drives theologians of any tradition to a degree of abstraction.

More concerning than the simple fact of abstraction, however, is the suggestion, also found in Alison, that this results in the experiences of forgiveness and love and mercy and acceptance becoming abstracted from the real relationships in which evangelicals find themselves. Thus the actual people

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[109] Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 36-41.

who evangelicals find themselves drawn into scapegoating are not identified as those to whom forgiveness, love, mercy and acceptance should be shown, and the broken-heartedness that is the basis of all genuine love and forgiveness is avoided. This aspect of the charge (which is the aspect that concerns this study more directly) appears to be rather less well-founded. As I have examined in chapter 4 above, evangelicalism has a strong holiness tradition derived from Calvinist theology (and therefore built upon a penal substitutionary model of the atonement) that emphasises a careful attentiveness to living a holy life as part of sanctification. It may be argued that the degree to which this tradition has abstracted sanctification from resurrection life has distorted it by robbing it of the hope and joy that should characterise it, leaving it in some cases with a rather dour and penitential tone, but this is a far lesser criticism. A work like Stott's *The Cross of Christ*, that is simultaneously a work of evangelical atonement theology and a work of evangelical spirituality, shows clearly the extent to which a penal substitutionary understanding, far from encouraging abstraction from lived experience, can draw attention to the need for forgiveness and repentance in real relationships. To illustrate this, it is necessary to turn the question around, and examine the ways in which evangelicalism's Calvinist spirituality, nurtured by the doctrine of penal substitution, provides resources for resisting sacred violence.

6.4 Towards an Unafraid Evangelicalism

As Heim recognises, penal substitution, as well as containing distortions of the gospel that may legitimise (and in the past has legitimised) sacred violence, also contains elements that subvert and undermine sacred violence. I

have examined the ways in which Girardian critics have rightly drawn attention to some of its tendencies towards legitimising sacred violence. I turn now to examine the resources it contains to enable sacred violence to be challenged and resisted. If penal substitution is approached simply as an abstract doctrine believed by evangelicals, its effect on evangelicals and evangelical culture is not truly appreciated. The true significance of penal substitution is the character it lends to evangelical spirituality. Penal substitution is central to evangelical worship and devotion. It shapes the way evangelicals understand the Christian life, and it is in this context that its potential to subvert and undermine sacred violence comes to the fore.

The first way in which penal substitution provides resources to nurture resistance to sacred violence is by encouraging the believer to stand at the foot of the cross, in a place where pretension and defensiveness must be cast aside and they must acknowledge their own brokenness and complicity in acts of sacred violence. In attempting himself to nurture resistance to sacred violence, James Alison speaks of the need to find a place from which to articulate a Catholic theology that grapples honestly with the issues of sacred violence directed against gays without giving in to the temptation to adopt a stance that simply perpetuates them (by assuming the position of the victim or heroic outsider). He speaks of this as a space where a heart may come close to breaking:

> The space which allows us close to a cracking of heart is the space where we learn to receive our perspective, so as from there to be able to learn to speak well of, and to imitate, God. The perspective will be, in the case of each one of us, rather different. For catholicity doesn't mean a unity of perspective from which we start, but the discovery and

construction of a real and surprising fraternity which begins with overcoming the tendency to forge from our own perspective a sacred which excludes.[110]

Clearly the issues for evangelicals are slightly different, but something close to what Alison describes must be a prerequisite for any process of grappling with issues of sacred violence. Evangelicals require a space from where it is possible to imagine an unafraid evangelicalism that does not seek to exclude the monstrous other. It must be a space where the reality of sacred violence within evangelicalism can be faced up to, without enabling an easy distancing from either the victims of the violence or 'those evangelicals' who are responsible for it. It is an uncomfortable space in which common ground can be found between victim and oppressor, and between the mimetic rivals within evangelicalism. My suggestion is that in evangelical spirituality, the foot of the cross (as approached through the doctrine of penal substitution) is such a place.

Pete Ward discusses the theme of the cross in worship in his exploration of charismatic worship. His exploration of this theme here deliberately echoes the lyrics of a number of songs from the popular *Survivor Songbook* of 2001:

> … So worship is seen as a moment where, once again, we look upon this sacrificial gift of God. To look in this way upon the cross makes us in turn 'broken inside'. Brokenness in worship is often spoken of as coming to the foot of the cross. Christ's pouring out inspires a response of sacrifice so once again we pour out our lives… Waiting at the cross is a moment of self-examination and exposure, surrendering all. It is the realisation of the inadequacy of the believer that makes for the brokenness at the cross. The sacrifice of Christ leads to an understanding of the weight and extent of human sin.[111]

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[110] Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment*, 37.
[111] Ward, *Selling Worship*, 157-8.

The sort of spirituality nurtured by a penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement is, paradoxically, one centred on the sort of vulnerability and acknowledgement of complicity in sin that Alison feared it prevented. Penal substitution nurtures a spirituality uniquely qualified to do this because of the stress it places on the believer's culpability. Lest this be thought of as a comparatively recent or purely charismatic emphasis, it should be noted that it is present in some of the classic hymns of the evangelical tradition: such as those of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Wesley's *And Can It Be*, a hymn soaked in a penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, includes the wondering enquiry: 'Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued?'[112] This is the sense, stressed by Stott, that the cross teaches the believer that Christ died because of them before it teaches that he died for them.

In chapter 4 I examined the way in which the Calvinist tradition of holiness, always central to evangelicalism, stresses the experience of struggle with sin. Stott, writing in this tradition in his *The Cross of Christ*, explores the implications of penal substitution for the life of the believer. He stresses the way in which the cross affirms both the believer's fallenness and their blessedness, their need for salvation, and their worth as one who has received it and is being saved. This tension, inherent in evangelical anthropology, necessitates the development of a careful practice of discernment and self examination, that that which is of God should be affirmed and that which is not should be denied.[113] Calvinist spirituality stresses this need for constant self-watchfulness, an

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[112] Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be" in Methodist Conference Office, *The Methodist Hymn Book* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1933), 143.
[113] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 278-85.

awareness that the believer remains a sinner, and prone to self-deception, an emphasis for which evangelicals are frequently criticised as nurturing a profoundly negative image of humanity. However, if we are concerned to identify resources that might help a community to identify and resist the deceptions of mimetic violence, then such a profoundly self-critical spirituality surely constitutes such a resource.

Secondly, an unafraid evangelicalism that nurtures resistance to sacred violence must be marked by a commitment to sacrificial service that rejects power and violence, imitating Christ in the words of Philippians 2: 6-11. My analysis of Stott and Jeffery et al. has shown an implicit tension in many evangelical understandings of penal substitution in regard to the divine action in the atonement viewed as presenting a model to the believer: the obedience of the crucified Christ or the sacred violence of the righteous judge. In his discussion of the sort of spirituality the cross inspires, Stott argues that following the crucified Christ must affect the way in which power is used, and therefore also affects approaches to violence. Stott's discussion of sacrificial service as a necessary characteristic of Christian leaders (because it reflects the priority of Christ, who put far more emphasis upon it than on any concern with church discipline) goes some way towards undercutting his earlier insistence on the importance of that discipline within the church (which as we noted he also justified by reference to penal substitution). The fault-line within Stott's thought in regard to the imitation of the god of sacred violence is clearly visible here, but to his credit whenever he appears aware of it, Stott allows mercy to once again triumph over judgement. Girard, discussing the difficulties of moving

from violent reciprocity to peaceful relationship, makes the point that it is not enough to seek to identify with and work for the good of the other. Identifying with the other inevitably degenerates into a negative mimesis – the proximity to the other creates rivalry – unless the identification with the other can be done in a way that is self-effacing, that points away from the self to Christ. He argues for an imitation of the Christ who always sought to point away from himself to the Father: 'To imitate Christ is to refuse to impose oneself as a model and to always efface oneself before others. To imitate Christ is to do everything to avoid being imitated.'[114] The evangelical imperative to humble service, flowing from contemplation of the cross, establishes such an approach. For Stott it is clear that in the context of power within the church, it is the crucified Christ who is to be the model, not the God of sacred violence:

> If Christian pastors adhered more closely to the Christ who was crucified in weakness, and were prepared to accept the humiliations which weakness brings, rather than insisting on wielding power, there would be much less discord and much more harmony in the church.[115]

Reflection on the Jeffrey John affair and the divisions around Steve Chalke's *The Lost Message of Jesus* suggests that this model of weak and humiliated leaders is not always clearly observable within evangelicalism. Rather than being content to identify with a humiliated, crucified Christ, some evangelical leaders have seemed more inclined to see themselves as the instruments of the God of sacred violence, condemning compromise and sin, and seeking to wield power to in an attempt to ensure doctrinal and moral purity by excluding scapegoats. However, Stott's discussion suggests that penal substitution does not have to promote this

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[114] *BE*, 122.
[115] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 290.

model. Indeed, for Stott, it is the alternate model of the crucified Christ who is commended to evangelical leaders by the doctrine of penal substitution.

Finally, an unafraid evangelicalism must demonstrate the costly identification with others that characterised the incarnation, leading Christ to die in their place on the cross. Such a commitment to mission, flowing from a cross-centred devotion, is the strongest possible challenge to the distorted holiness teaching I identified in chapter 4. As well as having implications for the use of power by Christian leaders, Stott sees penal substitution having a further necessary outworking in the life of all believers: mission based in costly identification with the needy, following the pattern of the incarnation.

> Christians and non-Christians are often widely separated from one another by social sub-cultures and lifestyles as well as by different values, beliefs and moral standards. Only an incarnation can span these divides, for an incarnation means entering other people's worlds, their thought-world, and the worlds of their alienation, loneliness and pain. Moreover, the incarnation led to the cross. Jesus first took our flesh, then bore our sin. This was a depth of penetration into our world in order to reach us, in comparison with which our little attempts to reach people seem amateur and shallow. The cross calls us to a much more radical and costly kind of evangelism than most churches have begun to consider, let alone experience.[116]

Stott's words here are strikingly evocative of Schwager's understanding of the atonement as following the pattern of the atonement: on the cross, Christ identified himself even with those who reject God, so that even from the depths of alienation from God a way back to him could be found. It is also striking how much the form of evangelism outlined by Stott here describes the approach followed by Andrew Marin in his radical and costly identification with the gay

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[116] Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 291.

community. The sort of spirituality being nurtured here, unlike the exclusivist tradition of concern with purity or distinctiveness from the world, is one that undercuts attempts at scapegoating. It resists the creation of a *pharmakos* or a monstrous other by attempting to seek out the sameness in the other without fear, in imitation of a Christ whose life and death were marked by suffering alongside and finally in the place of others. Penal substitution is shown by Stott to be the basis for a spirituality and an approach to mission that militates against concerns with ecclesial purity, and seeks to resist scapegoating by a costly incarnational identification with those who do not share evangelical beliefs, values and moral standards.

A careful examination of Stott's *The Cross of Christ* demonstrates the ways in which an evangelical spirituality nurtured by penal substitution actually contains positive resources for resisting sacred violence. This is seen in three outworkings of penal substitution in the life of the believer: a sense of brokenness and the need to develop self-discernment, a commitment to sacrificial service that rejects power, and a mission of incarnational engagement with the world. Although penal substitution can provide legitimation for sacred violence, it can also undermine it. This ambiguity in evangelical tradition, so apparent in Stott, suggests that the doctrine of penal substitution may both be a source of the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality and part of the solution to it.

6.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by discussing the Girardian critiques of penal substitution offered by Alison and Wink, noting that their argument, which in

many ways mirrors my own, suggests that the evangelical spirituality which I explored in chapter 4 has been fatally distorted to create a sacrificial form of Christianity. This would suggest that my argument in this thesis is not far-reaching enough, that the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality is not simply the result of an otherwise healthy spiritual tradition turning to sacred violence under the pressure of a crisis of undiferentiation. Rather, evangelical spirituality and theology as represented by penal substitution predisposes evangelicals towards the sacred violence apparent in their interactions with gays.

My analysis suggests that these critiques of evangelicalism are mistaken in their analysis that penal substitution creates sacrificial Christianity. Those strands of evangelicalism that appear most susceptible to scapegoating are not primarily marked out from other strands by their atonement theology. There is little difference between exclusivist, cautiously-open conservative and progressive approaches (except for those that have been explicitly influenced by Girardian thought), especially in regard to those areas most likely to encourage scapegoating.[117] Although penal substitution can provide an implicit justification for sacred violence rooted in a belief in the rightness of divine sacred violence and its suitability as a model for the believer, this is explicitly denied in all traditions and its clearest expression is comparatively late in our period. In addition, as Heim argues, penal substitution theoretically and historically contains resources within itself to undermine and critique sacrificial

[117] Chalke remains committed to penal substitution. Wright, Stott and Jeffery et al. all assert that in the cross Christ chose to suffer sacred violence from a loving God in the place of humanity (even if Wright denies that this violence was personally directed at Christ by God.)

Christianity. By contrast, Christus Victor approaches (like that advocated by Wink) and understandings of redemption that move away from the centrality of the cross have historically been associated with some of the clearest examples of sacrificial Christianity.

The fact that resources for resisting sacred violence are contained within evangelical tradition not only acts to counter Alison and Wink's critique. It also constitutes a key response to the alternative explanations of the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality explored in chapter 5. I highlighted in that chapter that homophobia and fundamentalism were compromised as explanations by being caught up in mimetic critique of evangelicalism. This was demonstrated by their inability to see evangelicalism as ultimately redeemable. Further violence was required for salvation to occur – evangelicals as evangelicals could not be allowed to survive. My analysis seeks to demonstrate, by contrast, that evangelicalism already contains the resources it needs to resist sacred violence. What is required is a self-critical renewal of its own tradition. I believe that this reflects Girardian insight – that redemption must be good news for both oppressor and oppressed.

In chapter 1, I discussed the critique of Girard's theory offered by von Balthasar, which suggested that Girard's understanding of the nature of God was deficient, and that this became particularly obvious in regard to atonement. Von Balthasar's argument is that Girard's understanding of the cross focuses too much on the human aspects of what occurred, and appears to rule out any possibility that what occurred was intended by God, who is effectively presented as powerless and uninvolved. For von Balthasar, this disregards both

scripture and tradition, which insist that Christ's death was a submission to the will of the Father. As I noted then, a similar tension exists between Girardian and evangelical approaches to atonement. Evangelicals characteristically insist that in some sense Jesus' suffering and death was the Father's intention (even if like Wright they assert that it was an impersonal by-product of the Father's desire to bless.) Girardians characteristically deny that the Father intended Jesus to suffer and die (even Schwager, whose understanding of atonement is objective and substitutionary sees Jesus' death as expressing human not divine intent.) For Girardians Christ's death is tragic, for evangelicals it is triumphant, and Girardian disquiet about triumphant appropriation of an act of sacred violence underlies the critique of Alison and Wink. My analysis of evangelical writings on atonement suggests that this Girardian critique may be overstated, however it also suggests that von Balthasar's argument may be equally overstated. There is considerable common ground between Stott, Wright, and Schwager. Specifically, all three stress the obedience of the Son to the mission of the Father, which all three prefer to characterise in terms of love rather than justice. This suggests that despite disagreement over divine intent in the death of Christ, all three share a common commitment to a Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God. Despite von Balthasar's insistence, Girardian approaches do not appear to necessitate a weak doctrine of the Trinity.

Conclusion

> Everyone believes they are a persecuted minority. And this is not a situation that encourages easy and honest communication. It is a situation that cries out for scapegoats.
>
> – Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, addressing General Synod following the Jeffrey John Affair.[1]

A Summary of the Argument

I have sought to provide an explanation for the problem of English evangelicals and homosexuality. As an English evangelical myself, I had become deeply unsatisfied by the analysis commonly offered by evangelicals committed to the consensus position, which either dismissed the reality of evangelical eruptions of violence, or saw them as ultimately unconnected to deeper problems within evangelical spirituality. I had also been unconvinced by liberal critiques of evangelical homophobia and fundamentalism, which were often thinly-veiled attempts to demonise evangelicals. I have argued that either reaction is profoundly mistaken. In fact, homosexuality is simply the presenting issue for a crisis of undifferentiation that has developed around the question of evangelical identity, and which has had a profoundly distorting effect on evangelical spirituality. My research has supported Warner's analysis of contemporary English evangelicalism, suggesting that it can be categorized into three broad traditions: progressives and exclusivists, who are divided over issues of doctrine and are moving in opposing directions, and a central group of cautiously-open conservatives caught between the two and seeking to find unity

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[1] Rowan Williams, 'General Synod: Presidential Address', *Church Times* (*CT*), April 18, 2003, 15.

in an increasingly hollow myth of evangelical success.[2] Drawing on the literature surveys presented in chapters 3 and 4, I have concluded that English evangelicalism has become consumed by contagious violence through its fears for its future. Different traditions of evangelicalism have become caught up in a cycle of mimetic rivalry with each other, a rivalry that has become scandalised and led to eruptions of sacred violence. Homosexuality has become a central focus for the acting out and exorcising of these fears, resulting in gays and those identified as 'liberal' on the issue of homosexuality being marked out as *pharmakoi*, potential scapegoats who can be fixed upon as sacrifices upon whom the community can vent its violence as a means of attempting to establish the unity it longs for. Ultimately, however, these sacrifices will inevitably be unsuccessful. Unity can no longer be forged through a scapegoat because of Christ's exposure of the single victim mechanism. Instead, such eruptions of sacred violence merely provoke retaliation, perpetuating the cycle of violence. The scandal that has engulfed English evangelicalism has had a distorting effect on evangelical spirituality, thus harming not only those scapegoats against whom it attempts to direct sacred violence, but also harming evangelicals, turning them against each other. Finally, the scandal of evangelicalism and homosexuality is in the process of being opportunistically swallowed up by a larger, global scandal also centred on homosexuality, in which the Anglican communion has become the central battleground. Increasingly, English evangelicals are positioning themselves not in relation to their internal crisis, but a larger global crisis of mimetic rivalry between a liberal West and a conservative South.

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[2] Warner, *Reinventing*.

My study of evangelicalism within its recent historical context in chapter 2 led me to conclude that there is widespread anxiety within contemporary English evangelicalism that the very foundations of evangelical identity are disintegrating. The unity of the conservative evangelical hegemony, which found triumphant expression in Keele, has given way to a destructive rivalry between progressives and exclusivists. Meanwhile, the dwindling unity created by the entrepreneurial myth of evangelical success has created its own distorting pressures on charismatic spirituality. This pattern can be discerned in other areas of contemporary debate besides homosexuality, and atonement theology has become another key battleground with its own scapegoats, albeit one that is not so visible to those outside of evangelicalism. Evangelicals have become violent because they are afraid, terrified of the mimetic monsters they see around them.

My study of evangelical spirituality in chapter 4 demonstrated that exclusivists and progressives are caught in mimetic rivalry over the legacy of Keele. Both are in some senses heirs to the modernist evangelicalism Keele created, yet both have moved beyond its legacy. In particular, both have in their own way rejected Keele's distinctive ecclesiology: its insistence that despite the sinfulness and fallibility of the church evangelicals must have a wholehearted commitment to engagement with their historic mixed denominations. Both exclusivists and progressives are harshly critical of the church and each other as groups within it, and are developing semi-detached enclaves only nominally within its borders.

Exclusivists see progressives chasing after innumerable non-evangelical influences and ideas into a liberal emergent wilderness, losing all sense of coherence as a party, and drifting steadily further away from their evangelical core identity, whilst attempting to stretch that identity to include their ramblings. In these 'ersatz evangelicals', exclusivists see the legacy of Keele unravelling the hegemony it created, just as evangelicals are becoming comparatively more significant within English religious life. Progressives see exclusivists as withdrawing from the legacy of Keele, critically undermining the principles of openness and engagement it stood for, whilst seeking ever narrower definitions of evangelicalism, steadily building barriers to evangelical unity and mission with the wider world, manning the barricades and preparing for a battle with other evangelicals they see as liberals.

Cautiously-open conservatives find themselves caught in a swiftly-shrinking middle ground between the two, increasingly pressured by one side or the other to throw their weight behind them and declare the other side to be in the wrong. Charismatic entrepreneurials, who make up the majority of this grouping, are also struggling with the failure of the myth of evangelical success. Products of a remarkably successful modernist form of evangelicalism, they nurtured a myth of success that for a time created a unity that could no longer be found within doctrine. Success became linked to holiness, so that the blessing of God denoted the presence of both and the absence of success suggested demonic oppression. As the myth of success failed to become reality, the entrepreneurials had a purity code to turn to to enable them to identify *pharmakoi*. The tension between the purity code (militating withdrawal from

the world) and the myth of success (militating confident engagement with the world) created a large group of potential scapegoats, but seemed to have a particular focus on those engaged in (or open to temptation by) sexual sin. As the cautiously-open conservatives still hold to the consensus position, gays and those who might associate themselves with them would be prominent *pharmakoi*.

For all of the tribes of evangelicalism, the present conflict is something they would much rather avoid. Violence erupts, not because those being violent relish the opportunity to do so (though there would inevitably be a sense of relief at being able to take some action against the formless, faceless forces they fear), but because they feel they have no other option. For all of them the urge towards contagious violence is an all-consuming fear that the conflict, if it continues as it has, will unravel their own identity as evangelicals.

A Girardian Analysis

My intent throughout this thesis has been to use the work of René Girard in order to identify and understand the hidden violence found in some strands of contemporary English evangelicalism and to suggest ways in which that violence can be challenged and changed. In adopting this approach, however, I recognized at the outset that this could be criticized for over-complicating a simple problem. Given my participant observer status, the suspicion might be raised that I was turning to a more complex explanation in order to avoid simpler yet more distasteful ones, namely those of homophobia or fundamentalism. These explanations would suggest the violence reveals an ultimately fatal flaw within evangelicalism itself, whether that be its spiritual

immaturity or its domination by patriarchalism. I believe I have demonstrated that this potential criticism of my approach is baseless, and that neither of these two explanations offer adequate analyses of the problem of English evangelicalism and homosexuality.

The careful study of English evangelical texts on homosexuality I offered in chapter 3 reveals that there is a history to evangelical responses to homosexuality. Despite claims to the contrary by both exclusivists and liberal critics, at the beginning of our period there was no 'consensus position' on homosexuality. Different evangelicals applied a similar interpretation of the same biblical texts in different ways, with some asserting that homosexual sexual expression was always incompatible with Christian discipleship, others asserting that it could be accepted in some situations. Influential early pastoral writings – cited approvingly by the very evangelical leaders who would later establish the consensus position – called for recognition of gay civil rights, repentance of homophobia, and acceptance of gays in stable sexual relationships within churches as the lesser of two evils.[3] There was no sense that this was a first-order issue of gospel faithfulness. At the middle of our period, a consensus had developed in which some of these positions were downplayed, and others outright rejected. By the end of our period, the consensus had fractured, with some evangelicals openly embracing a more liberal position, and others asserting that not only was a more conservative position the true one, it was the position evangelicals had always held, and that departing from it indicated unfaithfulness to the gospel.

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[3] Moss, *Christians and Homosexuality*; Field, *The Homosexual Way*; Atkinson, *Pastoral Ethics in Practice*.

This history poses serious difficulties for most conventional explanations of the problem in terms of homophobia or fundamentalism, because it suggests that significant change has occurred in a very brief timeframe. Both these explanations suggest that the explanation for the problem lie in deep-rooted and long-term deficiencies in evangelicalism, deficiencies that in all likelihood have been part of evangelicalism since its origins. To the extent that they can account for such short-term change they must do so by incorporating additional explanations (like theories that speak of responses to different phases of modernity, or that account for responses to crises within communities) that can account for changes in degrees of homophobia or fundamentalism.[4] To the extent that such qualifications are added to these 'simple' explanations they both become more complex and bear more resemblance to my own Girardian approach. Homophobia as an explanation also has to account for the way in which, as I demonstrated in chapter 4, evangelical responses to homosexuality are logical and reasonable outworkings of much more basic understandings of sin and holiness rather than being examples of irrational prejudice against gays. To the extent that this is recognized, and evangelicalism is therefore critiqued on the basis of being patriarchal or dualistic or puritanical, it must be recognized that homophobia in itself is no longer being offered as an explanation, but rather as a single aspect of a far more significant (and complex) critique. Simply, the critique now takes the form that evangelical spirituality is marked by a serious deficiency (often seen as objectionable on other grounds), which as one of its outworkings manifests homonegativity. Often, such a critique essentially merges with a critique of evangelicalism as fundamentalist and

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[4] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*; Percy, *Engaging*.

spiritually immature, albeit with a greater focus on the human cost of such

beliefs rather than their inherent deficiency.

The most significant criticism I have offered of alternative explanations,

however, is that these critiques themselves have become drawn into a new cycle

of sacred violence, where evangelicals are held to be the ones who by being

reviled and excluded can bring peace and unity. Within the global

liberal/conservative scandal of homosexuality, which is in the process of

consuming the smaller inter-evangelical scandal of homosexuality, accusations

of homophobia and fundamentalism are a central part of the rhetoric of liberals.

In offering them, a critic risks themselves becoming complicit in the cycle of

mimetic violence. Few of those who offer such critiques seem self-aware enough

to offer such reflection on the violent implications of their own rhetoric, but the

most significant result of the co-option of these analyses into a scandalous

dialogue is the comparative lack of concern such critics tend to demonstrate for

saving evangelicals *as evangelicals* from their own violence.[5] Generally, critics

offering these explanations look for evangelicals to either cease to be

evangelical or to cease to exist at all.

In offering a Girardian analysis of English evangelicals I have had to

expand Girard's work – albeit in a way that I believe is substantially in line with

his own insights – in regard to the close inter-relationship of evangelicalism and

modernity. Girard argues that the Church and modernity have both been

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[5] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* and Kirker in Francis (ed.), *Rebuilding Communion*, are commendable exceptions, though it should be noted that Dollimore's self-awareness leads him to nihilistically accept such mimetic violence as inevitable rather than strive to avoid it. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, and Barr, *Escaping Fundamentalism*, are notable examples of those concerned to save evangelicals as evangelicals.

decisively shaped by the gospel (which for Girard focuses around the revelation of the single victim mechanism). Both are also fatally compromised by sacred violence. This insight is, I believe, manifestly true in the case of evangelical tradition, which historians and social scientists have long identified as having an intimate connection with modernity, both helping to form it and in turn being formed by it.[6] This suggests a dialogical relationship between two inter-related cultural movements, as outlined by Tamney, rather than a more oppositional relationship as in Hunter, in which evangelicalism is somehow external to modernity and may attempt to resist it for a time but must inevitably accommodate itself to it.[7] I believe this combining of the insight of Girard with Tamney in this way has enabled a deeper insight into the problem of evangelicals and homosexuality, by refusing simplistic oppositional readings of evangelicalism and modernity and encouraging the recognition of the essential mimetic similarities between evangelical traditions that are all thoroughly modern.

Finding A Way Forward

It has always been my intention in this thesis to suggest some ways in which evangelicalism can free itself from the cycle of contagious violence in which it finds itself. Critiques of English evangelicalism and the problem of homosexuality that suggest no way to save evangelicals *as evangelicals* from their own violence risk becoming complicit in a new cycle of sacred violence – asserting in effect that the marginalized must become like us or must cease to

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[6] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.
[7] Tamney, *Resilience of Conservative Religion*; Hunter, *Evangelicalism*.

be is the rhetoric of the crowd just before the first stone is thrown. As I suggest

in chapter 6, where Girardian critics have appeared to offer no such hope, they

too stray dangerously close to placing themselves over against the victim.[8] It is

rhetoric that blinds us to our own monstrousness and complicity in violence by

placing all the blame on the other. Understanding the problem as one produced

by mimetic violence within evangelicalism itself underscores the necessity of

this. If Girard is correct, and the progress of the gospel renders the single victim

mechanism increasingly ineffective, leading society inevitably to the precipice of

either descent into apocalyptic violence or the emergence of the Kingdom, then

English evangelicals are left with a stark choice: either they must find the

narrow way out of their violence or follow the broad path into the destruction

they fear. And inasmuch as it is the presence of the gospel within evangelical

tradition that is rendering the single victim mechanism ineffective as a means of

preventing the dissolution into violence, it is within that same evangelical

tradition that the narrow way to the Kingdom may be found.

As first steps along this narrow way, I note in chapter 6 the ways in

which progressive evangelicals are beginning to engage with Girardian ideas

and the way that the New Perspective on Paul offers possibilities of a less

retributive concept of atonement. I also highlight some key themes in a

traditional evangelical understanding of penal substitution that may provide

resources to enable evangelicals to resist sacred violence. First, the reflection on

complicity in sin and specifically violence that occurs at the foot of the cross;

second, a commitment to sacrificial service that rejects power in taking up the

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[8] As in Wink, *Engaging the Powers*; Alison, *Joy of Being Wrong*, in their rejection of core evangelical beliefs in the atonement.

cross; finally, an incarnational commitment to costly identification with others in mission. All these themes are explicitly presented by Stott, the most widely-influential evangelical of the twentieth century, in his classic exposition of the atonement *The Cross of Christ*. If evangelicals can stay true to the gospel as it is preserved in their own core beliefs, then they may find a way to an unafraid evangelicalism that is free from sacred violence.

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