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Author(s): Leslie J. Francis; Carol Roberts

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Growth or decline in the Church of England during the Decade of Evangelism: did the churchmanship of the bishop matter?

The Revd Canon Professor Leslie J Francis
Professor of Religions and Education, Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit,
University of Warwick, UK

and

The Revd Dr Carol Roberts
Centre for Ministry Studies, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bangor University,
UK

address for correspondence

Leslie J Francis
Professor of Religions and Education
Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit
Institute of Education
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
UK

telephone 024 7652 2539
fax 024 7657 2638
e-mail lesliel.francis@warwick.ac.uk
web site www.warwick.ac.uk/go.wreru/

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ABSTRACT

The Decade of Evangelism occupied the attention of the Church of England throughout the 1990s. The present study employs the statistics routinely published by the Church of England in order to assess two matters: the extent to which these statistics suggest that the 43 individual dioceses finished the decade in a stronger or weaker position than they had entered it, and the extent to which according to these statistics the performance of dioceses led by bishops shaped in the Evangelical tradition differed from the performance of dioceses led by bishops shaped in the Catholic tradition. The data demonstrated that the majority of dioceses were performing less effectively at the end of the decade than at the beginning in terms of a range of membership statistics, and that the rate of decline varied considerably from one diocese to another. The only exception to the trend was provided by the diocese of London which experienced some growth. The data also demonstrated that little depended on the churchmanship of the diocesan bishop in shaping diocesan outcomes on the performance indicators employed in the study.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s were declared by the Churches to be a Decade of Evangelism. Given that a primary intention of evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel through word and action, it might have been reasonable to expect significant evidence of church growth during the decade. All the statistical evidence, however, points to continuing overall church decline throughout the decade (Brierley). Against this background, the aim of the present paper is threefold: to examine the Church of England's response to the Decade of Evangelism both at national and diocesan levels; to examine the extent to which growth or decline during the period may have varied from diocese to diocese; and to test the extent to which churchmanship differences between the dioceses may help to explain diocesan variations. The context for the empirical enquiry is set by reviewing what is already known about the Church of England's response to the Decade of Evangelism; by examining the legacy of the Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical movements for the Church of England today; and by discussing how dioceses may be characterised by churchmanship preferences.

The Decade of Evangelism

The 1988 Lambeth Conference agreed that the closing years of the millennium should be a Decade of Evangelism. There was to be a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of the world. This decision by the Anglican Bishops was echoed in decisions by all the mainline churches in the United Kingdom, together with 'new churches', independent churches and para-church organisations (Warren 1). The evangelistic drive extended throughout the world-wide church, and included not only the Anglican Church but also the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and the majority of Christian denominations (Green 9).

The aim of the churches was to put evangelism firmly on the agenda for the 1990s. Seen by Rowan Williams as a ‘necessary idiocy’, he is quoted as saying that ‘much of Western Christianity has gone to sleep on the job’ and that evangelism ‘is so much the essence of the church that a decade of evangelism is rather like declaring a decade of breathing’ (Warren 1). In this criticism Rowan Williams was pointedly referring to a situation where, for many in the church, ‘evangelism’ had become a dirty word (Green 9); was often the subject of misunderstanding and misconception; and was something with which many church people felt uncomfortable, and for which they felt ill-equipped. Policies on both national and diocesan levels aimed, among other things, to help equip church people for evangelism.

The Church of England’s response to the Decade of Evangelism can be best viewed through three different lenses. The first lens concerns the broader ecumenical initiative in which the Church of England participated, officially or unofficially. Early in the 1990s The Group for Evangelisation of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland agreed to try to limit national initiatives to 1994, 1997, and 2000 (Warren 50). The bi-annual ecumenical Lent course was to be the national initiative for 1994. This was called ‘Have Another Look’. Three additional initiatives also came about independently of the ecumenical Lent course. These initiatives were ‘On Fire!’, developed by a Baptist minister, but which became an ecumenical project; the Pentecostal Churches of Great Britain’s JIM campaign (Jesus in Me); and ‘Minus to Plus’, developed by the Christ for All Nations organisations, which aimed at (but failed) in the distribution of a booklet to every household in the United Kingdom.

Evaluating these ecumenical initiatives, Warren (50-51) drew the following conclusions. ‘Have Another Look’, did not attract a significant number of enquirers although some groups introduced new people to faith and worship in the local church. Warren suggests that the real

success of the ecumenical Lent course lay in the further strengthening of ecumenical links and the increase in confidence of church members in respect of communicating their faith. The 'JIM campaign' had a patchy response; 'Minus to Plus' fell short of expectations, with few independent commentators putting the distribution above 50% of British households, and a response rate of only 20,000. 'On Fire!' also seems to have had limited success, but Warren acknowledges that it was useful in terms of the process it gave for future national initiatives (Warren 51-52).

The second lens concerns the 'Springboard' initiative set up jointly by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York to stimulate and to promote the Decade of Evangelism throughout the Church of England. The work of the Springboard team was multi-faceted. For example, the team provided help to parishes and dioceses in their attempts to organize their lives around the objective of incorporating people into the life and faith of the Christian Church (Jackson, *Hope for the Church* 47). The team visited diocesan missionaries (Warren 19); conducted a study of the growing parishes in the diocese of Durham (Jackson, *Hope for the Church* 50); and commissioned various strands of research, for example further analysis by Christian Research of the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey database and an enquiry into the provision of Alpha courses by the 8,681 churches for which attendance data were available from the 1989 and 1998 Church Censuses (Jackson, *Hope for the Church* 34, 81).

The third lens concerns the different perspectives of the 43 individual dioceses. In many ways, given the nature of devolved authority within the Church of England to the diocesan level, this is the most important of the three lenses. The responses of the individual dioceses encompassed a variety of approaches, among which Warren (14-18) identified thirteen areas.

The first area was strategic planning: for example, the strategy of the diocese of Leicester, *Towards 2001 AD (a way forward for parish and dioceses)*. The second area was episcopal missions: for example, the bishop of Coventry's preaching and teaching mission taken to canals. The third area was episcopal calls to mission: for example, the bishop of Guildford's initiative *Pilgrim's Way*. The fourth area covered other episcopal initiatives: for example, *Go for God*, the initiative of the bishop of Bath and Wells. The fifth area was diocesan mission structures: for example, the Council for Evangelism in the diocese of Peterborough. The sixth area was diocesan mission events: for example, the Church Schools Festivals held at Lincoln Cathedral. The seventh area was a focus on training: for example, 'schools of evangelism' in the diocese of Blackburn. The eighth area covered prayer and spirituality: for example, The Kingdom Prayer Initiative Network (King Pin) of the diocese of Gloucester. The ninth area related to pilgrimage: for example, the March for Jesus events. The tenth area concerned encouraging the work of evangelists: for example, the training programme for local evangelists established in the diocese of Rochester. The eleventh area related to the appointment of mission officers. The twelfth area related to church growth and breaking church growth barriers: for example, the work of the dioceses of Wakefield, York, and Sheffield. The thirteenth area concerned the provision of consultants: for example, the commissioning of twelve advisers in evangelism in the diocese of York.

Churchmanship

The variety of responses among the individual dioceses may, of course, have been entirely random, or they may have reflected the historic tension within the Church of England between two very different theological traditions, both Catholic and Reformed (Francis, Robbins, and Astley; Randall). These differences were sharpened during the first half of the nineteenth century with the emergence of the Oxford Movement (Hylson-Smith, *High*

Churchmanship) and the Evangelical Movement (Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals*). The Oxford Movement is often traced to 1833 when a group of academics and clergymen centred in Oxford, including Newman, Keble and Pusey, published the first of a series of tracts, giving rise to their description as 'Tractarians'. In 1859 the Church Union was founded to promote the Catholic wing of the Church of England. The origins of the Evangelical Movement within the Church of England are both somewhat more diffuse and more widely linked with Evangelicalism across a range of denominations. While the Catholic wing is clearly linked to Oxford, the Evangelical wing of the Church of England is often linked to Charles Simeon and to Cambridge. In 1846 the Evangelical Alliance was founded to ensure that Evangelicalism remained a vital presence in Britain following the rise of Tractarianism (Steer).

With their distinctive theologies, and their distinctive views on worship, spirituality, ecclesiology, ethics, and understanding of society and pastoral activities (Francis and Lankshear, *The comparative strength 5*), it is no surprise that in the 1800s Catholics and Evangelicals saw a need to create their own theological colleges, following the precedent of the College established in Chichester in 1839. In 1854 Bishop Samuel Wilberforce founded the residential Cuddesdon College, on the Catholic seminary model. This influenced the nature of theological colleges for the rest of the nineteenth century. Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (established in 1872) and Ridley Hall, Cambridge (established in 1881) were the first colleges to train in the Evangelical model of churchmanship. Such foundations were the product of private initiative and funding. There was no centralised planning or control by the Church of England. Evangelical Colleges stressed biblical theology, biblical inspiration and authority, personal conversion, justification by grace through faith, the centrality of the preaching ministry, and simplicity in clerical dress. Anglo-Catholic Colleges stressed sacramental theology, sacramental grace, confession, and the centrality of sacramental ministry, richness

in Eucharistic vestments, ritual and ornaments (Francis and Lankshear, *The comparative strength* 5). The survival of these historic seminaries into the twenty-first century may help to perpetuate diversity in the Church of England.

The comparative strengths of the Catholic wing and the Evangelical wing of the Church of England have fluctuated during the twentieth century. Between the First and Second World Wars the Anglo-Catholics came to the fore. In the 1950s Evangelicalism came into the ascendant. The rise of the charismatic movement within the Church of England from the early 1960s (Bax) did not undermine the persisting differences between and the persisting importance of the Catholic and Evangelical wings of the Church of England. In preparation for the 1988 Lambeth Conference studies were commissioned to look at churchmanship within the Church of England. The two volumes *Catholics in Crisis* (Penhale) and *Evangelicals on the Move* (Saward) are particularly useful for the present study in that their titles present a picture of the state of Anglo-Catholicism and the Evangelical tradition in the years leading up to the beginning of the Decade of Evangelism.

Empirical evidence regarding the continuing influence of the Catholic and Evangelical movements on the Church of England has been provided by three sets of studies, focused on churches, clergy and laity. A good example of research with churches is provided by a detailed study of 7,157 churches throughout 24 dioceses and one additional archdeaconry reported by Francis and Lankshear (*In the Evangelical Way, In the Catholic Way*, *The comparative strength* 5-12). In the first two of their three studies, Francis and Lankshear (*In the Evangelical Way, In the Catholic Way*) employed descriptive statistics to profile the distinctive characteristics of Evangelical and Catholic churches. These statistics confirmed that the different theological emphases of these wings of the Church of England were indeed

reflected in different aspects of local practice. For example, the Catholic parishes were conducting a higher proportion of infant baptisms and admitting children to confirmation at a younger age, while the Evangelical parishes were showing greater commitment to Sunday school activities among children and young people. In the third of their three studies, Francis and Lankshear (*The comparative strength 5-22*) employed path analysis to compare the strengths of Evangelical and Catholic Anglican churches across three different geographical environments: rural, urban and suburban. The data demonstrated the comparative strength of Evangelical churches and the comparative weakness of Catholic churches in all three environments.

What is also of particular value from Francis and Lankshear's three studies (*In the Evangelical Way, In the Catholic Way, The comparative strength 5-12*) is that they publish the percentage of Catholic and Evangelical churches and places of worship within each of the twenty-four dioceses according to the self-designation provided on the seven-point semantic differential grid. So, for example, 41% of churches and worship places in the diocese of London claimed Catholic identity, whereas only 12% of churches and worship places in the dioceses of Carlisle and Hereford made the same claim. In the diocese of Chelmsford 31% of churches and worship places claimed Evangelical identity, whereas only 9% of churches and places of worship in the dioceses of St Albans and Worcester made the same claim. These data suggest that there are particular geographical areas in which the influence of one or other of the two churchmanship wings of the Church of England may be particularly strong.

A good example of research concerned with the clergy is provided by the Church Times Survey. In the spring of 2001 two editions of the *Church Times* carried a detailed survey, which received responses from over 9,000 readers. In their analysis of these replies, Francis,

Robbins and Astley compared the responses of the 846 clergy who checked the two values closest to the Catholic end of the seven-point scale with the 366 clergy who checked the two values closest to the Evangelical end of the scale. The analysis was conducted across 15 areas. The data demonstrated significant differences between the two groups within 10 of the 15 areas: in terms of their religious beliefs concerning God, Jesus, and life after death; in terms of their understanding of the bible, their attitude towards other world faiths, and their views about the debate between science and religion; in terms of their personal spirituality, concerning their preferred styles of worship; in terms of their attitude towards the ordination of women, divorced people, and homosexuals; in terms of lay ministry; in terms of church buildings; in terms of ecumenism; in terms of confidence in church growth; in terms of attitudes towards sex and family life; in terms of community concerns; and in terms of faith schools.

A good example of research concerned with laity is provided by Francis and Lankshear (The Catholic Evangelical Consensus 18-19) who undertook a reanalysis of questionnaires from a number of parishes in the diocese of Chester. The data had been gathered in the second half of the 1980s. The four areas considered were personal spirituality, church and clergy, the social gospel, and mission and outreach. In terms of personal spirituality, 33% of Evangelicals and 32% of Catholics claimed to read the Bible every week; that 71% of Evangelicals and 65% of Catholics are likely to adopt a pattern of frequent personal prayer; and that 87% of Evangelicals and 84% of Catholics feel that the experience of prayer is helpful in their lives. In terms of church and clergy, Evangelicals and Catholics selected the same four top priorities and the same bottom two priorities for the church's task today. There was also a clear consensus regarding the role of the clergy in today's church. In terms of the social gospel there was consensus in terms of prioritisation of social issues. In terms of mission and

outreach, both Catholics and Evangelicals saw the Church's priority as working with young people. Where views parted was the second and third priorities, with Evangelicals placing personal witness second and clergy visiting third, and Catholics placing clergy visiting second and personal witness third. This study suggests that churchmanship style impacted only in certain areas for the laity, and that this centred on personal witness and a distinctive Evangelical theology.

Diocesan leadership and churchmanship

According to the research traditions reviewed above, churchmanship is seen to continue to function as a significant predictor of individual differences in local church life, in the worldviews of clergy, and in the beliefs and practices of laity. Currently, however, there is no research tradition concerned with profiling the relationship between churchmanship and the ways in which diocesan bishops understand and express their leadership. Episcopal biographies of an earlier age, however, not only demonstrate the formative influence of churchmanship on shaping Episcopal self-understanding, but also clarify the extent to which such self-understanding impacted the distinctive profile of individual dioceses. Indeed the persistence of such influence well into the middle of the twentieth century is illustrated by biographies of various bishops (see, for example, Lockhart; Gummer; Barnes; Stockwood).

As an Episcopal church, it remains a question of key interest as to whether the churchmanship of diocesan bishops continued to have any consistent and measurable influence on their dioceses into the late twentieth century. Given the way in which each diocese structured its own individual response to the initiative, the Decade of Evangelism may provide a fruitful context in which to test the question. For this abstract question to be translated into a hypothesis amenable to empirical investigation, two conditions need to be met. It is necessary

to posit an objective indicator of the churchmanship of bishops and it is necessary to identify objective indicators of diocesan performance during the Decade of Evangelism.

One recognised way of trying to characterise the background of Anglican clergy (bishops, as well as priests and deacons) in terms of churchmanship is by means of identifying the theological college at which they trained. For example, in a recent research context, Jackson (*The Road to Growth*) employed the tradition of the training college of the incumbent to examine the relationship between churchmanship and aspects of church growth. Drawing on the biographies of bishops published in various editions of *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, it is relatively easy to illustrate the way in which some dioceses have established a pattern appointing bishops trained within a recognised churchmanship tradition. For example, between 1961 and 2000, the diocese of London has been served by five diocesan bishops, who all attended broad-Catholic or Catholic theological colleges. Between 1960 and 1997, the diocese of Truro has been served by five diocesan bishops, who all attended broad-Catholic or Catholic theological colleges. In contrast, between 1944 and 1998 the diocese of Liverpool has been served by four diocesan bishops who all trained at broad-Evangelical or Evangelical theological colleges; and between 1964 and 1997 the diocese of Southwell has been served by five diocesan bishops who all attended broad-Evangelical or Evangelical theological colleges. This suggests that in terms of episcopal leadership and ethos, there are dioceses which tend to favour a Catholic tradition and dioceses which tend to favour an Evangelical tradition.

One recognised way of trying to measure differences between dioceses is to look in terms of performance indicators. Such an approach considers statistics collected by the dioceses and uses these statistics for comparative purposes (see for example Lankshear, *One Church or*

Three, Is the rural church different? 105-117; Roberts, Is the rural church different? 25-39, *The 'Churches of England'*, Rural Anglicanism 25-39; Roberts and Francis; Roberts, Francis, and Hills). The data employed by such studies are routinely collected from parishes for diocesan returns. The Research and Statistics Department of the Church of England at Church House, London, collates the data and currently publishes a selection of statistics annually. Much of these data are published on a diocese-by-diocese basis. Although the data available for comparison purposes at the beginning and at the end of the Decade of Evangelism are relatively restricted, there should, nonetheless, be sufficient markers to provide a reasonable basis for assessment. Following the publication of the report *Statistics: a tool for mission* (McCulloch), a range of new indicators have been developed to capture the vitality of the Church of England in the new millennium. Given that these new indicators are a recent introduction, and that the present study relates to the final decade of the old millennium, it has not been possible to incorporate the breadth of experience reflected in the new indicators, since there are no data from 1990 with which to make comparison.

The data available from the Research and Statistics Department of the Church of England not only enable a broad comparison to be made between dioceses, but also permit some more theologically nuanced hypotheses to be tested. For example, in terms of churchmanship, a different approach to 'belonging' may be hypothesised. For a Catholic approach parish ministry tends to be paramount, while for an Evangelical approach core membership may be more important. It is to be expected that those who put emphasis on the wider 'parish-based' model of ministry would see progress reflected in electoral roll membership, infant baptism candidate numbers, and festival communicants. It is to be expected that those who put emphasis on the 'core membership' model of ministry would see progress in terms of usual

Sunday attendances (that is the regular commitment of members) and in terms of ‘adult’ commitment through baptism.

Research agenda

Against this background the broad research question was shaped into three precise aims. The first aim was to highlight the variation between the forty-three dioceses in terms of growth or decline over the Decade of Evangelism as reflected in key indicators of church vitality, through an examination of the statistical data routinely made available by the Church of England in reports such as *Church Statistics: parochial membership, attendance, and finance statistics January to December 2000* (Church of England). The second aim was to identify dioceses where throughout the Decade of Evangelism the diocesan bishop (or bishops) had trained for ordination either at clearly defined Catholic theological colleges or at clearly defined Evangelical theological colleges. The third aim was to establish the variation between the two groups of dioceses (led by bishops trained at Catholic theological colleges or led by bishops trained at Evangelical theological colleges) in terms of growth or decline over the Decade of Evangelism, as assessed by the key indicators available to this study.

METHOD

A dataset was created from statistics published centrally by the Church of England in the relevant editions of the Church Statistics publications (Church of England, *Church Statistics 1992*, *Church Statistics 1993*, *Membership and finance*, *Membership, attendance and finance*). Statistics for electoral roll membership, Easter day communicant numbers, Christmas eve/day communicant numbers, baptism candidate numbers, confirmation candidate numbers, and usual Sunday attendances were collated, tabulated, and the changes between 1990 and 2000 were calculated. This was to provide an overall view of the dioceses

in terms of performance during the Decade of Evangelism.

In order to establish which dioceses to include in the examination of the churchmanship question, information on diocesan bishops in office between 1990 and 1999, including date of appointment as diocesan bishop, and theological training college were collated for the forty-three dioceses of the Church of England (the Diocese in Europe was excluded from the study).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Decade

Table one presents data for the forty-three dioceses in terms of the changes which had taken place during the Decade of Evangelism regarding electoral roll membership, Easter day

- insert table 1 about here -

communicant numbers, Christmas eve/day communicant numbers, numbers of usual Sunday attendances, baptism candidate numbers, and confirmation candidate numbers. Change was calculated in the following way. Since random fluctuations tend to take place from year to year, figures for the beginning of the decade were calculated as the average for 1990 and 1991, while figures for the end of the decade were calculated on the average for 1999 and 2000. This strategy was designed to reduce the effect of chance fluctuation. Then the average numbers for 1990/1991 were divided by the average numbers for 1999/2000 and the resultant figure presented as a percentage. For example, in the diocese of Bath and Wells the numbers of Christmas eve/day communicants in 1999/2000 were 81% of those in 1990/1991, in other words numbers of Christmas eve/day communicants in 1990/1991 were 19% higher than in 1999/2000.

The data presented in table 1 demonstrate some considerable variation between the dioceses. For example, in terms of usual Sunday attendances during the ten year period some dioceses lost around a quarter of their attendances (Bath and Wells, Carlisle, Durham, and Lincoln), while Canterbury and Coventry remained relatively stable and London grew in numbers. A number of dioceses lost between two and three in every ten Christmas communicants during the ten year period (Blackburn, Canterbury, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Chester, Coventry, Durham, Exeter, Lichfield, Lincoln, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Ripon and Leeds, Rochester, Sheffield, and Southwell), while only London remained relatively stable. The biggest decline during the decade occurred in terms of infant baptism (defined as under one year of age), with 24 dioceses seeing decline between one third and one half (Bath and Wells, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bradford, Bristol, Canterbury, Chester, Chichester, Derby, Durham, Exeter, Hereford, Lichfield, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Peterborough, Ripon and Leeds, Rochester, Sheffield, Truro, Winchester, and York). On this measure only Sodor and Man remained relatively stable.

A somewhat different picture emerges, however, from the statistics concerning electoral rolls and baptisms of children between the ages of one and twelve years. In terms of electoral rolls 17 dioceses remained stable with fluctuations no more than five percent either way (Birmingham, Canterbury, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Chester, Chichester, Guildford, Hereford, Manchester, Oxford, Portsmouth, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Salisbury, Sheffield, Southwark, Wakefield, and Winchester). In terms of baptisms of children between the ages of one and twelve years no diocese saw significant decline and 20 saw growth by one-fifth or more (Blackburn, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Chester, Coventry, Derby, Durham, Guildford, Hereford, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Salisbury, Sheffield, Sodor and Man, Southwark, Southwell, Wakefield, Worcester, and York). In real terms, nonetheless, the number of

baptisms among this age group remains relatively small.

The statistics on baptisms of individuals over the age of twelve years show wide variations among the dioceses. While a decline of at least one-fifth was experienced by six dioceses (Blackburn, Bradford, Carlisle, Chester, Oxford, and Peterborough), a growth by at least one-fifth was experienced by ten dioceses (Coventry, Derby, Ely, Lincoln, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Sheffield, Sodor and Man, Truro, and Worcester).

Churchmanship of bishops

Two dioceses were discounted from the following analysis in view of their distinctive political role within the Church of England (Canterbury and York) and two other dioceses were discounted in view of their distinctive divisions into episcopal areas managed by suffragan bishops (London and Southwark). Sodor and Man was also discounted in view of its small size. For the remaining dioceses the profile was drawn of the diocesan bishops in office between 1990 and 1999. On this basis three dioceses were identified as having been throughout the decade under leadership of bishops trained in Evangelical theological colleges and four dioceses were identified as having been throughout the decade under the leadership of bishops trained in Catholic theological colleges.

The three Evangelical dioceses were Derby, Liverpool and Southwell. Bishop Peter Spencer Davies (Tyndale Hall) was appointed to Derby in 1988 and was succeeded by Bishop Jonathan Sansbury Bailey (Ridley Hall) in 1995. Bishop David Sheppard (Ridley Hall) was appointed to Liverpool in 1975 and was succeeded by Bishop James Stuart Jones (Wycliffe Hall) in 1998. Bishop Patrick Burnet Harris (Clifton Theological College) was appointed to Southwell in 1988 and was not succeeded by Bishop George Henry Cassidy (Oak Hill) until

the decade was almost over in 1999. The four Catholic dioceses were Blackburn, Chichester, Leicester and Truro. Bishop David Alan Chesters (St Stephen's House) was appointed to Blackburn in 1989 and remained in post throughout the following decade. Bishop Eric Waldron Kemp (St Stephen's House) was appointed to Chichester in 1974 and remained in post throughout the Decade of Evangelism. Bishop Tom Butler (Mirfield) was appointed to Leicester in 1991 and was not succeeded by Bishop Timothy John Stephens (Ripon College Cuddesdon) until the decade was almost over in 1999. Bishop Michael Thomas Ball (Community of the Glorious Ascension) was appointed to Truro in 1990 and was succeeded by Bishop William Ind (Mirfield) in 1997.

Table 2 presents and compares the aggregated figures for the four dioceses led by Catholic

- insert table 2 about here -

bishops and for the three dioceses led by Evangelical bishops. The major conclusion is that the differences between the performances of the two sets of dioceses on the available indicators are trivial. Over the decade: usual Sunday attendances fell by 16% in Evangelical dioceses and by 15% in Catholic dioceses; Easter communicants fell by 17% in Evangelical dioceses and by 15% in Catholic dioceses; electoral roll numbers fell by 10% in Evangelical dioceses and by 11% in Catholic dioceses; infant baptism candidates fell by 36% in Evangelical dioceses and by 35% in Catholic dioceses; and baptisms of children between one and twelve years of age grew by 21% in Evangelical dioceses and by 17% in Catholic dioceses. Slightly greater differences emerge in respect of Christmas eve/day communicants, other baptisms and confirmations in ways consistent with theological emphases of the two wings of the Anglican Communion, but these differences were too small to offer real strategic insight into the future development of the Church of England.

In terms of Christmas eve/day communicants, the fall in Evangelical-led dioceses was slightly greater (22% compared with 18%). This finding is consistent with the view that Evangelical churches press for a greater level of personal conversion and commitment among core members and so may appear somewhat less accessible to those Anglicans who wish to express their churchgoing only at major festivals. The tendency may be for Catholic churches to give greater emphasis to being accessible to the wider local community or parish and to give less emphasis to the gathered church. It may, therefore, be somewhat easier for ‘fringe members’ to cross the threshold into Catholic churches at the major festivals. This finding is also consistent with the view that the range of statistics collected and published by the Church of England used in the present analysis may discriminate unfavourably against Evangelical churches. By publishing only communicant figures and not overall attendances, such data make invisible the non-communicants who attend communion services at Christmas and the people who attend non-eucharistic services at Christmas. It is Evangelical churches who may be more likely than Catholic churches to provide non-eucharistic services on Christmas day.

Published statistics for the year 2000 onwards include attendances figures for Easter day and for Christmas eve/day attendances and so future studies of church statistics may be less discriminatory against Evangelical churches. What are not published, however, are the other services, such as Christingle, which occur in the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season and which may attract numbers of people on the margins of church life. In this sense the picture available for the Church of England remains incomplete.

In terms of baptisms of individuals over the age of twelve years, there was a rise in Evangelical dioceses of 14%, compared with a decline in Catholic dioceses of 5%. This finding is consistent with the view that Evangelical churches may be keen to press for

conversion and commitment to faith, and the growth in baptisms of individuals over the age of twelve years may reflect such an emphasis. This interpretation, however, needs to be qualified by three caveats. First, the growth in baptisms on which this percentage is based is simply an increase of 70 candidates across the three Evangelical-led dioceses (that is an average of 23 per diocese) and a decrease of 40 across the four Catholic-led dioceses (an average of 10 per diocese). Second, when the three categories of infant baptism, baptisms of individuals over the age of twelve years, and other baptisms are combined into ‘total baptisms’, there is no difference between the two groups of dioceses (26% less in both cases). Third, these calculations have been based on published data rounded during some years to the nearest hundred. Such rounding can cause considerable distortion to data dealing with such small absolute numbers.

In terms of confirmations, the fall in Evangelical-led dioceses was slightly greater than in Catholic-led dioceses (37% compared with 31%). This finding is consistent with the view that Catholic churches prefer to confirm children at a younger age in order to admit them to communion. Catholic churches are more likely to have confirmed their young people before they reach the age when they decide to leave church. By preferring to delay confirmation to function more as a rite of mature commitment, Evangelical churches are already likely to be working with a reduced pool of likely candidates.

Table 2 also publishes changes in the population served by the two groups of dioceses over the Decade of Evangelism, in order to test whether the forgoing simple comparison of performance indicators across the two groups of dioceses has been legitimate, or whether differences in performance might also reflect different trends in the population growth or decline of the dioceses. These data demonstrate that the population growth was comparable

in the two groups of dioceses: 1% in the Evangelical-led dioceses and 5% in the Catholic-led dioceses.

CONCLUSION

The present paper set out to examine the extent to which insights into the outcome of the Decade of Evangelism could be generated by re-analysis of the statistics routinely published by the Church of England. The statistics were interpreted as providing a range of ‘performance indicators’ according to which individual dioceses could be assessed. Comparisons were offered between the levels of performance revealed by these indicators at the beginning of the Decade of Evangelism and at the end of the Decade. Three main conclusions emerge from these analyses.

First, it is clear that, in terms of the range of performance indicators used, most dioceses in the Church of England completed the Decade of Evangelism in a significantly weaker condition than they entered the Decade. This is probably not entirely good news for the Church of England and it may, overall, be difficult to herald the Decade of Evangelism as a resounding success. The one diocese clearly isolated by the statistical data as going against the trend is London. Further research is needed to understand and to interpret this remarkable difference. Not to invest in learning from apparent areas of growth could be negligent.

Second, the attempt to identify two distinct sets of dioceses (one led by bishops trained in the Catholic tradition and one led by bishops trained in the Evangelical tradition) has suggested little support for the thesis that the churchmanship of the diocesan bishops greatly affected the way in which their dioceses performed during the Decade of Evangelism. This finding needs to be interpreted against other recent research in the contemporary relevance of

churchmanship for the Church of England. Three studies based on individual churches published by Francis and Lankshear (*In the Evangelical Way, In the Catholic Way*, The comparative strength 5-22) demonstrated two points: that Evangelical churches and Catholic churches perform differently on a range of indicators; and that Evangelical churches and Catholic churches are distributed differently across the dioceses of the Church of England. There is evidence, therefore, that churchmanship still matters in practical fields like church growth and church decline. What the present study adds to the research-based evidence is that the churchmanship of diocesan bishops is by no means as important to local church life as the churchmanship of the local church and the churchmanship of the local vicar. In the way in which the Church of England currently functions, bishops may not seem to matter a great deal.

Third, the present analyses have also highlighted the limitations with the published statistics available for modelling performance indicators across the Church of England. It is for this reason that a major independent survey was undertaken by David W. Lankshear and Leslie J. Francis in the mid 1980s, throughout about half of the dioceses of the Church of England, and from which a number of focused analyses were published, including studies concerned with the relationship between small churches and children's ministry (Francis and Lankshear, *Small churches* 15-19), the liturgical work of rural clergy (Francis and Lankshear, *The rural factor* 1-9), the impact of children's work on adult church membership (Francis and Lankshear, *Shared Pilgrimage* 24-31, *The impact of children's work* 35-45, *The impact of children's work* 57-63), the impact of provision for pre-school children on church life (Francis and Lankshear, *Church provision* 55-64), the impact of a resident parish priest on local church life (Francis and Lankshear, *The rural rectory* 97-103), the implication of changing trends in confirmation (Francis and Lankshear, *Changing trends* 64-76), the relationship between

baptism policy and church growth and decline (Francis, Jones, and Lankshear, 11-24), the nature of evangelical identity and ministry among young people (Francis, Lankshear and Jones, Evangelical identity 225-69), and the influence of the charismatic movement on local church life (Francis, Lankshear and Jones, The influence of the charismatic 121-130). Perhaps it would be helpful to replicate this study in order to provide a more detailed assessment of trends.

Note

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Table 1: Diocesan performance comparisons for 1999/2000 (relative to 1990/91=100)

Diocese	uSa %	Easter %	Xmas %	ER %	Inf bap %	Bap 1-12 %	Other bap %	Conf %
Bath and Wells	77	83	81	90	67	112	98	50
Birmingham	81	85	84	96	57	97	103	75
Blackburn	82	80	80	82	62	133	80	84
Bradford	86	86	84	88	67	118	75	56
Bristol	80	83	83	89	65	102	97	55
Canterbury	97	84	78	105	60	104	108	64
Carlisle	74	77	71	95	80	130	80	58
Chelmsford	84	84	79	101	73	124	96	70
Chester	86	82	80	103	62	122	77	65
Chichester	86	89	83	96	67	103	93	57
Coventry	98	82	75	92	73	122	120	59
Derby	93	89	81	91	58	121	135	54
Durham	73	73	70	89	62	126	93	45
Ely	88	94	86	90	71	108	155	63
Exeter	84	82	79	90	63	101	90	61
Gloucester	82	91	86	94	70	108	110	56
Guildford	85	93	82	95	70	122	90	67
Hereford	87	89	89	101	67	122	105	64
Leicester	87	85	81	87	69	128	103	67
Lichfield*	83	78	77	94	60	125	115	53
Lincoln	73	84	80	87	74	131	153	58
Liverpool	81	79	78	89	62	118	105	71
London	107	107	98	132	64	106	103	106
Manchester	83	80	78	99	57	98	95	64
Newcastle	83	84	78	93	64	100	105	47
Norwich	81	85	85	85	68	115	83	55
Oxford	90	90	86	105	70	107	80	64
Peterborough	88	86	84	91	67	104	75	64
Portsmouth	84	84	81	101	68	102	130	57
Ripon and Leeds	86	82	78	78	66	118	100	64
Rochester	81	86	79	94	57	103	92	58
St Albans	85	86	82	93	69	111	98	67
St Eds and Ips	88	90	86	99	71	115	110	63
Salisbury	86	90	86	98	74	122	130	62
Sheffield	87	92	80	95	64	125	170	56
Sodor and Man	89	88	86	92	93	167	133	88
Southwark	91	95	83	103	69	123	106	74
Southwell	79	84	75	90	75	127	113	58
Truro	84	83	85	83	65	115	120	56
Wakefield	84	92	84	100	73	125	113	68
Winchester	82	87	85	98	63	100	90	66
Worcester*	91	91	83	109	75	137	150	62
York	79	81	83	97	65	139	100	62

* On 1 October 1993 the Himley Deanery transferred from the diocese of Lichfield to the diocese of Worcester.

Table 2: Comparing dioceses led by Catholic bishops and dioceses led by Evangelical bishops: percentage change over the decade

	Evangelical %	Catholic %
uSa	84	85
Easter commun	83	85
Christmas commun	78	82
electoral rolls	90	89
infant baptisms	64	65
baptisms age 1-12 years	121	117
baptisms over 12 years	114	95
total baptism	74	74
confirmations	63	69
population	101	105

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