

Preface

This is a book about Christian identity – a form of being and living as a follower of Christ that holds the gospel together with the life of the church and the life of the Spirit for life in the world. More specifically, it is about *evangelical* identity. It is written by someone who found the grace of God – or rather who was found by the grace of God – through the teaching and witness of evangelicals. Hence I will be for ever indebted to evangelicalism, eternally grateful to those who were compelled to share the love of Christ with me and from whom I discovered the power of the scriptures. The aim of this book is not in any way to go beyond the simple gospel of salvation and the conviction that the Bible is the inspired word of God that I learnt from my spiritual fathers and mothers. It is to go deeper into the scriptural gospel, to mine more of its depths, to receive more fully of its fullness, to grasp more of what it means to be a gospel person, an evangelical.

This book was written in an evangelical Anglican theological college while I was its Principal. Much of what it says has been on my heart for many years, but during my time at Ridley Hall I was much encouraged by the life and teaching of an evangelical leader of a generation long since passed: Handley Moule, the first Principal of the college. I find Moule inspiring because of his capacity to hold together those things which Christians, evangelicals included, sometimes allow to be unnecessarily forced apart. In the terms of his day he was an evangelical churchman, who was also, rarely for his time, a Keswick man. That means that he was a convinced evangelical who was at the same time committed to the continuous,

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visible, historical expression of Christ's people – embodied, for him, in the Church of England. So he described himself as a church evangelical. At the same time, he had discovered the dynamic, life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit as taught in the Keswick Movement of his day. Biblical gospel, catholic church, powerful Spirit: Moule held these fundamental realities of Christian existence together in his teaching, writing and ministering. In so doing, he presented a vision of an ecclesial form of evangelical life, enlivened by the Spirit.

Moule was satisfied with nothing less than the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' (Ephesians 3.8, RSV) and would frequently exhort his students and readers to seek the presence of Christ and search out the extraordinary goodness and graciousness of Christ's work in all its depth and breadth. Following his lead, Chapter 1 begins with some biblical study on the one in whom 'all things hold together' (Colossians 1.17) before moving on to make the central claim of all that follows, that there is no gospel without the church, and no church without the gospel, and that both are bound to the Spirit.

Chapters 2–8 consider some of the areas where evangelical Christians with their instinctive feel for the gospel, and catholic Christians with their instinctive feel for the church, have often found themselves in sharp disagreement. Chapter 2 looks at the relationship between scripture and tradition. Chapter 3 examines different understandings of justification. Chapter 4 focuses on the place of the church in God's purposes. Chapter 5 considers Mary as a way of rounding off this set of chapters on word, salvation and church, and testing out some of its conclusions. Chapters 6–8 form a different sequence, though still dealing with themes where evangelicals and catholics have seldom seen eye to eye: worship in Chapter 6, liturgy and baptism in Chapter 7 and the Eucharist in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 is on mission, the point at which Christians are under a very specific mandate to unite in order that the world may believe.

In different ways, each chapter attempts to hold the gospel together with the church, and to hold the gospel and the church together with the Spirit. In some chapters (for example,

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Chapters 2, 3 and 7) this is done in what might be called a dialectical way very much in the spirit of Charles Simeon, often said to be the founder of modern Anglican evangelicalism, who believed that ‘as wheels in a complicated machine may move in opposite directions and yet subserve one common end, so may truths [of scripture] *apparently opposite* be perfectly reconcilable with each other, and equally subserve the purposes of God in the accomplishment of our salvation’.¹ Here, often sharply contrasting positions in evangelical and catholic theology are made to face each other so that they can listen to each other *in the Spirit*. Amos Yong, a leading Asian Pentecostal theologian, argues persuasively that ‘a vital pneumatology is indispensable for a truly healthy dialectic in that it drives the to-and-fro movement necessary to sustain both poles’.² As well as sustaining the debate between its two ends, the perspective of the Spirit often shifts its angle just enough to allow both sides to see each other’s positions in a new light and to reveal their underlying complementarity.

In other chapters (for example, Chapters 6, 4 and 9) the approach is more dialogical than dialectical. Here the emphases that begin with the gospel are placed alongside those that begin with the church or with the Spirit. They are then allowed to converse with each other so that they are able to feed and enlarge our understanding of, for example, our calling to belong to God’s people (Chapter 4), to worship God together (Chapter 6) and to proclaim the coming of God’s kingdom (Chapter 9). In Chapters 5 (on Mary) and 8 (on the Eucharist) the method is more deliberately integrative. In these chapters, which form the conclusion to two sequences of studies (the first on word, salvation and church; the second on matters relating to worship), the three overarching themes of the book are held together by being used together in a common project, as a loom weaves different threads into one garment.

Three points of clarification are needed. First, these three methods are not quite as self-contained as they sound. Dialectic involves dialogue and implies some form of positive interaction, if not integration itself. Nevertheless, their different

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starting points make them suitable for different tasks within an overall theological purpose. This is why different methods are sometimes used in the same chapter. Second, more importantly, gospel, church and Spirit are most definitely not self-contained categories. The co-inherence of these theological categories is, in fact, a basic assumption of the book and the reason why it also proposes a certain co-inherence of the traditions of the church. On the one hand the delineation of the categories is simply an organizational device. Sometimes it can help to isolate individual theological concerns simply in order to see how they properly relate to the wider theological picture. On the other hand, though, there is a good deal of evidence in the life of God's people – including those of us who call ourselves evangelicals – of a tendency to so emphasize one aspect of God's grace that we neglect others, especially perhaps when we see them being over-emphasized elsewhere.³

Third – and consequently – readers will soon find that the easy equation of the theological themes and church traditions (i.e. of gospel–church–Spirit with evangelical–catholic–charismatic) is potentially confusing. For example, when proposing that evangelicals recover a more self-consciously catholic and charismatic identity, I am not suggesting that they become Roman Catholics or Pentecostals. As I hope will be clear in Chapter 2, my challenge to myself and other evangelicals is that we follow through the ecclesiological and pneumatological implications of the gospel, developing therefore what might be called a form of catholic evangelicalism in the Spirit. Generally in theological discussion, the association of the word 'catholic' with the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglo-Catholic tradition lends itself to particular confusions. These I have been unable to avoid. For example, I often draw on Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic theology to explore the ecclesiological depths of the gospel. I have done so because I have found that these theological traditions often work harder than my own at the 'being with others' that the gospel involves and that lies at the heart of what it means to be catholic. Sometimes I have found that the catholic theological tradition has informed my understanding

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of the corporate realities of the gospel. At other times I have felt that it has over-egged the pudding and, as it were, solidified the very gospel that forms the church and which ‘the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’ (as the Nicene Creed puts it) is called to proclaim. You will notice that in these two sentences, as elsewhere in the book, I am using the word ‘catholic’ first in the sense of the ecclesial and theological tradition identified with the Roman Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, and, in some ways, Eastern Orthodox traditions, and second, in the sense of the ecclesial identity of all those who are made members of Christ. Again, I hope that Chapter 2, particularly with its semantic analysis of catholic (as well as evangelical and charismatic) will help to keep matters clear and show how to distinguish between the two uses in the rest of the book.

As this short summary of its contents has shown, this book does not directly address the holding together of the Anglican Communion during its present disputes. My sights are set on older – and, I would say, deeper, more fundamental – tensions and controversies than those that immediately confront much of the church today, Anglican or otherwise. Nevertheless, I hope that aspects of the book’s method may be of value in the present situation: for unless followers of Christ can listen attentively to each other in the Spirit and according to the scriptures to discern what is of the gospel in the other’s position, we have little to offer each other, let alone the world.

In addition to my eternal debt to those who first shared the gospel with me, I owe a great deal to those who helped me complete this piece of writing about the gospel and the church to which it gives rise, and the Spirit who gives life to both. Stephen Sykes’ invitation to give the 2004 Michael Vasey Memorial Lecture kick-started the project some time ago. Believers in Egypt, Syria and India provided generous hospitality and much inspiration for it.⁴ Colleagues at Ridley Hall modelled much of what I write about in their teaching, preaching and living. A group of research-active students at Ridley, first convened by Philip Hobday, gave up the chance to present their work to each other in favour of a few evenings discussing

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mine, much to my benefit. Philip later read the whole typescript and made invaluable stylistic, structural and theological suggestions. Another member of the group, Peter Sanlon, gave up some of his research time to introduce me to a computer program that much improved my endnotes. John Colwell of Spurgeon's College also read and commented on the manuscript, as did my good friend, Jeremy Begbie. My son, Ashley, spent many hours chasing up references that his father failed to record properly, and also pointed me to some new and valuable sources, proving in the process to be a reliable theological guide in his own right. Although they cannot be held responsible in any way for what follows, I am deeply grateful to all of them for their careful thought and kind support. I would also like to record my thanks to Kate Nix, my former secretary, for much help with the final stages of the typescript, to Christine Smith of Canterbury Press whose beguiling combination of patience and persuasion makes her my favourite publisher, and to Charlotte, my wife, and all of our sons, upon whom I have depended in this endeavour – as in every aspect of life – more than they can know. Finally, I should like to express my thanks to my mother and father, to my mother- and father-in-law, and to all my mothers and fathers in the faith whose influence lies behind this book by dedicating it to them.

Holding Together

‘Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.’
Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, is the heart of the gospel and the cause of the scriptures. Knowing Jesus Christ, being in personal relationship with him, is the essence of evangelical Christianity. Jesus – and all that he brings – is the good news of the kingdom of God. So in a book about evangelical Christian identity, which seeks to hold together the great themes of gospel, church and Spirit, the proper place in which to start is with the confession of Christ as the one ‘in whom all things hold together’ in the great hymn of redemption in Colossians 1.15–19.

Christ and the gospel, church and Spirit

The letter to the Colossians was written round about 60–61 CE.¹ The hymn in chapter 1, or at least some of it, may well have been circulating around the churches of the day before Paul made use of it in the letter.² It may even have had pre-Christian origins in first-century Jewish worship. Paul may well have added to it and adapted it to serve his particular theological purposes, how much we are not quite sure. But the important point to note is that the extraordinary claims it makes for Jesus Christ were being made only 30 years or so after he had hung on the cross, executed under Roman law as a criminal in a death considered by Jewish law to be accursed. He was now being acclaimed in the churches as the ‘image of the invisible God’ (1.15) in whom ‘all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’ (1.19), as the one in whom and for whom ‘all things

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... were created' (1.16), and as the one through whom God 'reconcile(d) to himself all things' (1.20) through his death. The historical figure, still vivid in the memories of those who had met him, was actually the embodiment of God in human form. Although he was known as the son of Mary and Joseph who grew up in Galilee, in reality, he was – and is – the principle and purpose of the whole creative activity of God. The death he died in apparent defeat was, in fact, the action of decisive cosmic significance by which the record of our sins was erased and the forces of evil defeated. Here are the fundamental Christological claims of our faith which lead to the great doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, the atonement and the church. Through the eternal Word, God has created the world. The Word, God's own Son, became flesh. He died for the world on the cross and he was raised to life as the 'first-born from the dead' (1.18), the head of the new community of the kingdom, his church. This is the 'mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints' (1.26).

Verses 17 and 18 of the hymn act as a pivot between the first stanza, which concentrates on creation, and the second, which focuses on redemption:

He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together (*sunestēken*). He is the head of the body, his church.

The verb *sunestēkenai* was used in Platonic and Stoic philosophy of the time to denote the unity of the entire world, a unity which was believed to be found in the divine Logos (God's self-expression) who was the unifying bond holding everything together. Jewish philosophers readily adopted the idea of God's Word being the creative presence or activity of God. Philo, for example, described God's Word as 'the bond of all things, the one who holds them together indissolubly and binds them fast, when in themselves they are dissoluble'.³ The staggering claim of this early Christian hymn is that Jesus (the recently crucified messianic figure) is, as J. B. Lightfoot says in his commentary, 'the principle of cohesion in the universe [who] impresses

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upon creation that unity which makes it a cosmos rather than a chaos'.⁴ He is 'the sustainer of the universe and the unifying principle of its life [without whose] *continuous* sustaining activity all would disintegrate', as Peter O'Brien's more modern commentary puts it.⁵

Where verse 17 sums up the claim of the first stanza of the hymn that Jesus is the mediator of the creative activity of God, verse 18 introduces the second stanza which confesses Christ as the one through whose death God's redeeming activity in and for the world is achieved. Jesus is the 'head of the body, the church', the new community which embodies the reconciling purposes of God. Christ's capacity to hold together the whole of creation is the basis of his redemptive ministry to bring together sinful, estranged humanity (1.21) and the God of grace (1.2). In these few verses Jesus Christ holds together the invisible God and the visible world, the uncreated and the created, the fullness of divinity and the life of a human being, the eternal reality of God and the contingent events of human history, all the spiritual powers and all material things, the holy God and redeemed humanity.

This is a breathtaking panorama of God's relationship with the world, at each point concentrated in the person of Jesus Christ. It provides the platform for the rest of Paul's letter to the church of Colossae. Paul commends the Christians of Colossae for their 'faith in Christ' and their 'love . . . for all the saints' (1.4). He tells them how he continually gives thanks in his prayers for their grasp of the 'grace of God in truth' (1.6) and their 'love in the Spirit' (1.8). At the same time he is concerned about a danger hanging over their faith and life in Christ. An insidiously threatening teaching was probably widespread throughout the three cities of Lycus valley of which Colossae was one, and perhaps even beginning to make itself felt within the Colossian church. It was poised to prey on the unsuspecting Christians of the city (2.8) and, if allowed to take its course, would gradually dismember the Colossians' faith. Paul's letter is an exhortation to stand firm and to press on towards maturity in the faith (1.11, 23; 4.12).

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Although biblical scholars are reticent about attempting to define precisely this false teaching, there is general agreement that it represented a form of Jewish faith heavily influenced both by mystical tendencies within Jewish religion and by contemporary pagan speculations about the soul's ascent through the heavenly realms. The former developed into *merkabah* mysticism with its complex exercises and rituals designed to lead to the sort of vision of the heavenly chariot (*merkabah*) experienced by the prophet Ezekiel.⁶ The latter developed into sophisticated gnostic religious systems of spiritual spheres separating the material world from the divine life, through which the soul must navigate itself in order to find its way to the fullness of God's light.

Left unchecked, this teaching risked undoing everything. Although it was quite capable of high-sounding statements about Jesus Christ and his place in the order of intermediaries between God and the world, and on the importance of obeying his ethical instructions, this incipient form of Jewish-Christian gnosticism displaced Christ from the centre of God's purposes and denied the efficacy of his work on the cross. As F. F. Bruce puts it in his commentary on Colossians, Paul's strategy was to confront 'the false *gnōsis* and worldly *askēsis* taught at Colossae with the true *gnōsis* and spiritual *askēsis* of Christ'.⁷ In other words, rather than advanced form of knowledge (*gnōsis*) and a complex systems of religious observance and abstinence (*askēsis*), which would assist the believer to orientate a route for the soul's redemption in the fullness of God, Paul reiterates 'the grace of God in truth' (1.6) – namely, that in Jesus Christ the fullness of deity dwells bodily. Christ is the Lord of all that exists. He has disempowered all the hostile spiritual forces with their claims against us. Forgiveness of sins has been achieved through his decisive death and powerful resurrection. The only form of *gnōsis* and *askēsis* needed for redemption is faith in Christ and participation in his life:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and

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established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (2.6–7).

It is worth pausing to note that Paul's campaign against the embryonic Colossian heresy reflects several features of the classic evangelical critique of catholic and charismatic forms of spirituality. Often with considerable justification, evangelicals have accused catholic theology of constructing 'human traditions' (2.8) which bind people to unnecessary religious practices and obscure the unique mediatorial work of Christ. My wife was brought up in South America and is not short of stories about a debased form of Christianity, in which the perfectly respectable practice of spiritual discipline, or a quite proper belief in the communion of saints, have been turned into superstitious systems of religious manipulation. The gospel of 'the grace of God in truth' – where Christ is the agent of creation, the mediator between heaven and earth and the reconciler of all things to God who offers us forgiveness of sin, freedom from all the powers of evil and fullness of life in the fullness of God – has been eclipsed through the accretions of human traditions, requiring forms of abasement or encouraging forms of invocation of the saints which look suspiciously close to all that Paul castigates in Colossae (2.16–18).

Some evangelicals have claimed – not always without reason – that charismatic devotion too easily lures believers into preoccupations with exotic religious experiences (2.18) and speculation about the hierarchies of angels and demons (2.20), diverting them away from simple faith in Christ and the demands of patient, faithful discipleship (1.11; 4.12). 'Why do we spend time bothering with a "word which someone feels might be from the Lord" rather than giving much more time to the preaching of scripture, which we know is *the word of the Lord*?' an ordinand asked me after (in his view at least) a particularly unconvincing sharing of 'pictures' and 'words' in a college chapel service. Whatever you think about the way God communicates his word, you do not need to have spent much time in charismatic circles before picking up the message

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that there seems to be just one more experience you need to have, one more gift you need to find, or one more new spiritual perspective you need to acquire if you are to keep up with the work of God.

The trouble with an over-emphasis on certain aspects of the faith is the over-reaction it causes, often leading to a form of the faith that distorts its proper contours by denying or neglecting that which is good, right and thoroughly scriptural. It is a travesty to equate catholic Christianity with ‘human traditions’ (2.8) or charismatic Christianity with preoccupations with ‘visions’ (2.18) and powers (2.15), just as it is very unfair to define evangelical Christianity as a loveless legalism and unthinking biblicism, as its strongest critics often do. Catholic Christianity is about belonging to Christ’s body (1.24) and sharing fully in the process of being ‘nourished and knit together’ (2.19) by Christ. Charismatic Christianity is about living the life of God’s ‘love in the Spirit’ (1.8). Later we will explore how, rather than being antithetical to being evangelical, being catholic and charismatic are necessary to evangelical faith and life. This is for the simple reason that, according to scripture, the church and the Spirit belong to the gospel.

We return to Paul’s remedy for the Colossians. He preaches Christ to them as the incarnate mediator of God’s creative and redemptive purposes for the world. One of the rallying cries of the Reformation – *Christ alone* – fits well with Paul’s passion in the pages of this letter. Everything in the cosmos, material and spiritual, is created through Christ (1.16). The fullness of God dwells in him (1.9; 2.9). He has done all that is necessary to free us from evil (2.15), to put us right with God (2.13) and to give us fullness of life in him (2.10). Therefore, says Paul, hold fast to him (2.19). Stay bound to him, do not allow other practices or philosophies to bind you (1.8). Keep your faith in him as Saviour and Lord. This is the *gospel life* – life in Christ. It is the new life of the gospel made possible by receiving the gospel – by receiving Christ (2.6). At the same time, it is *catholic life*, life lived out in the community of Christ’s disciples; and it is *charismatic life*, life lived out in the Spirit. Paul never

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isolates belief in Christ from membership of the church and empowerment by the Spirit. Indeed, a great deal of the letter is encouragement for the Colossian Christians to live the gospel that they have received in the fellowship of the church by the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are three further points that need to be made about the letter as a whole. They build upon and reinforce what we have already said. The first is to underline the importance Paul places on the church in the letter. As we have seen, the church is the body of which Christ is the head. Believers are *together* 'to put on' the virtues of the gospel – the characteristics of Christ (3.12–14) – so that they may be bound together 'in perfect harmony' (3.14). They are to build each other up through the word of Christ by mutual teaching and corporate worship (3.16). They are to express the rule of Christ in the ordinary human relationships of marriage, family and household (3.18–4.1). So intimate is the relationship between Christ and his people, and so intrinsic is membership of the church to Christian identity, that Paul talks about 'completing', through his own sufferings for the cause of the gospel, 'what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church' (1.24). Paul does not mean, of course, that his or any one else's suffering contributes to the atoning work of Christ. The word he uses for 'sufferings' (*thlipseon*) does not have the least of a hint of a sacrificial act in the atoning sense. But, in the sense of encouraging or edifying the life of the church, it is, in the words of Lightfoot,

a simple matter of fact that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ. The Church is built up by repeated acts of self-denial in successive individuals and successive generations. They continue the work which Christ began. They bear their part in the sufferings of Christ. (2 Corinthians 1.7; Philippians 3.10)⁸

Paul says that Christ's sufferings are incomplete, not in any sense to imply that the redemptive capacity of Christ is some-

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how lacking (the whole of his letter is designed to prove that it is sufficient), but because he believes in the literal participation of Christians in the life of Christ. The suffering of an individual member of the church for the sake of the gospel is a Christological and ecclesiological event. It involves Christ because the church is his body and it involves every member of the church because each is bound to the other in the one body.

Second, although Paul says less directly about the Spirit than he does about the church in the letter, his specific references to the Spirit count for a great deal. In 1.8 he commends the Colossians for their ‘love in the Spirit’. In 1.9 he tells them about his prayer that they will be filled with ‘spiritual wisdom’, wisdom that comes as the Spirit’s gift (see 1 Corinthians 2.10–16). In 3.16 he encourages them to sing ‘spiritual songs’, to worship in the Spirit (see Ephesians 5.18–20). Loving in the Spirit, thinking and acting in the Spirit, worshipping in the Spirit: these are the cornerstones of life lived in and through the presence and power of the Spirit.

These relatively few direct references to the Spirit are enough in themselves to build a strong doctrine of the importance of the life of the Spirit, but they can also be supplemented by Paul’s many references to the ongoing presence and activity of the ascended Christ among his people, for we know that in Pauline thought ‘the Spirit conveys what Christ bestows’.⁹ Theoretically Paul could distinguish the indwelling Christ from the indwelling Spirit, but practically he and his converts knew that they could never be separated because ‘the exalted Christ imparts his life and power to them through the Spirit’.¹⁰ Hence, Paul’s Christological emphasis in the letter to the Colossians is at the same time an implicitly pneumatological emphasis. We cannot live in Christ without living in and by his Spirit.

Third, in a book on the theme of *holding together*, it is worth noting again how Paul manages to hold so much together in this letter. We have already discussed the breathtaking claims made in the hymn in chapter 1 for Christ’s capacity to hold all things together, even God and humanity. We have just

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underlined Paul's conviction about the intimate relationship between Christ and the church and we have seen that for Paul, Christ and the Spirit are inseparable – even, in terms of everyday experience, indistinguishable. But Paul makes other connections in his letter between, for example, baptism and faith (2.11–12), faith and love (1.4; 2.2–3; 2.6–7), faith and works (3.5; 3.12), Greek and Jew (3.9); word and worship (3.16), the spiritual life and the ordinary realities of human living and relating in family and economic life (3.18–4.1). He refuses to divide what he believes God has joined together.

Terms and purpose

As this short study of Colossians has reminded us (and we could have chosen other books to demonstrate the same thing), gospel, church and Spirit belong inseparably together. We are reconciled to God by the all-sufficient work of Christ, the incarnate image of God, and we live out our new life in Christ within his body, the church, and in the Holy Spirit, God's gift of life. Etymologically evangelicalism emphasizes the gospel – the *euangelion* in Greek or *evangelium* in Latin. Historically the adjective 'evangelical' was used first simply to describe what pertained to the gospel. As the sixteenth century progressed, it began to be applied to those who sought to make a stand for certain truths of the gospel, *evangelical* truths. During the eighteenth-century revival in the United Kingdom, 'evangelical', often with a capital 'E', became increasingly applied to supporters of the revival with their passion for the gospel and their desire to see scripture preached and lived in the church. Theologically, evangelicals have placed primary emphasis on the scriptural gospel, making it the controlling category in their theology, recognizing that it has been a continual temptation for the church to turn its back on 'the grace of Christ' and to try to dismantle the authentic gospel and construct, futilely, a 'different gospel' (Galatians 1.6–7).

Applying the etymological method to the catholic and charis-

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matic traditions is also enlightening. The word ‘catholic’ is derived from two Greek words: *kata*, meaning ‘with’ or ‘according to’, and *holos*, meaning ‘whole’. For many believers, ‘being with other Christians’, in the sense of sharing in the faith of the one church, being part of the life of the whole church and following the teaching believed by other Christians, is the starting point for Christian identity. The instinct for catholicity is born out of the profound recognition that there is only one body of Christ with Christ as its head. Similarly, ‘charismatic’ comes from the Greek *charismata*, referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Charismatic movements have sprung up at various points in the church’s history, often at times when God’s people seemed to have neglected the dynamic, gift-giving presence of the Spirit in the life of the church. Theologically, charismatics stress the present availability of gifts such as healing, tongues and prophecy, and press for the renewal of the church as a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led community.

I want to describe a form of evangelicalism that takes seriously the life of the church and the life of the Spirit and sees them as intrinsic to the life of the gospel. I do so as an Anglican evangelical who has found that Anglican identity contributes something very significant to evangelical identity in a way that considerably helps this task. Anglican evangelicals belong to the reforming movement that swept across Europe in the sixteenth century as many Christians rediscovered the grace of the gospel and the power of God’s word in scripture. It is a movement that has proved to be extremely effective in a variety of cultures and periods since then, including our own. At the same time Anglican evangelicals can trace a clear connection in all sorts of visible and tangible ways to the beginnings of Christian faith in Britain. Through our creeds, liturgies and orders of ministry, we are connected in some way to other churches that also claim an ancient origin and an unbroken continuation: Roman Catholicism, Greek and Oriental Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the movement of the Spirit in periods of evangelical revival, the historic Anglican interest in the Spirit (at least in its liturgical and theological theory if not always in practice), and the

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deep influence of charismatic theology and spirituality upon many contemporary evangelicals, brings Anglican evangelicals into close contact with the extraordinarily vibrant Pentecostal movements, the fastest growing form of Christian life in today's world.

The location of Anglican evangelicalism at a meeting point between the great Reformation, Catholic and Pentecostal traditions does not of itself produce a form of evangelicalism that successfully holds church and Spirit together with gospel. Because of the tendency we all have to concentrate on one set of truths to the neglect of the other, and because of the legacies of history, which often institutionalize legitimate theological concerns into exclusive ecclesiastical cultures, a self-conscious attempt to describe and develop what might be called a *catholic form of evangelicalism in the Spirit* is required.

I realize that I am taking a risk in talking about catholic evangelicalism. Christians formed in the catholic tradition of the church may accuse me of commandeering their name and claiming to represent the fullness of catholic faith. To them I say that I believe in the enduring need for a distinctively catholic tradition and that I want always to have the privilege of learning from others more deeply immersed in it than I am. Equally, I hope that in what I will say shortly, they will see why it is important, indeed essential, for evangelicals to reclaim their catholic identity.

Christians shaped in the evangelical tradition, especially those used to defining themselves in distinction from 'catholicism', may be horrified by any attempt to link the two together. To them I say that I am doing nothing that is *unevangelical* either in a theological or historical sense. Quite the contrary, in fact, because to be an evangelical one must be *with (kata)* the whole (*holos*) of the church (that is, one must be a *katholikos*). 'No gospel without the church; no church without the gospel' is my rallying cry. This is what the Reformers, according to Paul Avis' classic study of the Reformers' ecclesiology, believed: 'where the gospel is found Christ is present, and where he is present the church must truly exist'.¹¹ And here they were simply am-

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plifying Ignatius' dictum from the second century: 'where Jesus Christ is, there is the universal (the catholic) church'.¹² When Jesus comes to us through the gospel he comes to us *with* his people to unite us with himself and *with* his people.

The form of evangelicalism I am proposing is one that is also authentically *charismatic* – one that rejoices in and reaches out for the dynamic empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In fact, just as we might say that the term 'catholic evangelicalism' is, strictly speaking, tautologous – for there is no gospel without the church, and no church without the gospel – so we might say the same for 'charismatic evangelicalism'. There is no gospel without the Spirit. Christ and his gospel come to us by the Spirit. And, of course, there is no church without the Spirit. Ignatius' Christological definition of the church needs to be held together with Irenaeus' pneumatological version – 'where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace'.¹³

Precedents: sixteenth to twenty-first centuries

A strong doctrine of the church, which sees full participation in the life of the church as necessary for Christian existence and which is committed to the continuing, visible life of the universal church, is not alien to the historical origins of evangelicalism. In fact it lies at its heart. In a very revealing exchange between Cardinal Sadoleto and John Calvin in the 1530s (to which we shall refer on several occasions later), Calvin defines the church as 'the society of all the saints, a society which, spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by the one doctrine and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord'.¹⁴ He goes on to tell Sadoleto, 'With this Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.'¹⁵ In some places in Europe, such as England, the leading Reformers were bishops who were quite clear that they were not creating a new Protestant church but simply reforming the existing Catholic church of which

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they were the leading pastors and whose office gave them the responsibility and authority to teach the true faith and to maintain its purity. For example, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer called his presentation of a reformed view of the Eucharist *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament*. He would have considered any idea of his liturgical reforms as a departure for the catholic faith as a great insult. The whole point of his liturgical programme was to return the worship of the church to its true catholic character.

In other parts of Europe the Reformers found themselves in a more complex situation that required hard and, to many, regrettable choices. Heinrich Bornkamm vividly describes the dilemma faced by Martin Luther and other continental Reformers.

Luther was excluded from his church because of his criticism of the theology and the ecclesiastical condition of his time. It was *his* church from which we was excluded, for it was no other church that he uttered his fervent pleadings and prayers, and his painful laments and angry indictments. Everything he did and said and wrote was not against it, but for it, for its sake, not in order to establish a new church. It was because it was *his* church, the Roman church of that time, that excluded him that an inner reform, which had often taken place before, became something new, outside the existing church.¹⁶

Even then it must be remembered that in much of continental Europe the creation of Reformation churches was territorial. The usual pattern was for cities or principedoms to join the Reformation. Hence the whole church in that area would re-form itself according to Protestant principles, creating a reformed church rather than a new church. The chief Protestant principle, of course, was scripture on the grounds that the Bible is the word of God that holds – and holds before the church – ‘the word of truth, the gospel’ (Colossians 1.5), the word by which the church is formed. The Reformers, therefore,

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were not anti-catholic, and Protestantism was not an alternative to catholic faith. *Protestari*, the Latin word from which 'Protestant' is derived, means 'to witness, or testify', 'to make a solemn declaration'. The Reformers were trying to call the church back to its scripture and its gospel. Evangelicalism, which is true to their vision, will see itself as speaking within the catholic faith of the church, persuading the church to keep attentive to the dynamic of the gospel and, therefore, to the heart of catholic faith.

Even in the highly polemicized days of the seventeenth century, William Perkins, a leading Puritan, described himself as a 'Reformed Catholic'.¹⁷ This he defined, in his important book with the same title, as 'any one that holds the same necessary heades of religion with the Roman Church, yet so, as he pares off and rejects all errors in doctrine whereby the said religion is corrupted'.¹⁸ He went on to argue that the Roman church had added erroneously to the catechism of the church that had been 'agreed upon ever since the days of the Apostles by all Churches'.¹⁹ Hence, rather than arguing on classic Protestant grounds that the Roman church had departed from scripture, he based his claim on a classic catholic foundation: it had failed to preserve the universal, catholic tradition of the church of which it claimed to be the custodian and interpreter.

John and Charles Wesley will appear at various points in the coming chapters. At this point, I simply want to note two marks of their ministry. The first is their enjoyment of the ordered, sacramental and liturgical life of the historic, continuing church (in a very real sense, they remained 'high-church Anglicans'). The second is their commitment to 'a catholic spirit'. Like other leaders of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival like George Whitefield, and, a little later, John Newton, the Wesleys were avowedly *catholic* in their attitudes to other Christians. They wanted to embrace other Christians wherever they were to be found. For the Wesleys at least, this involved a genuine attempt to be generous towards Roman Catholics as well as Protestant Dissenters, seeking to acknowledge points of agreement over the essentials of Christian faith rather than

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to focus on differences over less fundamental matters. In his open ‘Letter to a Roman Catholic’ (where he says that his reader ‘deserves the tenderest regard I can show’), and in his celebrated sermon ‘Catholic Spirit’ (where he calls for ‘catholic or universal love’), John Wesley carefully identifies the *catholic core of doctrine* and *catholic principles of Christian practice*, while at the same time allowing differences of genuinely held ‘opinions’ over secondary theological matters and in practical expressions of the faith.²⁰

The rise of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century, and the ritualist movement that followed in its wake, caused evangelicals in the Church of England to be at best cautious and at worst antagonistic about anything resembling Roman Catholic thought and practice. Nevertheless, they maintained a strong view – perhaps a stronger view because of the renewed ‘catholic threat’ – of the Church of England as the rightful and historic church of the land, bearing its authentic liturgy, sacramental system and pattern of ministry. It is clear that relationships between English evangelicals and followers of the Oxford Movement (often called Tractarians) were very strained for most of the nineteenth century. But it should not be overlooked that a group of second-generation Tractarians displayed a remarkable combination of convictions about evangelical conversion on the one hand and catholic principles of church life on the other. George Wilkinson was the most well known and respected member of this small but very significant movement. Often described as a ‘Church Methodist’,²¹ his teaching was thoroughly evangelical, with a strong emphasis on personal commitment to Christ, disciplined life of discipleship and strategies for church growth. Increasingly he was able to integrate these evangelical emphases with a strong view of Christ’s presence through the actions of the church in a way that, according to Henry Scott Holland, a distinguished Tractarian, ‘held together his Evangelical Gospel and Catholic Creed’.²²

Although the rise of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century, and the fears that it evoked of ‘ritualism’ and

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'Romanism', caused a hardening of English evangelical arteries against things perceived as 'catholic', movements on the world stage during the twentieth century led to a significant softening of attitudes and created opportunities for genuine engagement. The Second Vatican Council in the 1960s initiated a reform of the Roman church that generally took evangelicals by surprise. With clear similarities to many of the Reformation concerns of the sixteenth century, it created a new climate and a new language for theological dialogue. The rapid rise of Pentecostalism and the charismatic experiences of many evangelicals – which they shared with Christians from other traditions across the church – led to a greater humility among evangelicals and a readiness to work with and learn from others. Evangelicals were forced to recognize that the Holy Spirit could not be confined within the bounds of evangelicalism. Increasing contact with Eastern Orthodoxy opened the eyes of evangelicals to swathes of Christianity which, although very different from evangelicalism, provided many points of connection, not least a similar historic suspicion of elements of traditional Roman Catholic belief and practice. Evangelicals discovered that they often had more in common with Eastern Orthodoxy, Pentecostalism and modern Roman Catholicism than with Liberal Protestantism. Although sometimes cautious about involvement in official church dialogues, evangelicals have been engaged in various private initiatives with Roman Catholics and Orthodox which have led to some significant publications, such as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* and *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*.²³

James Cutsinger, the evangelical editor of *Reclaiming the Great Tradition*, shows that far from being just a piece of polite ecumenical politics, its aim is to: 'Test whether an ecumenical Orthodoxy, solidly based on the classical Christian faith as expressed in the scriptures and ecumenical councils, could become the foundation for a unified and transformative witness to the present age.'²⁴ The project in which he and others were engaged reflects a wider movement within some branches of American evangelicalism where an interest in the ancient

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church is gathering pace with determined attempts to retrieve the inheritance of the church of the first four to six centuries – the Great Tradition of the undivided, ecumenical church. Prominent here has been Robert Webber, who has written extensively about this renaissance of interest in the ancient church among evangelicals and has been engaged in a systematic attempt to relate the doctrine and practice of the ancient church to the contemporary missionary situation of the church in the West. He holds that our present culture bears striking similarities to the culture in which the church first evolved and that the theological method and ecclesiological practice of the patristic church has much to teach us. The closing words of his book, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, are worth quoting in full. They chime closely with the basic contention of this book that we need expressions of the Christian faith that hold together gospel, church and Spirit in the way that the church of the first few centuries managed to do so successfully.

My argument has been that the evangelicals will do well to affirm a Christianity that has a deep kinship with the faith of the early church. What I sense is that many contemporary Christians who have been affected by cultural change toward a more integrated and dynamic view of life are in search of a faith that corresponds with their experience in general. For this reason an increasing amount of dissatisfaction is being expressed over rationalistic and divided Christianity. The challenge for us is to return to the Christian tradition. For here is a faith that, like a tapestry, weaves everything in and out of the main thread – Christ. My own experience with this rediscovered tapestry is a renewed and enriched faith. And I have talked with countless others who have experienced the same sense of newness in commitment through the insights of the early Christian tradition. Here, I believe, is a faith for our time, a faith that finds in the ancient Christian tradition a power to speak to a postmodern world.²⁵

Chapel windows and Raphael's fresco

Webber's challenge to weave 'everything in and out the main thread – Christ' is exactly what Paul does in Colossians.²⁶ It is the distinctively *Christian* theological method. I think that it is 'anneal[ed] in glass', as the poet-priest George Herbert would say, in a fascinating set of stained-glass windows in the chapel of Ridley Hall where I have done much of my praying.²⁷ On one side of the chapel there is a set of windows picturing the Fathers of the universal tradition of the church, West and East, stretching from Irenaeus to Anselm, with James the Apostle, said to be the first Bishop of Jerusalem, heading up the line. Opposite them, on the other side of the chapel, is a sequence of Reformers of the church, beginning with Tyndale and concluding, somewhat surprisingly but very significantly, with George Herbert. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death by representatives of the unreformed church of Israel, stands at their head. At the west end of the chapel is a group of pastors and missionaries who took this late-nineteenth-century chapel into the present day of its time with a window of the scholar-bishop Joseph Lightfoot, whose classic commentary on Colossians we made use of earlier, and who was a friend and mentor of Handley Moule, the first Principal of the college.

Most of the east end is made up of a magnificent single window depicting the risen Christ striding along the road to Emmaus to declare the gospel to the world. He is flanked by Peter, Matthew, John and Paul representing the great theological traditions of the New Testament church. Here is the scriptural Christ, surrounded by the authoritative apostolic witnesses. Behind and above him is the shape of the cross, subtly portrayed by the emblems of his passion. At the apex of the window is the Spirit, hovering over Gabriel the angel, and Mary, Jesus' mother, as the news of God's gift is announced and her obedient response is made. At the same time, the Spirit is also brooding over the cross, with its unimaginable suffering, empowering the resurrection ministry of Christ and overseeing the apostles' telling of his story to the world. It was as if the

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designers of the pattern of windows were saying: as you stand, sit and kneel here, at the west end of the chapel in your contemporary situation, recognize that you are part of an unbroken theological community. Keep one eye on the inherited catholic tradition of the church and the other eye on the continuing need to ensure that the church remains faithful to the gospel at the heart of its tradition. With dual vision, look up, look forwards and keep your eyes fixed on the scriptural Christ sent by the Father through the power of the Spirit to live and to die for the world. This Christ is powerfully risen from the dead and he calls you to follow him into the world to proclaim his risen life with all the energy of the Holy Spirit that he breathes upon you.

It is a Christological vision of theology, rooted in worship and proved in costly discipleship and mission. Charles Wesley captures something of this sort of theology in his poem ‘Catholic Love’, which his brother John published alongside his sermon on the ‘Catholic Spirit’:

Weary of all this wordy strife,
These notions, forms and modes and names,
To Thee, the Way, the Truth, the Life,
Whose love my simple heart inflames,
Divinely taught, at last I fly,
With Thee, and Thine to live, and die.²⁸

It is also a charismatic vision of theology. It recognizes that it is the Holy Spirit who reveals to us the deep things of God and guides us into all truth (John 16.13). In another British theological college at about the same time, Charles Spurgeon was inspiring his students with a similar understanding of the role of the Spirit in theological understanding:

The Spirit of God is peculiarly precious to us because [the Spirit] especially instructs us as to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . He takes of the things *of Christ*, and shows them unto us.²⁹

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Finally it gives a vision for a distinctively catholic–evangelical form of theology. It recognizes the interdependence of church and gospel. It celebrates the gift of the gospel to the church and receives all the good things that God gives through the continuing life of the church, while at the same time remaining vigilant to the church’s capacity to obscure the gospel, and the need always to direct the church to the Christ revealed to us in the scriptures through the ministry of the Spirit. In his magisterial study, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, which had similar aims to this book but which approached the issues the other way round, from a catholic rather than an evangelical perspective, Michael Ramsey acknowledged that the great themes of the Reformation – “The Word of God”, “sola fide”, “sola gratia”, “soli Deo Gloria” . . . are Catholicism’s own themes, and out of them it was born.’ ‘But’, he went on to confess, ‘they are learnt and re-learnt in humility, and Catholicism always stands before the church door at Wittenberg to read the truth by which she is created and by which she is judged.’³⁰ That seems to me to capture something of the spirit of the windows and the challenge of a catholic evangelical theology in the Spirit.

The theological method proposed by the windows in this small nineteenth-century evangelical chapel reminds me of a much grander project designed and executed by the Renaissance painter Raphael in the early years of the sixteenth century in the Stanza della Segnatura, the palatial rooms of the formidable Pope Julius II in Rome. At one end of the Pope’s large private library Raphael created a massive scene of the church in theological dispute. *La Disputa* depicts the church on earth in a passionate theological discussion, with bishops, priests, monks and people, young and old, men and women thrashing out the finer points of eucharistic doctrine. Above them is the heavenly church, with the Holy Trinity at the centre of the picture, directly above the holy table. At the heart of the Trinity is the ascended Christ, bearing the marks of his death. Gathered around the heavenly Christ and mirroring the church below is a collection of biblical figures and saints of the church, in deep conversation with each other. In the earthly scene in the

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lower half of the wall, one wise-looking figure, dressed in blue, the colour of heaven, fixes his powerful eyes on the Fathers of the church and points with the index finger of his right hand to the risen Christ in the heavens. Like the designers of the chapel windows, Raphael appears to be saying ‘The answer to all your theological questions is to be found in the living Christ, witnessed to by the biblical writers and the faithful theological tradition – look to him.’ Interestingly, Raphael places the Spirit between Christ and the church rather than between the Father and the Son, as more normal in the classic Western ‘Throne of Grace’ rendition of the Trinity. This allows Raphael to show that we do our theology in the Spirit and that through the Spirit’s ministry we receive the life and truth of the scriptural Christ.

It is fitting that one of these settings should be a chapel and the other a library. Chapels are places where Christ’s people, his *church*, gather in the present as others have in the past, to hear and to celebrate scripture’s *gospel* and to pray and praise *in the Spirit*. Libraries are places where we are drawn into the minds of brothers and sisters in the *church* over the centuries, listening in to their attempts to grapple with the *gospel* of the Christ of scripture, discerning how they have been led by the *Spirit* more deeply into Christ’s truth and life. It is also fitting that one should be a chapel in the evangelical tradition and one in the catholic tradition, showing that what I am proposing in this book is not new to evangelicalism – others have sought to do same thing – and that the theological instincts of evangelicals and catholics, insofar as they are led by the Spirit, are united in their common quest to know and to love Jesus Christ, in whom ‘all things hold together’.