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**Discipleship Goals in the Holy Trinity Brompton [HTB] Network of Churches.
An exploration of the theological trajectories of the movement and their implications for
the future of the network.**

Richard John Moy

Abstract

The Holy Trinity Brompton Network is comprised of some of the most influential and well-funded churches within the Church of England, closely linked to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and known internationally for the Alpha Course which originated at Holy Trinity Brompton [HTB] in the 1980s. As a network it provides a window into contemporary charismatic Christianity in the UK and beyond. This thesis details HTB's roots in an Upper-Middle Class Anglican Evangelicalism prevalent in the 1950s-1980s showing how those roots shaped its future trajectory. It then explores the impact of three waves of the charismatic renewal movement on discipleship goals in the church, paying attention to unconscious by-products of shifts in praxis, including substantive liturgical changes as John Wimber's 'Worship - Teaching - Ministry' service structure refocused worship. It then considers the impact of a pragmatic consumerism and managerial approach on discipleship goals from developing the network into what Pete Ward calls 'branded church'.

Using the Theological Action Research framework and ethnographic study to build a thick description which draws from interview data and other interactions with the network, it argues that these influences have caused an unacknowledged drift in 'normative', 'espoused' and 'operant' theology as the network has reorientated, and that a widening gap has emerged between what classic HTB network leaders would still see as their normative theology and the operant and espoused theologies evident in many network churches and leaders today.

A conversation partner of the 18th Century revivalists John Wesley and George Whitefield is introduced to show the full extent of this shift on discipleship goals when contrasted with the start of the evangelical era. This leads to a reflection on how the HTB network, as a case study in contemporary charismatic Christianity, has unintentionally vacated its evangelical Anglican heritage and how out of David Bebbington's quadrilateral definition of evangelicals as 'crucicentric, biblicist, conversionist and activist', the HTB network can only fully claim to be 'activist'. This is explored in relation to discipleship goals, and concludes with ways in which the network could reconnect with its evangelical heritage to bring normative, espoused and operant theologies into closer harmony.

**Discipleship Goals in the Holy Trinity Brompton [HTB] Network of Churches.
An exploration of the theological trajectories of the movement and their
implications for the future of the network.**

Richard John Moy

A Thesis in one volume submitted for the degree of
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Declaration

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. The thesis is my own work.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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The study was made possible by the openness and willingness of many in the HTB network to engage with this scrutiny, and Ric Thorpe and Archie Coates were key gatekeepers for that. It was also part-funded by the generosity of London Diocese and Christ Church W4, and by many big and little sacrifices from our family who have endured me studying and encouraged me on the way. An especial thanks to Anne and Jamie Harrison for regularly hosting me in Durham in the most wonderful of ways and introducing me to fine wine and

fine company on many occasions. I am particularly grateful to Andrew Moy and Paul Maddren for their time in proofreading the text, and to Dr Chloe Lynch for her comments on an early draft, and the many people who have read and commented on some of my emerging ideas along the way. All of you have kept me going when it would have been easier to stop.

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[Dedication:](#)

Prebendary John Theodore Cameron Bucke Collins

(25 August 1925 – 8 December 2022)

Introduction

Context

The Holy Trinity Brompton [HTB] network of churches is an expanding group of Anglican Churches and church plants associated closely with the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. HTB is best known for the Alpha Course, a Christian enquirers course which became prominent in the early 1990s and now runs in over 100 countries and over 100 languages. By 2018 Alpha claimed more than 24 million people had taken the course, including 1.3 million that year.¹ Since Justin Welby became Archbishop in 2013 the network of churches has expanded rapidly as Welby encouraged each Diocese to establish 'resource churches' using the HTB model. This has been funded to a large degree by the Strategic Development Fund [SDF] that Welby set up.

HTB's roots are in the evangelical Anglican wing of the Church of England that dates back to the 1730s, but its discipleship goals have also been strongly impacted by three 'waves' of the charismatic renewal movement and by a success and marketing culture that has enabled it to expand its brand well beyond evangelical Anglicanism. The thesis will show how in the early 1980s HTB's discipleship goals were fundamentally aligned to those of the normative theology of the prominent Anglican evangelical John Stott, and yet by 2016 HTB and All Souls could be considered by Mark Cartledge to be 'two different types of mega church, even though they belong to the same denomination.'² Cartledge summarised HTB as now 'reflecting pietistic and in particular Pentecostal impulses.'

This thesis will show weaknesses in the inherited Anglican Evangelicalism that HTB practitioners were keen to move on from (including some of the legacy of the influential Iwerne camp system ran by EM Nash for boys from highly selective public schools), and how the three waves of charismatic renewal each contributed to the pietistic / Pentecostal journey. While the first wave (1960s/70s renewal) could be largely accommodated in the

¹ Alpha International Annual Review 2018.

https://issuu.com/alphaannualreview/docs/alpha_annual_report_2018 [accessed 2 November 2019].

² Mark Cartledge in Mark Cartledge, Sarah Dunlop, Sophie Bremner, Heather Buckingham, *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice*. (Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 4

Evangelical Anglican system epitomised by Stott's 'Eclectics', the second wave, spearheaded by John Wimber, was a paradigm breaker with some unintended consequences in the long-term for discipleship goals. The final wave, known as 'The Toronto Blessing' provided the initial fuel for HTB achieving mega-church status, propelling the rapid growth of the Alpha Course, but also contributed further to moving discipleship goals in a pietistic direction and the need to sustain expansion.

It then shows how a success and marketing culture has been a third leg on the stool (alongside evangelical roots and charismatic waves), for explaining both the rise of the HTB network and a shift in its discipleship goals. It will show how the network has been able to successfully market an experiential religion epitomised in the Toronto Blessing/Alpha Holy Spirit Away Day, as 'a life worth living' [now]. Through 'preaching the positives', branded church and various marketing tools it has created a religious product that has appeal in a late modern consumer age.

However, whilst this 'espoused (publicly communicated) theology' has shifted focus and the 'operant (observable) theology' clearly looks different, for many of the early network pioneers the 'normative theology' (sources you consider authoritative – including Wimber and Stott) remains the same.³ But the gap between what may be privately considered important and public theology continues to grow, to the point that of the four markers of Evangelicalism David Bebbington outlines (activist, conversionist, biblicist, crucicentrist),⁴

³ Espoused, operant and normative theology are all terms drawn from the Theological Action Research project, elaborated on later in this chapter under Methodology. See Helen Cameron *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. (United Kingdom: Hymns Ancient & Modern Limited, 2013).

⁴ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1989), 2-3. His definition has won support for being succinct and clear even if perhaps understating revivalism (which may be seen in activism), sinfulness (which is implied in conversionist), and the sovereignty of God. Maiden and Larson etc also critique its lack of pneumatology. Nevertheless, even scholars less comfortable with Bebbington's definition have 'tended to defer to it.' Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe. *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17, see also Timothy Larsen, "The Reception given *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* since its publication in 1989", in Michael Haykin and Kenneth Stewart, (eds.) *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 21-36. See also Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989* for a similar historical span. For a summary of ways to categorise Evangelicalism see opening chapters of Andrew Atherstone & John Maiden (eds.), *Evangelicalism and the Church of England in the Twentieth Century* (United Kingdom: The Boydell Press, 2014), described by Andrew Goddard as a 'masterclass overview'. Andrew Goddard, "Review Article", *Fulcrum*, (9 March 2016).

only 'activist' remains a definite marker of the current HTB network when their operant and espoused theology is contrasted with Anglican Evangelical antecedents. While still highly evangelistic the invitation to 'try Alpha' and 'start a relationship with Jesus' will be shown to be a different thing to 'be born again'; the use of Scripture to have evolved and been sidelined in worship and ethics; and the felt experience of the Spirit to have replaced the cross as the locus of transformation in the Christian life.

This is significant because the HTB network's stated aim has been to 'change the model not the message' as they have sought to proclaim the gospel afresh to a new generation.⁵ This contrast is. But this work on their evangelical Anglican origins, made explicit by holding up the discipleship goals of Evangelical Revival practitioners John Wesley and George Whitefield as a mirror to the network, shows how and where these shifts have occurred. It brings into question Sandy Millar's statement that it is 'not the message that needs to change but the model', and how orientating to the needs of the 'market' can have long-term implications for theological drift. These are explored by focusing in on the discipleship goals that are explicit and implicit in the network.

Theobiography: Why The Research Matters To Me

This is an insider-ethnographic account of a movement which I have personally benefited from and am in sympathy with. It is a work of formal theology offered into a Charismatic Evangelical tradition that has often been seen as activist rather than reflective.

Indeed in 2006 Martyn Percy claimed that despite the 'millions involved in contemporary Charismatic Christianity, there is very little that could be classed as 'Charismatic Theology.'⁶ His argument was that no theologian of national significance had emerged within the movement and that it has distanced itself from systematic theology. Percy acknowledges 'exceptions to this rule',⁷ although they are 'slight in number' but that this must be balanced by the 'obvious lack of theology in mainstream Charismatic tradition... [meaning] there is

⁵ Sandy Millar quoted in Monica Furlong, *The CofE: The State it is In*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), 274.

⁶ Martyn Percy, *Clergy: Origin of Species*, (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 139

⁷ *ibid.* 140 Including Walter Hollenweger (1972), Peter Hocken (1986), Simon Tugwell (1976), David Watson (1965).

unlikely to be a developed Christology, soteriology, doctrine of the church and the like.’⁸ In his thesis, ‘Card-carrying Charismatics’ were unlikely to be ‘bogged down’ by tradition and ‘eschew a depth of participation in theological, ecclesiological, historical or sociological processes.’ While this may seem to be an unfair dismissal of the likes of Scottish Presbyterian Tom Smail and English Anglicans Michael Green and Anthony Thisleton, who each combined charismatic theology with genuine scholarship, there is nevertheless truth in Percy’s bold assertion. This meant that where ‘formal’ (academic) theologies emerged regarding charismatic praxis they often had an ‘outsider’ ‘sociological’ perspective.⁹ Indeed, even those writing with some sympathy, such as James Steven, can be clearly identified as ‘writing polemically’ in their analysis despite ‘eirenic intent’.¹⁰

Yet while theologically minded practitioners in the early years of renewal were more focused on practically equipping the church, in recent years there has been an increasing interest in formal theology among charismatics. In the UK, Mark Cartledge, Andrew Walker and Tom Greggs have been among those who have helped insider voices to be heard more clearly at an academic level.¹¹ Within the HTB Network focused on here, a significant level of academic engagement is now emerging. A key aspect of this has been the founding of the St Paul’s Theological Centre and St Mellitus College for the training of leaders and ordinands. Graduates have continued to significant doctoral research including Nick Drake whose 2018 doctoral work attempts to formulate a theology for Pentecostal and Charismatic worship based on Calvin’s notion of ‘Union with Christ’,¹² and Keir Shreeves whose 2019 PhD is on ‘Bonhoeffer’s homiletics: the Spirit-impelled word of the church for the world.’¹³ As I write,

⁸ Ibid, 140.

⁹ Including Percy’s own work on Wimber, which owed much to his reaction against excesses of Charismatic Christianity he experienced as a teenager at Christ Church Chorleywood. Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996).

¹⁰ Andrew Walker in his introduction to James Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church of England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002).

¹¹ See Mark Cartledge’s *Charismatic Glossolalia: an empirical-theological study*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) for his original contribution, Tom Greggs 2007 thesis dealt with ‘*Restoring particularity: The economic dynamics of Spirit and Son, with special reference to the theologies of Origen and Karl Barth*’

¹² Nick Drake, *Constructing a Theology for Pentecostal-Charismatic Worship using Calvin’s ‘Union with Christ’* (2018) Birmingham <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8516/>

¹³ Shreeves argues that for Bonhoeffer preaching is a pneumatological speech event, whereby the Spirit ‘actualises Christ from Scripture, establishing and sustaining the church, bringing a supremely relevant Word into the world and for the world.’ Shreeves, K *Bonhoeffer’s homiletics : the Spirit-impelled word of the church for the world* (2019) Aberdeen <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.794130>

I am aware of ten clergy in the HTB network who are engaging in DMin research through the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication, and former Dean of St Mellitus and HTB Assistant Curate, Graham Tomlin (the current Bishop of Kensington) has just been appointed head of the Church of England's new 'Centre for Cultural Witness' which will work with major University theological departments to communicate the Christian faith.¹⁴ This practical theology / ethnographic contribution thus sits alongside these emerging theologies.

When my research began in 2014 the HTB network was a place of support for my ministry. Network members, including those interviewed for this thesis, increasingly viewed me as an insider. Our church hosted HTB network prayer gatherings and I led a seminar, which feeds into this research, at one of the large HTB network gatherings for church leadership teams. Although I have never been on staff or even a member of HTB, the church, network and Alpha course have all impacted me greatly and I am a church leader within the charismatic Anglican tradition that HTB represents.

A few instances stand out. In 1996, aged 17, I joined an Alpha away day and began 'speaking in tongues' in response to Nicky Gumbel's video message. In 1998, I visited HTB at a moment of vocational crisis and was nurse-maided into the Church of England by the kindness and contacts of the then vicar, Sandy Millar. From 1997 onwards I have led Alpha courses with a Cambridge church youth group, with international students, with young people in a homeless hostel in Walsall, with students at Starbucks in Wolverhampton, and in church settings including an Anglo-Catholic parish in Staffordshire and each of the parishes I have served since ordination. In 2012 I moved to London and became friends with many of the HTB network ministers and within two years was invited to be part of the HTB network by the convener Ric Thorpe. In 2014 we planned a joint church plant with HTB from our Chiswick base. At a leaders' retreat that year I was singled out by a visiting speaker who prophesied that God would use my mind to greatly bless the network. Various of our staff and congregation have had deep connections with the HTB network. In 2017 from my

¹⁴ 'Bishop Graham to Step Down this Summer' (16 February, 2022) <https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/bishop-graham-to-step-down-this-summer/> [accessed 16 February,22]

studies Sandy Millar enabled me to spend considerable time with his predecessor John Collins and begin to record some of Collins' ministerial story.

From 2016 to 2021 I was a Regional Director within the New Wine Network which has been similarly impacted by John Wimber. Since 2021 I am also National Director for SOMA UK, an international mission agency for Anglicans in charismatic renewal historically linked with HTB. Ric Thorpe, now Bishop of Islington, remains a mentor and together with his successor as network leader Archie Coates (now Vicar designate of HTB), has been a key gatekeeper for the interview part of my research. In short, I am writing from what I know, about people I know, for people I know, albeit with enough of an outsider edge not to feel beholden to anyone. My hope is to write about, to, and for, a movement to which I am deeply indebted as an inside-outsider, or critical friend.

The Significance of the HTB network

HTB and the HTB network are inseparable from the Alpha Course. Alpha is a 'process approach' to evangelism with a 'crisis theology of conversion' that Andrew Walker asserts makes it 'undoubtedly the most successful evangelistic tool to come out of the United Kingdom in decades,' and more evocatively as 'spiritual nitro-glycerine... in a safety bottle'.¹⁵

The statistics on the uptake of the course are impressive. James Heard outlines its growth well in *Inside Alpha* and Stephen Hunt describes its growth from four courses in 1991 to 1994 when 2500 courses 'exploded' into being.¹⁶ 1994 was the year HTB became the UK epicentre of the phenomena known as The Toronto Blessing [TTB] explored later, and the year the Alpha Videos were launched.¹⁷ Alpha continued increasing in the 1990s to a peak of 10,500 courses in 1998.¹⁸ After some years where its influence was languishing (at least in

¹⁵ In his forward to James Heard, *Inside Alpha: Explorations in Evangelism*. (N.p.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), xv..

¹⁶ James Heard, *Inside Alpha*, especially Chapter 3. Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha? Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), 5.

¹⁷ Charisma magazine estimates that by May 1995 over 4000 UK churches had been impacted through this phenomenon (Stephen Strange. "More, Lord", *Charisma Magazine*, May 1995.) Guardian writer Jon Ronson, writing after interviewing Gumbel also credited Toronto as 'just the kick start Alpha needed... it caused Alpha to explode in the 1990s', and quotes Gumbel saying that '1994 was such an amazing year' and 'a wonderful, wonderful thing'. [nb TTB began in Canada on 20 January, 1994].

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/oct/21/weekend7.weekend> [accessed 2 December, 2019].

¹⁸ Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha*, 5.

the UK) it was injected with a new lease of life in 2015 through the ambitious free-to-access *Alpha Film Series* which allowed for a further expansion of online Alpha during the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020-2021.¹⁹ This £700,000+ project involved 200 contributors, 38 interviews of celebrities and experts, 12 location countries and 3 presenters, including Nicky Gumbel, a children's TV presenter Gemma Hunt and then curate-in-charge of Alpha, Toby Flint, (now leading a City Centre Resource Church in Bristol).²⁰ So for nearly thirty years since 1994 Alpha in various iterations has had an enormous impact on the UK church. As Rob Warner rightly asserted, Alpha is the great success story of British Evangelicalism since the 1990s,²¹ bringing new hope and life to many churches.

But the success of Alpha is not the sole reason to focus this study on the HTB network. There are three other factors and one key appointment that have combined to position it as a church and a movement of unrivalled influence within the Church of England. These are its leadership pipeline, church planting, institutional penetration and Archbishop Justin Welby.

HTB's leadership pipeline is epitomised by the growth of St Mellitus theological college partly out of St Paul's Theological Centre in 2005,²² which merged with the London and Chelmsford Dioceses' local ministry training course in 2007. Operating primarily from a London base in a church owned by HTB, by 2019-2020 St Mellitus' had 25% of the market share of all ordinands in the Church of England, (including 80% of ordinands from Leicester diocese).²³ The Dean of St Mellitus ostensibly answers equally to the Bishops of London, Chelmsford and the Vicar of HTB, which might exemplify both the scope and limits of HTB's influence over the wider college. The Dean and an Assistant Dean are part of the HTB staff

¹⁹ HTB saw Alpha attendances triple in online format: Heather Preston, "Alpha Course Sign Ups Triple During UK Lockdown" Premier Christian, (5 June, 2020), <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/alpha-course-sign-ups-triple-during-uk-lockdown> [accessed 18 February, 2020].

²⁰ See Alpha International accounts 2014-2016 on <http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk>, and annual review https://issuu.com/alphaannualreview/docs/alpha_annual_report_2015 [accessed 18 February, 2020]

²¹ Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966–2001: A Theological and Sociological Study*. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2007), 115.

²² <https://sptc.htb.org/about> [accessed 18 February, 2020].

²³ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/6-december/news/uk/number-of-ordinands-in-contextual-training-increases-by-142-per-cent> [accessed 18/2/20]. This impact reduced a little in 2021 the North-West dioceses launched their own version of St Mellitus, replacing St Mellitus North-West. <https://emmanueltheologicalcollege.org.uk/our-story/>

team and expected to attend the weekly HTB staff meetings along with over 100 other colleagues.

The model and methodology of St Mellitus' context-based training is important in considering the theological influences and trajectory of younger HTB network leaders. It enables young leaders to be identified within the network, trained on the job through placements in churches within the network and then deployed in church planting or revitalisation roles into churches that remain in the network. To enable this production line of clergy St Mellitus have had to show that they are sufficiently Anglican in staff, theology and structure to be a trusted delivery agent for a wider cohort of Church of England ordinands. Key to this is the College's self-descriptor "Generous Orthodoxy" and this thesis will consider how this broad and embracing ideal that enables an eclectic group of students to study there, has impacted normative, operant and espoused theologies within the network members themselves.

This leadership pipeline links very directly to HTB's church planting strategy and has been further developed through the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication which is another key mechanism for HTB to impact the wider Church of England. Despite the reach of Alpha, and the efforts in 1997 to standardise the 'product',²⁴ Alpha has after four decades failed to bring the 'evangelisation of the nation, revitalisation of the church and transformation of society' that are now HTB's three stated ambitious priorities.²⁵ Part of the fault for this has been deemed to be the inadequacy of the local churches delivering Alpha to replicate the Alpha 'experience' throughout the rest of their church life.²⁶ Hence a pattern of church planting, that began with the visit of John Wimber in the early 1980s, was intensified to reach beyond the Diocese of London to the nation and beyond, building on the

²⁴ Millar in Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues*, (United Kingdom: Kingsway, 2001), 207.

²⁵ Cf Andrew Davies "The Evangelisation of the Nation, the Revitalisation of the Church and the Transformation of Society': Megachurches and Social Engagement" in Stephen Hunt, (ed.) *Handbook of Megachurches* (Netherlands: Brill, 2019) 214-239. HTB vision can be seen at <https://crtrust.org> and <https://www.htb.org/our-story>

²⁶ Gumbel, network leaders retreat Jan 2015. This was predicted much earlier by Martyn Percy "Join the Dots Christianity. Assessing Alpha", *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, (May 1998): 14-15, who notes converts rarely properly integrate into local church and Ward who highlights the gap between regular church membership, Sunday worship and attending an Alpha course. Pete Ward. "Alpha – the McDonaldization of Religion?", *Anvil: An Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission* 15.4 (1998): 279–286.

extraordinary success in particular of St Peter's Brighton.²⁷ The clear strategy was to establish a 'City-Centre Resource Church' ['CCRC'] across the major urban areas of the country, and from them to establish a network of smaller church plants aligned to the HTB network.²⁸ The Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication [CCX] has been the central delivery agent for this and is also funded by the Church Commissioners. Training is run for churches across all traditions but is led primarily through leaders closely associated with the HTB network.²⁹ Through adept relationship management future leaders are identified from a variety of church backgrounds and nurtured to propagate the CCX methodology whilst also being trained on the job, usually at HTB network churches. They are then deployed into CCRCs many of which have come from an HTB stable. From 2015-2020 CCX supported 43 City Centre Resource Churches outside London in 30 Dioceses, magnifying HTB's impact on the wider church.³⁰

Key to this multiplication of influence were the permission-givers within the Church of England who were increasingly aligned with HTB as its institutional penetration increased. Two pairs of characters stand out. The ambitious incoming Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, partnered with Philip James, the Director of the Strategy and Development Unit for the Church Commissioners; and the long serving Bishop of London Richard Chartres (1995-2017)³¹ with his innovative appointment of Ric Thorpe as a 'Bishop for Church Planting' and founder of CCX.

The consecration of Ric Thorpe as 'Bishop of Islington' was one of the outgoing acts by which Richard Chartres sealed his influence over the Church of England post-retirement. Thorpe had been a long-term Associate Vicar of HTB, church planter in East London and Chartres' Diocesan Director of Church Planting since 2012. Chartres had advocated HTB church planting across the Diocese and developed a symbiotic relationship with HTB which

²⁷ An article in the 2015 Economist maps the growth from 30 people to 1000 since 2009. <https://www.economist.com/britain/2015/01/15/go-forth-and-multiply>

²⁸ See Churches Resource Trust www.crtrust.org for details including 'Vision Video 2018'

²⁹ Most of the core team at the Centre for Church Planting have been drawn from HTB network, including five out of six clergy: Bishop Ric Thorpe, H Miller, Darren Wolf, Mark Bishop and John Valentine. Full team listed here: <https://ccx.org.uk/about/> [accessed 4.4.21].

³⁰ See reports on www.ccx.org.uk including church directory [accessed 4.4.21]

³¹ Described as 'The last of the prince bishops', including by Ysenda Maxtone-Graham in the *Spectator* (11 Feb 2017).

included making Sandy Millar an honorary assistant Bishop in the Diocese. In 2015 he gained approval to take the See of Islington out of a 92 year abeyance and both make Thorpe into a Bishop with a national reach, and bring the HTB network even more firmly onto the top table of the Diocese.³² In the Lambeth Lecture later that year Chartres explained how at the beginning of his tenure in 1995:

The local hierarchy was unwilling to see HTB as much more than a conventional parish in the Area, and in particular was keen to restrict the numbers of curates that the Church could employ, even though there was finance available to enlarge the staff. The restrictions were fuelled by a liberal distaste for charismatic evangelicalism and a conviction that the supply of curates should be evenly spread throughout the Diocese, irrespective of the capacity to pay.³³

By contrast, 20 years on, the ambitions of the Diocese had become national leveraging learning particularly derived from HTB.

The revival of the See of Islington is intended to provide greater capacity to achieve our pledge of establishing 100 new worshipping communities in London by 2020, but it is also intended to be a gift to the Church nationally. My prayer is that it will be possible to learn from our experience and especially our mistakes so that other places will be able to surpass our successes.³⁴

But it was another 'homegrown' cleric, Justin Welby, who enabled that national influence to flourish. As an active member of HTB in the 1980s he was at the heart of the first HTB church planting season. Key members of his pastorate group went with John Irvine to

³² See explanation "Revival of See of Islington" [accessed 1 March, 2021].

<https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/the-revival-of-the-see-of-islington/> NB both Chartres' 2009 and 2015 appointees to the role of Area Bishop of Kensington (where HTB is situated) met with HTB approval, with Paul Williams rapidly expanding HTB church plants around his area and Graham Tomlin having been on staff at HTB whilst being Dean of St Mellitus. This trend has continued since Chartres' retirement with HTB network leader Adam Atkinson appointed Archdeacon of Charing Cross in March 2020.

³³ "Bishop delivers Lambeth Lecture" [accessed December 2, 2019]

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/bishop-london-delivers-lambeth-lecture-church-growth-capital>

³⁴ Ibid.

revitalise the nearby St Barnabas Church. Contemporaries like Nicky Gumbel and Nicky Lee left their legal and teaching careers respectively to train for ordination. According to his biographer it was at HTB that Welby learnt many of the key lessons he would bring to later ministry:

He witnessed at first hand a growing and innovative church, and knew that such things were possible, even in pluralistic modern Britain, even in the Church of England, whatever pessimists said to the contrary.³⁵

Justin Welby's own call for ordination was only rekindled in 1987 after the visit to HTB of John Wimber's close Vineyard colleague John McClure. In responding to this he gained first-hand knowledge of intransigence in an institutional church which his vicar, Sandy Millar, described as 'geared for maintenance not mission'. His Area Bishop, John Hughes, reportedly told Welby, 'there is no place for you in the modern church of England. I have interviewed a thousand people for ordination, and you do not come in the top thousand.'³⁶

His training took him in the footsteps of Sandy Millar, and HTB curates Nicky Lee and Tom Gillum, to the Anglican Training College, Cranmer Hall in Durham where Anthony Thistleton provided a learned environment for charismatically inclined open-evangelical ordinands.³⁷ From this platform Welby's ordained career seemed to take him further and further geographically and spiritually from HTB, drawing him to inner city ministry, reconciliation work and a broadening spirituality that made him comfortable in the silence of a continental monastery. Nevertheless for 13 years he still brought his growing family to the charismatic New Wine bible weeks still influenced by John Wimber.

When his rapid ascension to Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013 brought him back to London, evangelical Anglican commentator Andrew Carey predicted Welby's theology would move beyond its origins and become broader still, cautioning against expecting that Welby would

³⁵ Andrew Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity: Alpha and the Building of a Global Brand*. (United Kingdom: John Murray Press, 2022).

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.23

³⁷ According to Atherstone, Cranmer was also Nicky Gumbel's first choice before diverting to Wycliffe Hall.

replicate ‘too exactly the HTB model at Lambeth Palace.’³⁸ This thesis will suggest that both have been influenced by the other. On the one hand the HTB network’s theology has continued to broaden in a similar ‘generously orthodox’ manner to Welby’s, and on the other hand Welby has actively sought to replicate the growth of HTB through facilitating its plants around the country. He has done this by both commending it to Diocesan Bishops in the strongest of terms, and by incentivising its duplication with a Strategic Development Fund deployed by close ally Philip James from the Church Commissioners with an overall budget of £136million,³⁹ much of which is aimed at City Centre Resource Churches [CCRC] which are predominantly from the HTB stable.⁴⁰ The role of the central church finances should not be underestimated, nor overlooked for several reasons which we will return to in Chapter 4. The money impacts accountability, affiliation, allegiance, authority and autonomy of the church plants as well as being firmly linked to numerical markers for growth. All of these, this thesis will argue, have a propensity to impact the network’s theology.⁴¹

With an activist Archbishop, access to central church finances, the most prolific theological college, a Centre for Church Multiplication with national reach and episcopal backing, a recently revamped Alpha Course, and a multi-million pound turnover,⁴² HTB has come a long way from being a ‘society’ church in Knightsbridge. It is now a considerable enterprise needing to sustain finances, protect reputation and manage risk. Such substantive power in the life of the Church of England, tending towards what Weber termed a ‘structure of dominancy’, carries with it the risk to the Church of England of HTB exerting what JD

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/nov/10/justin-welby-archbishop-canterbury-holy-trinity-brompton> [accessed 18.2.20]

³⁹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/15-november/features/features/the-magic-money-tree-sdf-a-progress-report> [accessed 2.12.19].

⁴⁰ See <https://crtrust.org/about>. Others are aligned to the New Wine Network (stylistically similar to HTB), and some with the liberal-Catholic network ‘HeartEdge’. Conservative Evangelical plants in the Re:New stream tend not to be CCRCs.

⁴¹ ‘Whatever Justin decides we will do.’ Nicky Gumbel, in his platform speech at the HTB Leaders Conference 2015.

⁴² Income for constituent charities closely related to HTB in 2019: Parochial Church Council £11,982,478; Alpha International £12,535,508; St Paul’s Theological Centre £2,050,414; Church Revitalisation Trust £2,479,163; Worship Central £141,213

Thomson labels 'illegitimate power.'⁴³ For HTB the risk is of equivocating on core values to maintain such structural dominancy. Although the dynamic works in both directions the key consideration for this thesis is whether holding on to legitimate or illegitimate power may impact the voices of theology within the HTB network. Put simply, if a Diocese has sponsored a church plant, how far will the church planter adjust their espoused theology to fit into the culture of that Diocese? Or again, if the Church Commissioners are bankrolling much of the CCRC development, how closely aligned to and uncritical of the Archbishop who is loosening the purse strings will the central leadership of HTB need to be, even if theological or ethical developments within the central church take them further away from previously held normative theologies?

Furthermore, HTB's influence is not only constrained to the national Church of England. Through the ministry of Alpha International, Relationship Central, Worship Central, Prison Ministry, Leadership Conference, the Love Your Neighbour Initiative and more besides, this is a church and network with an increasingly global reach. The 2019 Alpha International Annual Report claims that 114 countries hosted an Alpha course in that year alone, and that other high-risk countries will have held courses that have not been reported for reasons of persecution. One fifth of the known courses were Roman Catholic.⁴⁴ Worship Central's annual report shows a similarly ecumenical intention, with training events held in 14 countries, over 100,000 people accessing their training since 2007 and their hit song 'Stir a Passion' achieving 3 million hits on Spotify in one year.⁴⁵

Hence the espoused and operant theology in the network and derivative charities has significant potential to impact the wider church in the UK and beyond. Yet influence is rarely a one-way street. Maintaining an intentional ecumenical engagement, among other factors explored below, has led the network to be both deliberate and limited in their well-disciplined public voice. As will be explored this has meant a de-emphasis of normative theologies that do not fit well with the main product, de-emphasising ecclesiology so that

⁴³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); JD Thompson, 'Authority and Power in Identical Organisations', *American Journal of Sociology*, 62:290-301; See also Stewart Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: SAGE, 1989), 189-190.

⁴⁴ 2019 Annual Review, p.6-7 <https://www.alpha.org/annual-review/> [accessed 4.4.21].

⁴⁵ 2018 Annual Report, pp.3-4 accessed [4.4.21] via www.register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk.

Alpha and other products can be embraced ecumenically. There has also been a gradual de-emphasising of the 'challenging lifestyle' aspect of discipleship goals, but this probably has as much to do with wider cultural sensitivities as finding the 'lowest common bar' for ecumenicalism.

This then leads to the core argument that this thesis seeks to make: The HTB network has expanded by simultaneously broadening the reach and limiting the scope of its espoused and hence operant theologies to have mass appeal. As its influence and power has expanded so has its distance from normative theologies previously considered to be essential. By looking more narrowly at discipleship goals within the network this thesis plots the journey through formal theology and suggests questions the network may wish to ask itself as it continues evolving.

Methodology

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the HTB network utilising the prism of the four voices of Theological Action Research [TAR]. It is ethnographic in attempting to provide what Clifford Geertz, (building on Gilbert Ryle) labels a 'thick description' of the network,⁴⁶ and is indebted to the TAR framework for analysing those findings.

The TAR framework derives from an awareness of the complexity of how theology is developed, oftentimes without the awareness of key practitioners. It utilises the four voices 'formal', 'espoused', 'operant' and 'normative' to provide TAR practitioners with a cyclical way of analysing Christian practice as 'faith seeking understanding', and a 'kind of theology' in itself which is committed to all research into faith practices 'being theological all the way through'.⁴⁷ It rightly asserts that our practices bear theology as much as our statements of faith.⁴⁸ So our 'faith-full' actions have a voice – our 'operant' theology, as much as our articulated 'espoused' theology. Espoused theology derives (to some degree at least) from our 'normative' theology – the theology that 'the practicing group names as its theological

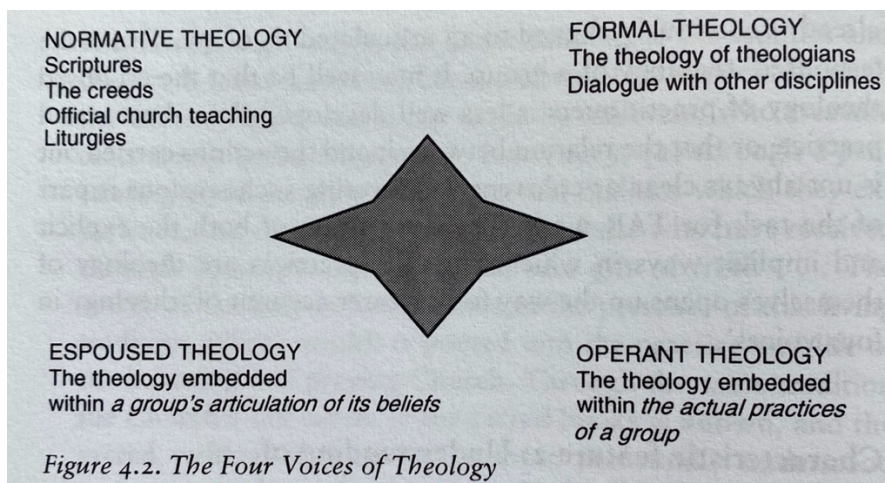
⁴⁶ Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

⁴⁷ Helen Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. (United Kingdom: Hymns Ancient & Modern Limited, 2013), 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

authority.’⁴⁹ ‘Formal’ theology completes the quartet of voices. This is a privileged academic or intellectual voice able to articulate faith seeking understanding reflectively, by both shining a light on the other voices and at times creating modes of thought that enable reflection in practice. Part of formal theology is dialogue with other disciplines, which Cameron et al suggest may involve engaging with a ‘second cycle’ such as the pastoral cycle, to get the benefit of this outside voice.⁵⁰ With that in mind this thesis interacts with the historical mirror of the discipleship goals of John Wesley and George Whitefield as a helpful evaluative tool.

Diagram One: The Four Voices of Theology:⁵¹



Advocates of TAR intend for each of the voices to be able to inform the other, so that practice can change even academic readings of theology. They articulate aspirations to ‘make a real difference’ and bring about ‘practical transformation’ through their conversational approach.⁵² This thesis essentially accepts the differentiation identified by TAR into the four voices and seeks to deploy that classification to give explanatory power to the developments that will be mapped in the HTB network.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 54

⁵⁰ Ibid. 107. This helps to test the robustness of the findings. In this thesis the outside voice is the historical lens of the Evangelical Revival.

⁵¹ Cameron, *Talking About God*, 55.

⁵² Ibid. 57-8. See Pete Ward, “Helen Cameron, “Life in all its fulness” Engagement and Critique: Good News For Society (a Response)” *Practical Theology*: 5.1 (2012) 28. Ward sees TAR as a positive way to find the theological as a key element in lived religion.

This can be illustrated briefly with regards to the topic of discipleship goals through the lens of the Vineyard Church movement in the USA as described by T.M. Luhrmann. It may be possible to have a *normative* theology emphasizing new birth, conversion, regeneration and a life of holiness and personal sanctification; an *espoused* theology that is self-consciously 'seeker-friendly' emphasizing the benefits to the individual of a relationship with Jesus and end up with an *operant* theology of a 'vulnerable God, who loves us unconditionally and wants nothing more than to be our friend, our best friend, as loving and personal and responsive as a best friend in America should be.'⁵³

TAR researchers point out that *operant* theology will in time challenge and even change *espoused* and *normative* theology. In other words, how we behave will (eventually) become what we believe. For the HTB network therefore it is helpful to map the development and strength of these voices. This formal theology seeks to remind the network of normative theologies that members still assume may be dominant, to establish through semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire which espoused theologies are actually dominant and to create a sufficiently thick description of operant theology through various levels of participant observation that both emerges from, and contributes to, what will be seen as ongoing slippage in the espoused theology away from previously held normative theologies. This will bring into conversation the voices currently evident in the network and ask which voices have become dominant, why, and on what trajectory that might take the movement?

Awareness of these voices was thus critical in thinking through an ethnographic 'thick description' of the discipleship goals in the network. For Greetz, a 'thick description' occurs where analysis accompanies ethnographic observation, giving a reason for the actions described.⁵⁴ As he understood it the researcher needs understanding of the rituals, customs and ideas of their subjects to avoid the trap of unfiltered observation. Quoting Ryle, he observes that one boy blinking his eyes may be an involuntary act, to another boy it may be

⁵³ Tanya Luhrmann *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. (United States: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 34. She describes the therapeutic perspective on Jesus on offer in experientially orientated evangelical churches. She particularly maps how some Vineyard churches in the USA developed away from John Wimber's original espoused and operant theology.

⁵⁴ See Joseph Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept Thick Description" *The Qualitative Report* Volume 11 Number 3 (September 2006), 538-549 for helpful description of how the term has developed since Geertz.

a signal and a third boy may be blinking as an act of mimicry.⁵⁵ The level of understanding of subtlety needed to pick up on these non-verbal clues presents an obvious descriptive challenge for any researcher not deeply imbedded in their subject matter.

The use of 'thick description' was expanded beyond Geertz' anthropological and Ryle's philosophical usages to sociology and the humanities by Norman Denzin who noted:

A thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing... It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.⁵⁶

A true thick description is notoriously hard to achieve. For Schwandt the key is to actually begin to interpret the 'circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode.'⁵⁷ This interpretive characteristic of description rather than amassing relevant detail is what makes it thick. For Denzin the key challenge is to 'reflect on experience as it occurs' to enable the researcher to 'record interpretations that occur within the experience as it is lived.'⁵⁸

Ponterotto's contention is that a thick description can be established through a common interview study as authorised in his context by the American Psychological Association.⁵⁹ It requires fully describing participants without compromising anonymity through including relevant demographic data and presenting concerns. Settings and procedures of interviews need describing in adequate detail as do the wider context that is being studied. This provides a 'sense of verisimilitude' to the reader and enables adequate critique of the

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Norman Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 83.

⁵⁷ Thomas Schwandt, *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (2nd ed.). (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 255.

⁵⁸ Denzin, *Interpretive*, 98.

⁵⁹ Ponterotto, *Brief Note*, 546.

findings.⁶⁰ The reader benefits from a ‘sense of the cognitive and emotive state of the interviewee (and interviewer)’, and the work seeks to create thick meaning for the reader as well as the participants and researcher, enabling them to ‘discern if they would have come to the same interpretative conclusions as the report’s author.’⁶¹

The privilege of this research has been unusually high access to what TAR calls the ‘primary gatekeepers of research’.⁶² Ethnographers debate the degree to which an interpreter can or should be immersed in their subject matter. According to Simon Coleman, Tanya Lührman (1989) sought to immerse herself in practicing magic to understand the world of modern witchcraft. Edith Turner felt she had ‘practically disappeared’ into the rituals of the Ndembu people who she was studying.⁶³ Yet most formal studies of Alpha/HTB so far have the feel of an outsider commentating and their recommendations have often seemed to them to fall on deaf ears. Hunt laments this in his second book on Alpha, ‘Nicky Gumbel told me he had bought my first book, read half of it and then had “permanently misplaced it.”’⁶⁴ Ireland, similarly to Hunt, was ‘left thinking that my research would have little appreciable impact on their thinking or the future shape of Alpha.’⁶⁵ Earlier academic commentators like Ward and Percy were similarly ‘courteously listened to’ and simultaneously disregarded, according to Heard.⁶⁶ Heard makes a strong case himself for writing as an ethnographer, with the insider’s perspective of five years on staff at HTB,⁶⁷ but ends up writing from the position of an ‘ex-insider’ offering a Kierkegaardian parting shot: ‘Woe, woe to the Christian church when it will have been victorious in this world, for then it is not the church that has been

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 547

⁶² Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney and Clare Watkins, *Talking About God In Practice* (London: SCM, 2010), 142.

⁶³ Simon Coleman “Are they really Christian” in J. Spickard, J. Landres, and M. McGuire (eds.), *Personal Knowledge and Beyond* (NYU Press, New York 2002), 76-77

⁶⁴ Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 19

⁶⁵ Ireland and Booker, *Evangelism*, 38

⁶⁶ Heard “Exploring Alpha” in Martyn Percy and Pete Ward, *The Wisdom of the Spirit: Gospel, Church and Culture*. (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019). 77; although see Chapter 3 for account of how Ward felt ill-treated for his 1998 article on Alpha (but see also Mark Ireland, “Alpha” in Booker and Ireland, *Evangelism*, for evidence of Nicky Gumbel’s awareness and reworking of Ward’s McDonaldization thesis, where Gumbel uses Ritzer to argue that the McDonaldization is a necessary thing cf. George Ritzer. *The McDonaldization of Society* (United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, 2015).

⁶⁷ See Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 75-79 for an excellent discussion of the complexities of this methodology and the self-awareness necessary for conducting research.

victorious but the world.’⁶⁸ Yet on the other hand there is the danger of the observer being in too close proximity to the subject to have any perspective. As has already been seen the HTB network is a powerful institution utilizing patterns of ‘soft power’ and patronage such that several people sought to warn me to take care in writing this thesis.⁶⁹ Happily I have had far more encouragement than caution from within the network, but I am aware that, as I try to offer academic scrutiny back to the network that I hope will help it to flourish, I am walking something of a tightrope between all the insider access that has been kindly afforded to me and having sufficient outsider status.

As an immersed ethnographic investigation this work has the twin advantages of drawing from, but not being limited to, an interview study. On the one hand it draws most specifically from semi-structured interviews with 23 church leaders in the HTB network, including each of the three most recent vicars. These have all been carried out under ethical approval guidelines from the University of Durham. On the other hand, it has also been informed by a myriad of conversations, participant observations and interactions that I have had within the network since moving to London in 2011 and being invited to engage at a variety of levels by Ric Thorpe, Sandy Millar and others besides. This provides background colour for what I will seek to evidence from the formal interviews. But these ‘background colour’ conversations have repeatedly saved me from misinterpreting or misunderstanding key points and I am deeply indebted to the scores of other clergy and church members whose throwaway comments or longer dialogues have helped me build up a thick description that provides me with a ‘sense of ethnographic verisimilitude.’

Underlying all of the considerations above are the responses the HTB network has taken to ‘life in the Spirit’. Key shifts in the theologies in the network have most clearly come about through how it has interacted with charismatic renewal generally, and John Wimber in the 1980s and the Toronto Blessing in the 1990s specifically. As with Luhrmann’s study of Vineyard churches in the USA, part of the scope of this thesis is to see whether the paradigm shift of understanding that Wimber brought to the contemporary charismatic

⁶⁸ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 65.

⁶⁹ See Chapter Four for France Williams detailed account of his experiences at HTB in *Ghost Ship*.

church continues to be outworked in the manner and on the principles that he believed he was establishing. An espoused and operant theology of 'Life in the Spirit' enthused with a confidence in an encounter with the Spirit as a transformative event are key in understanding the HTB mindset. The big question remains whether such encounters negate the need for clearly articulated espoused theology on moral or ethical discipleship goals.

Since this research began Andrew Atherstone has published a helpful and well received work on the Alpha Course, already quoted above, that builds on his previous biography of Archbishop Justin Welby.⁷⁰ He lays out a number of criticisms of Alpha in detail (theology, style, culture) and 'deliberately leaves readers space to come to their own conclusions'. Atherstone writes as someone who has never attended key HTB events such as Focus, the Leadership Conference etc, and has never met Nicky or Pippa Gumbel in person, but has been able to review a vast array of primary and secondary source material given to him by HTB to author a book that celebrates the 'Global Phenomenon' of Alpha in the year Nicky Gumbel 'hands over the baton' as vicar of HTB.⁷¹

His title 'Repackaging Christianity' echoes Nicky Gumbel's aim in *Telling Others* (1997) not "to tamper with the apostolic message" but ensure its "cultural packaging" is not a stumbling block.⁷² Atherstone acknowledges that this 'provokes a fistful of questions'. Such questions are a key part of this thesis. His core chapters "Building a Brand" and "Marketing the Gospel" identify some of them. He quotes Sandy Millar praising Gumbel for 'stripping down the Gospel to its bare essentials', but also quotes Gumbel reasserting that 'we cannot change our doctrine or our message just to suit passing fashions.'⁷³ He maps out some of the issues of personality based product, 'relentlessly upbeat' marketing, promoting wealth and beauty, chasing celebrity endorsement and unsubstantiated testimonies – including a 'born-again thief' who ended up robbing thirteen churches after being held up as an example in Alpha News. But ultimately the book is a very positive account of Alpha seen as,

⁷⁰ Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*.

⁷¹ See Ian Paul, 'What has been the influence of the Alpha Course: Interview with Andrew Atherstone' <https://www.psephizo.com/reviews/what-has-been-the-influence-of-the-alpha-course/> September 7, 2022. (accessed 12.12.23)

⁷² Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 58-59.

⁷³ Ibid.

‘an opportunity to explore Christianity, repackaged in a convivial, informal, experiential environment’.⁷⁴ What is less clear is any assessment of whether that repackaging could or has also refocused or reduced the theology of the network and hence unintentionally altered its discipleship goals. That is what this thesis explores.

As a contrast to Atherstone, early reference should also be made to Robert Warner’s 2007 critique of the attempt to ‘brand’ evangelical Christianity by what he calls the ‘conversionist-activist’ axis of evangelicalism (drawing from Bebbington’s terms). He identifies a key weakness in the approach to ‘market the message’, by Nicky Gumbel and others in the 1980s and 90s arguing that:

Their advance has proved volatile, transient and self-limiting, promising levels of success that proved untenable. By relativising traditional evangelical convictions, theological and ethical, through pragmatic experimentation and a persistent emphasis upon contemporaneity and cultural engagement, the entrepreneurs opened the door, however unintentionally, for the subsequent emergence of progressive reconfigurations of evangelical identity.⁷⁵

Thesis Map

This thesis examines developments in discipleship goals at HTB partly by holding up two mirrors to the movement from the two historical bookends of David Bebbington’s *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from 1730s- 1980s*. As well as contrasting the discipleship goals of the HTB network with those of Wesley and Whitefield from the eighteenth-century it begins by considering HTB’s roots in Evangelicalism. In particular, it shows how much it owes to the ‘classical evangelical’ position of the 1950s-1980s closely associated with the Iwerne Camps, John Stott and the ‘Eclectics’. This longer view is important because of the assumption in the HTB network as clearly stated by Sandy Millar, that the ‘gospel has not changed, only the model.’⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid. 240

⁷⁵ Warner, *Reinventing*, 144-5

⁷⁶ See Furlong, *CofE*, 274.

Chapter One begins the work of painting a thick description of the HTB network through describing its once deep roots in the school of Anglican Evangelicalism represented by EM Nash, founder of the (now infamous) Iwerne Camps and John Stott, Rector of All Souls Langham Place. This school provides a second tightly held normative theology by which to evaluate developments in HTB and helps establish the seismic cultural shift and sense of liberation that John Wimber's visit to the UK in the 1980s brought to the movement. The chapter concludes with a comparison between the espoused theologies evident in HTB and All Souls Langham Place during the COVID-19 pandemic to show a divergence that Mark Cartledge refers to in a recent study of mega-churches. It suggests that the network owes much to John Stott in particular, and that some of Stott's instincts in bridging between biblical teaching and culture have been embraced by the HTB leadership as they attempt to teach into the felt needs of their community, despite a divergence from All Souls on teaching and discipleship praxis.

Chapter Two explores the impact on HTB of the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s 'waves' of the Spirit associated with Renewal, John Wimber and the Toronto Blessing. It shows how Renewal in the 1960s and 1970s could be an add-on to a normative theology aligned with John Stott. It then considers the impact of John Wimber's visits to the UK and the degree to which his advocacy for 'Kingdom Theology' could contribute helpfully to a normative theology for HTB. It also illustrates how his new espoused theological paradigm of 'doing the stuff' paved the way for substantive shifts in operant theological practices, not least in worship style, and helped create a culture of measurable church growth and church planting that paved the way for both the expansionism now witnessed in HTB and yet also left it susceptible to a success orientated mindset and willingness to break with the past. This can be seen in how the promise of a world revival from the 'Kansas City Prophets' was embraced by the church leadership. An examination of the impact of The Toronto Blessing [TTB] concludes the chapter showing how this energised the expansion of the Alpha course between 1994 and 1998 and how rapidly HTB's operant theology continued to diverge from All Souls Langham Place.

Chapter Three details the expansion of Alpha International and the HTB network in the wake of Wimber's visits and the Toronto Blessing. Using data from the interviews it

considers how the rapid expansion resulting from these respective 'waves of the Spirit' fuelled the pre-existing desire for growth and the external influences that fanned this into what can be clearly seen as a success orientated movement. It shows how Wimber's theology, modelling and praxis of church planting and association with the Church Growth Movement have been galvanising factors in the success of the HTB Network, but also shows how creating and sustaining growth may impact on discipleship goals, and even end up being an organisational goal in itself.

It examines the success narrative through the lens of the interviewees exploring whether an experience of the Spirit may lead to heightened expectations of success. It considers how success is defined and used to galvanise effort and, by corollary, how failure is viewed. It analyses how this has impacted their espoused and operant theologies and the outworking of discipleship goals. It outlines the critiques that can be brought to this understanding of success and considers how managerialism, pragmatic and church growth considerations, celebrity culture and a skilful packaging of the message, continue to impact espoused and operant theology. The pivotal question set up at the end of the chapter is whether the HTB network has predicated too much on the very thing that sparked its growth in the first place, viz. a tangible encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Four deepens the thick description through analysing the findings of semi-structured interview process and questionnaire in more detail. It focuses on theological developments in the network and particularly how a truncated eschatology and pneumatological dependency impact on discipleship goals, identifying a key theological shift towards 'a life worth living now' and 'Kingdom come'.

Chapter Five has the role of a historical mirror by which to evaluate these trends. It outlines such common discipleship goals as can be established from the very different ministries of Wesley and Whitefield, and holds them up as a mirror to the current HTB network. The chapter shows where the HTB network has continuity with either or both of Wesley's well organised Arminianism or Whitefield's dramatic Calvinism. It shows that what Wesley and Whitefield held in common is more than a sufficient mirror by which to examine the 21st Century movement. The chapter will show how both movements emerge out of austere

circles making a 'serious call for a devout and holy life', and are birthed from an imminent, tangible and transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit, leading later to unusual manifestations of that Holy Spirit at a time of their greatest expansion.

Chapter Six integrates these findings into the developing ethnographic picture of HTB. It considers whether the operant and espoused theologies derived from either or both of 'success culture' and 'life in the Spirit' have fundamentally altered the normative theology of the HTB network from its roots in Stott's 'Eclectics'. It suggests some tools for evaluating this and questions for the network to consider if it is only the 'model' not the 'message' that it wishes to see changed as it tries to build on Stott's mandate to do effective 'double listening' between biblical and contemporary cultures. Finally, it concludes by pointing to the lesser known life and ministry of John Collins as an integrative model beholden to Stott, Nash, Whitefield and Wesley and marked by a rare humility and ability to engender 'ecclesial friendship', and an unsung hero whose foundations have enabled much of the growth at HTB. It shows that the strength of the HTB network is not so much in its products and productivity but its people. It compares the move of the Spirit that has birthed this movement to that which propelled Wesley and Whitefield into action and calls for a renewed confidence in the once for all gospel whose message has not changed. It reminds us that the long-term impact of the movement is not so much in grandiose statements about societal transformation but in each individual heart that makes the journey Collins did in 1962 to being dead to sin through life in the Spirit.

Conclusion

Surmises that an unrealised and unacknowledged theological shift has occurred in some parts of the HTB network away from core normative theologies as represented variously by Wesley, Whitefield, the Eclectics and John Wimber. This has been prompted by an operant overreliance on an experiential approach to work of the Spirit and espoused teaching that has focused on applications to immediate felt needs rather than theological and biblical systems anchored in a longer theological timeframe from creation/fall to eternity. A success orientated methodology has made critical distance hard to achieve for those in the network with success validating unexamined theological shifts and the propagation of a consumerist Christianity over and against clearly articulated discipleship goals. Nevertheless, within the

movement are the gifts and tools to counter these tendencies. The prized pneumatologically focused soteriology and ecclesiology in the network has a strong explanatory power for both its growth and for the extraordinary ecclesial friendships within the network. The foundational values and normative theologies that underpinned the growth of the network are still evident within most practitioners and there is every possibility they could be recovered for a new generation. Any theological slippages identified have generally occurred for missional reasons and there is much hope to come for the sort of discipleship within this network that early practitioners like John Collins would have been keen to see continue.

Chapter One: Evangelical Heritage

The Argument:

This Chapter considers HTB's identity within the history of Anglican Evangelicalism to tease out a strand of what might be the expected normative theology for the network. In Cameron's scheme, 'normative theology is concerned with what the practising group names as its theological authority – an authority that may even stand to correct, as well as inform, operant and espoused theologies.'⁷⁷ In the TAR framework, 'the very question of what is normative theology for a particular practitioner group becomes *the* question for attention.'⁷⁸ The chapter will show HTB's emergence from an Anglican evangelicalism dominated in the 1970s and 1980s by John Stott, the Eclectics and the highly formative Iwerne Camps, where normative theology included a strong sense of 'orthopraxy' as well as 'orthodoxy'.⁷⁹ Later chapters will show how three 'waves' of charismatic experience in the 1960s, 80s and 90s unsettled this normative theology. It will then show how marketing strategy, success, managerialism, celebrity culture and a broad ecumenical context impact HTB's espoused and operant theology which in turn loosens the HTB network's ties with historic evangelicalism as a dominant normative theology. This shift has largely occurred in an unexamined, reactive and to some degree unnoticed manner. But the roots run deep and may prove to be an underutilised resource in a network that seems increasingly adrift from a clear normative theology.

Evangelical Heritage at HTB

In the 1970s St Paul's Onslow Square and Holy Trinity Brompton were joined together to form one parish. St Paul's, formerly known as the 'Evangelical Cathedral of London' under the 43 year ministry of Hanmer William Webb-Peploe (1837-1923),⁸⁰ was in the 1970s one

⁷⁷ Cameron, *Talking About God*, 54.

⁷⁸ Cameron, *Talking About God*, 55.

⁷⁹ In TAR the nature of the practitioner group helps determine what the normative theology voice is (see Cameron, *Talking About God*, 54). If the group demands conformity in both doctrine and practice both doctrine and practice become part of the normative theology. Being 'sound' in a Iwerne camp setting would hence be a shorthand for having both correct thinking and correct lifestyle. See further Atherstone and Maiden, (eds.) *Evangelicalism*.

⁸⁰ 'Appeal for St Paul's, Onslow Square', *Times*, 25th January 1952, p. 6. Cited in Atherstone and Maiden (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 1. See also Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, for an extensive, authorised history.

of only three large evangelical 'preaching' churches in London (along with All Souls Langham Place and St Helens Bishopsgate). While it had a thriving congregation, it also had substantive roof issues. Holy Trinity Brompton was a 'society church' whose best-known vicar Bryan Green (1901-93) was a traditional 'liberal' evangelical. Despite having a professional choir and being an established place for Etonian weddings it was in dire financial straits. According to James Heard Holy Trinity Brompton had also experienced some 'Holy Spirit rumblings' since 1969 when the curate held 'secret monthly meeting with speakers such as Colin Urquhart and Jean Darnell, although Andrew Atherstone traces these back further to the 'Divine Healing Mission' meetings hosted by HTB since the 1950s, which led to a 'steady stream of renewalist pioneers' speaking at HTB under the 'Divine Healing Mission auspices.'⁸¹ Bringing the two churches together fell to conservative evangelical Raymond Hilton Turvey (vicar from 1975-1980), who had been instrumental in planning the Keele Congress (NEAC 1967) in a previous role at St George's Leeds. The main driver was financial insolvency and need for roof repairs.⁸²

Charlie Colchester, churchwarden from 1977 to 1994, described how the pressure of the merger nearly broke both Turvey and John Collins, his successor.⁸³ The professional choir proved intransigent. There were full-blown shouting matches between outgoing wardens and extreme pressure from the PCC. There was much pain in change management.

Raymond Turvey (1916-1995) was, in Colchester's analysis, 'an outstanding man of God, a strong solid evangelical.' His peers clearly trusted him, as he held the position of secretary of NEAC for many years under the chairmanship of John Stott.⁸⁴ Yet Turvey had charismatic leanings telling his curate Sandy Millar to 'get on and pray for everybody (to be filled with the Spirit) and I'll explain what you meant.'⁸⁵ He also gave space to Millar to develop a radical house group comprising of 'fiery' young charismatics like Nicky Lee, Ken Costa, and Nicky Gumbel (many recently converted in a Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union

⁸¹ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 7. Atherstone, *Repacking Christianity*, 2.

⁸² Randle Manwaring, *From controversy to co-existence: evangelicals in the Church of England, 1914-1980*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 176-180.

⁸³ Colchester, *Interview*, 31 August, 2019.

⁸⁴ National Evangelical Anglican Congress. See Kenneth Hyslop-Smith, *Evangelicals*, 1988, 290-2; 323-5 for its significance.

⁸⁵ Sandy Millar, interview, 14 September 2017.

(CICCU) mission led by David MacInnes).⁸⁶ But as an established and trusted member of NEAC for Turvey to be outwardly charismatic would be to go against the strongest characters within the evangelical hierarchy. He later confided in Millar that he had appointed him to do what he could see needed to happen but couldn't do himself.⁸⁷ Ultimately Colchester maintains that while the merger broke Turvey he is 'in many ways the unsung hero of HTB.'⁸⁸

Turvey's successor in 1980 was John Collins (1925 - 2022). Collins also had a deep heritage within Anglican Evangelicalism. He was the son of a Victorian clergyman, converted at the Iwerne camps, where Henry Chadwick was his mentor. He was a former CICCU president, who led England Cricketer and future Bishop David Shepherd, to faith in his college rooms.⁸⁹ He was a contemporary of Timothy Dudley Smith and Dick Lucas at Ridley Hall. John Stott appointed him from 1951-57 as his 'senior' curate at the rapidly growing All Souls Langham Place, where he regularly deputised for months at a time while Stott wrote and travelled.⁹⁰ When he left to become vicar of St Mark's Gillingham, EM Nash of Iwerne Camps trusted him with the development of prized curates David Watson and David MacInnes.⁹¹ And while as will be seen later, his experiences of the Spirit in 1963 left him estranged from former evangelical mentors and peers, he remained a committed evangelical and deeply loyal to Stott right up to his death in 2022.⁹²

Sandy Millar (1939-), vicar at HTB from 1985-2005, came into ministry in a very different manner. Although already a member of Holy Trinity Brompton, and on the church council

⁸⁶ See Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 21-26 for further details.

⁸⁷ Millar, op cit.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ David Shepherd, *Steps Along Hope Street: My Life in Cricket, the Church and the Inner City*. (United Kingdom: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), 214-217.

⁹⁰ See Julia Cameron, *John Stott's Right Hand: The Untold Story of Frances Whitehead*. (United States: Cascade Books, 2018), 98, 121. Stott could be away for four months at a time during Collins' ministry. They holidayed together, discovering Stott's writing retreat the Hookses while on vacation in 1952.

⁹¹ See David Watson, *You are My God: A Pioneer of Renewal Recounts His Pilgrimage in Faith*. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), 53-57. Collins' personal papers however reveal that Nash was aggrieved with him as neither Watson nor MacInnes took on public school chaplaincies after their curacy with him. See also Teddy Saunders and Hugh Sanson, *David Watson: A Biography*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992). 47. Collins was also instrumental in Watson's conversion on a CICCU mission.

⁹² See Anderson, Allan. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 153 for Stott distancing himself from former curates including Collins and Michael Harper. In several interviews Collins reiterated to me: 'All my theology is Stott's'.

(PCC), he was converted aged 28 ‘through a combination of my wife and the Holy Spirit,’ and soon after prayed for by charismatic South African speaker David du Plessis (1905-1987) at a Fountain Trust event (one of several organisations promoting charismatic renewal that Michael Harper would found). Hence Millar argues, ‘I have never known a non-Spirit-filled Christian existence.’⁹³ Thus, unusually for 1970s and 1980s curates at HTB, he had no personal allegiance to Anglican Evangelicalism as defined by Iwerne or Stott.⁹⁴ This may have contributed to his early adoption of John Wimber and his ‘normative’ Kingdom Theology as discussed in Chapter Two. Nicky Gumbel (vicar 2005-2022) was also a later convert - as a student on the David MacInnes CICCUC mission - but was intensely disciplined in the Iwerne system for several years (particularly by the since disgraced Jonathan Fletcher).⁹⁵

This helps explain why David Fletcher, brother to Jonathan Fletcher and EM Nash’s successor running Iwerne Camps, described the Alpha Course proprietorially as ‘basically the Iwerne camp talk scheme with charismatic stuff added on.’⁹⁶ Rob Warner similarly concurs that Alpha, which Gumbel adapted from fellow HTB curates Charles Marnham, John Irvine and Nicky Lee, is a ‘paradoxical hybrid’ of Iwerne camp ‘rationalistic conservatism’ and John Wimber’s ‘charismatic expressivism’.⁹⁷

In 1980 as a society church in Knightsbridge with an increasingly strong evangelical identity partly inherited from St Pauls Onslow Square, HTB easily drew in laity and clergy from Iwerne backgrounds who had been schooled in ‘camp theology’ like Collins, and especially if they had some openness to the charismatic Renewal ministry. The socio-economic make up of HTB in the 1980s meant that it had a substantive evangelical heritage within the upper-middle class Iwerne Camp system. Despite the increasing charismatic tendencies at HTB

⁹³ “Sandy Millar gives Norwich leadership insights” (14 June, 2018). https://www.networknorwich.co.uk/Articles/524679/Network_Norwich_and_Norfolk/Partners/Transforming_Norwich/Sandy_Millar_gives_leadership_insights_in_Norwich.aspx

⁹⁴ Millar’s story is expanded on in Chapter Two.

⁹⁵ See Nicky Gumbel: “Three Ways to Empower the Next Generation” <https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Youthwork-past-issues/2016/August-2016/Nicky-Gumbel-Three-Ways-to-Empower-the-Next-Generation> [accessed 6.3.20]. Discussed more fully in Chapters One and Three.

⁹⁶ David Baker, “Doing the impossible”. *Evangelicals Now*. Accessed 27 September 2011. <https://www.en.org.uk/1999/03/features/doing-the-impossible/>

⁹⁷ Warner, *Reinventing*, 122. Chapter Two will argue contra this that content of the Holy Spirit teaching on Alpha largely predates Wimber’s influence, and energy behind the expansion of Alpha owes at least as much to the Toronto Blessing as Wimber, but the thesis that Alpha is a paradoxical hybrid still holds some merit.

there was also remained a natural link to John Stott, who had trained Collins in ministry, and dominated the Evangelical Anglican scene through various roles, including as Founder Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and as a prolific author. This chapter thus now sets out the history and influence on HTB of Iwerne and Stott in order to assess the degree to which either or both provide normative theological voices by which to assess HTB.

The Iwerne System

Background History

King's 1969 study of British Evangelicals found that since so much of the leadership of the British Evangelical Church had been 'Bash Campers,' that it was impossible to understand British Evangelicalism without understanding the 'Bash camp mind'.⁹⁸ 'Bash camps' were the affectionate name for the Iwerne Minster Camps led by EJ Nash, (1898-1982), Scripture Union worker and ordained Anglican known as 'Bash'. Nash had the Protestant Evangelical love of the Book of Common Prayer and Authorised Version Bible, the Keswick Evangelical austerity and holiness teaching and, most critically, was a highly influential mentor to many of the Eclectics. The Eclectics were closely associated with John Stott who was arguably the most significant of a long list of Nash's summer campers and converts.

According to Roger Steer, aged 19, Nash had a 'vision in a railway carriage that he was to win Britain for Christ'.⁹⁹ Although that lofty goal was not reached, nevertheless through strategy, humour and ability to explain the gospel simply and attractively and train young men to do the same, Nash had an astounding impact on the Church of England. Michael Green devotes seven pages of his autobiographical sketch to 'the magnificent nurture' he had in the Iwerne system, stating, 'I have no hesitation whatsoever in regarding it as the main ingredient in my own spiritual growth.'¹⁰⁰ Nash is credited by Alister McGrath as a key

⁹⁸ John King, *The Evangelicals*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 159.

⁹⁹ Roger Steer, *Inside Story the Life of John Stott*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 33.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Green, *Adventures in Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 23-29. He recalls the Iwerne system of leadership development, spiritual disciplines and close mentoring in detail.

reason for the renaissance of British Evangelicalism in the post-war era,¹⁰¹ and the Iwerne alumni in his time range from Bishops like David Shepherd, Timothy Dudley Smith and Maurice Wood, to many of the leaders of larger 'student' churches of whom John Stott was of unparalleled significance.¹⁰² Despite Nash's own rejection of charismatic renewal these leaders included those who became champions in both conservative and charismatic evangelical streams.¹⁰³ Alumni also included the influential church historian Henry Chadwick, public school teaching staff and head teachers, two international Cricketers, and a Brigadier.¹⁰⁴

In a 2011 version of *Bible in One Year* Gumbel also paid tribute to Nash, (who he met at Iwerne when Nash was in his early eighties), saying 'I was spellbound, I had never before heard anyone speak with such authority.' He recalls Nash as 'extremely gracious and I sensed a deep humility'.¹⁰⁵ He concludes by reflecting on Nash's 'self-authenticating' authority, and how though 'today people are very wary of authority... which can be abused...authority can also be a source of great blessing.'¹⁰⁶ In the 2003 edition of *Questions of Life* Gumbel uses Nash as a 'notable example' of God using weak, inadequate and ill-equipped people who 'when they are filled with the Spirit become outstanding leaders in the church'.¹⁰⁷ He quotes John Stott saying: 'Nondescript in outward appearance, his heart was ablaze with Christ.'¹⁰⁸

Theology and Discipleship Goals

¹⁰¹ Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, United Kingdom: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994. 45.

¹⁰² Ministers include: Dick Lucas, Mark Rushton, John Collins, Nicky Gumbel, Hugh Palmer, Mark Ashton, Paul Perkins, John Coles, William Taylor, John Irvine, Richard Bewes, David Watson and David MacInnes. Note the influence on key churches including All Souls Langham Place, St Helen's Bishopsgate, The Round Church in Cambridge, St Michael le Belfry, St Aldates Oxford, Christ Church Clifton, as well as HTB and its early church plants.

¹⁰³ See account of David Watson's response to Nash's lack of enthusiasm in Saunders and Sanson, *David Watson*, 83-84.

¹⁰⁴ John Eddison (ed.), *A Study in Spiritual Power, An Appreciation of E J H Nash (Bash)*. (Crowborough: Highland, 1992).

¹⁰⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20110927163800/http://www.htb.org.uk/bible-in-one-year/authority-0> [accessed 6.3.20].

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 118.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Iwerne camps are extensively described in Timothy Dudley-Smith biography of John Stott.¹⁰⁹ There was a ‘highly-systematised pattern of pastoral care’¹¹⁰ and a theological system was a simple, even anti-intellectual, system rooted in propositional truth and historic evangelicalism.¹¹¹ It was deliberately non-intensive as Nash ‘had a horror of intensity, believing that spiritual commitments made in a highly-charged atmosphere, were unlikely to last.’¹¹² Instead there was a low-key, but meticulous follow up scheme, which ‘yielded dividends in the number of committed Christians going into Anglican ministry.’¹¹³ Nash drew heavily from RA Torrey as a mentor,¹¹⁴ and emphasised a personal encounter with Jesus.¹¹⁵ The centrality of the cross was evident in Nash’s simple saying: ‘The only way to Mansion House is through Kings Cross.’¹¹⁶ David Watson described how he gained from the camps, ‘excellent basic grounding in Christian doctrines, with strong emphasis placed on clarity and simplicity.’¹¹⁷ Orthopraxy as well as orthodoxy was a key part of Iwerne’s normative theology. Right behaviour as well as right belief was expected. As Chapman put it, Nash’s Christianity was ‘countercultural in its otherworldliness’.¹¹⁸

The 7000 alumni of Iwerne Camps were familiar with Wesley, Whitefield and holiness teaching. According to David Fletcher, Nash used to pray for ‘another Wesley to stalk this land’.¹¹⁹ Michael Green recalls that Nash had his soul ‘lit up’ by the same doctrine of ‘New Birth’ that had made ‘Whitefield a tireless preacher’.¹²⁰ His extensive letter writing campaigns to John Stott and others ‘counselled against worldly practices’.¹²¹

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Dudley Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* IVP 1999, 118-150.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 141

¹¹¹ David Winter, "A review of Inside Story: The Life of John Stott by Roger Steer". Church Times: 723. (May 7, 2010).

¹¹² Dudley Smith, op cit. 141.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1998), 146. Pete Ward shows how Nicky Gumbel in Alpha Video 11 uses an illustration directly from Torrey. Pete Ward *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and The Church*. (Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 110.

¹¹⁵ Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

¹¹⁶ Eddison, *Spiritual Power*,

¹¹⁷ David Watson, *You Are My God*, 1983, 39.

¹¹⁸ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 16.

¹¹⁹ in Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 65.

¹²⁰ Green, *Adventures*, 118.

¹²¹ Stott, *ibid*, 84.

Nash encouraged attendance at the Keswick Convention which had been the main depositum of holiness teaching since the 1870s.¹²² The Keswick discipleship goal emphasis was not so much inward facing purity but activism. Holiness was seen as an empowerment for service rather than individual personal holiness. The espoused discipleship goal was for a 'joyful' and 'victorious' Christian life, which meant that while campers might accept an inevitable degree of ongoing sin that should nevertheless be fought against.¹²³ But there was no room for licentiousness. Nash, 'cultivated a ruthless self-discipline himself in the fight against temptation and urged upon others the same safeguards and control'.¹²⁴ He used a common analogy from Keswick teaching on 'being dead to sin' from Romans 6 in which he described a dead dog and explained that a touch of the foot would show if it was only sleeping. If it was only asleep it would instantly respond. A dead dog would not, and neither should Christians be easily stirred into sin. Perhaps ironically in the light of Nash's antipathy to charismatic renewal it was the aspiration to be 'dead to sin' most probably imbibed from Nash that was a significant factor in David Watson and John Collins' pursuit of a higher Christian life whereby they could truly affirm they were dead to sin. This in turn led each to their dramatic encounters with the Holy Spirit at the beginning of 1960s Charismatic Renewal (see Chapter Two).

Many of these disciplines were what Wesley and Whitefield termed 'means of grace' - including abstinence from external markers deemed to be sinful (dancing, make-up, theatre, ornamentation).¹²⁵ He was famously anti-alcohol and pro-celibacy and 'adamant that Christians are at liberty to marry only Christians and, indeed, that mature Christians should only marry mature Christians'.¹²⁶ His style was to 'boldly confront and rebuke'¹²⁷, and his closest allies could call him 'a little ruthless, even intolerant'.¹²⁸ And yet despite this he was a man of 'outstanding virtues...irresistible charm, perfect manners and considerations'¹²⁹

¹²² see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 153-55; 171-74. for details on Nash and Keswick see Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: a Global Ministry*, 34.

¹²³ Rob McAlpine, *Post Charismatic? Where Are We Now? Where Have We Come From? Where Are We Going?*. (United Kingdom: David C. Cook, 2008), 28.

¹²⁴ Stott in Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 92

¹²⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 214.

¹²⁶ Stott in Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 93

¹²⁷ Ibid, 93

¹²⁸ Eddison in Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 26

¹²⁹ Ibid, 27

credited with a 'crowd of people at his funeral who considered themselves as his spiritual children.'

Nash officially retired in 1965 but stayed involved in Iwerne and ministry until just a few years before his death in April 1982. Nash's system had been so enculturated into the movement that it extended beyond his formal retirement. Nicky Gumbel explains how intensely he was mentored through the Iwerne system when he was a new convert aged 19. As recently as 2016 he wrote:

I am so grateful to Jonathan Fletcher. When I first encountered Jesus in 1974, Jonathan met with me for three hours every week for a year, and regularly thereafter until I left university. He became a great friend. He taught me the Christian faith. He explained to me how to read the Bible and how to pray. He recommended Christian books and answered my questions. Even though I had only just encountered Jesus myself, he encouraged me to lead others to faith in Jesus and to straight away pass on what I was learning.¹³⁰

Critique: *Spiritual Power, Abuse and Avoiding Controversy*

Two months before Nash's death allegations of abuse by two lay leaders (John Smyth and his young accomplice Simon Doggart) were made to the leadership team.¹³¹ Smyth was described by one of his victims as the 'darling of the Iwerne Minster Holiday Camps, the famous lawyer representing Mary Whitehouse on the news'.¹³² The abuse occurred after Nash's formal retirement and was detailed in the *Rushton Report*, but then effectively buried by the leadership team who arranged for Smyth to go into exile to Zimbabwe where his abuse tragically continued. Iwerne has repeatedly made the national press between

¹³⁰ Nicky Gumbel: *Three Ways to Empower the Next Generation*
<https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Youthwork-past-issues/2016/August-2016/Nicky-Gumbel-Three-Ways-to-Empower-the-Next-Generation> [accessed 6.3.20].

¹³¹ 'The Rushton Report' can be read
<http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/970485/27843482/1519929269713/The+Ruston+Report+on+John+Smyth+h+1993.pdf?token=b5ZM1XU9leAUV05%2BfBelEJFZCiE%3D> [accessed 15.3.20]. This suggests Smyth tried to recruit two other senior campers for his 'cult' activities, before Diggart, 'one of whom refused to take part.'

¹³² Stibbe, Mark in <https://www.churchnewspaper.com/52014/archives> [accessed 6.3.20].

2014-2021 as firstly, the suppressed report on Smyth has come to light evidencing the abusive extremes of 'spiritual discipline,' and secondly, due to similar spiritual and physical abuse allegations against Jonathan Fletcher - a key Iwerne clergyman and one of the most prominent conservative evangelical clergyman of his generation.¹³³ Both Smyth and Fletcher engaged in naked beatings of boys from top public boarding school backgrounds, inserting themselves into these young men's lives as a substitute father,¹³⁴ and accounting for their abuse in spiritual terminology.

Nash's brief biography was entitled '*A Study in Spiritual Power*',¹³⁵ and it is a sad appendage to its history that Iwerne will now in perpetuity be associated with these misuses of spiritual power by Smyth and Fletcher et al. that occurred outside of the camp and after Nash's formal retirement. Yet reading the eulogies of Nash's life with hindsight, the spiritual power system at Iwerne included contributing factors: austerity, demanded disciplines, hierarchical command system, gender discrimination, campers encouraged to meet one-to-one for directive meetings with senior 'officers' - even in bedrooms or private cars. At the very least the camp culture created a climate where abuse was possible. The influence extended late into many men's ministries and Nash was not above telling his campers how to run their churches.

There were some who broke away from Nash, with Bishop David Shepherd arguing that a complete break could be needed to be free of his considerable influence.¹³⁶ Some of the eager adoption of the liberating 'waves of the Spirit' explored later can be best understood as a rebound to the enforced austerity and rigid practices of the Iwerne system. And yet amidst scores of abused and hurt former participants are many hundreds of others, like

¹³³ Extensive reports are available see: Charles Foster, November 28 2019, '*Smyth, Fletcher, Iwerne, and the theology of the divided self*' <https://anglican.ink/2019/11/28/smyth-fletcher-iwerne-and-the-theology-of-the-divided-self/> [accessed 16.2.22]

Andrew Graystone, *Bleeding For Jesus John Smyth and the cult of the Iwerne Camps*, (United Kingdom: Darton, Longman & Todd Limited, 2021) is the most extensive study.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Andrew Graystone has also alleged that abuse from the Iwerne set was more extensive than has yet been seen.

¹³⁵ Eddison, *Spiritual Power*.

¹³⁶ Sheppard, 2002, 256.

Michael Green, who have attested positively to the camp system's formative and lasting impact on their lives.¹³⁷

In many ways Iwerne was to Anglican Evangelical Renewal what William Law's *A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life* was to John Wesley and George Whitefield. But whereas even after what might be considered Wesley's 'encounter with the Spirit' in May 1738, he both continued and propagated many of the spiritual disciplines he had begun under the influence of Law, this thesis will show that those who encountered the Spirit in the 1980s and 1990s especially proved far less likely to propagate the 'means of grace' promoted at Iwerne. In fact, Stott himself had already helped shift evangelical spirituality away from the 'world-denying' focus of Keswick.¹³⁸ But after encountering Wimber (and later the Toronto Blessing) 'life in the Spirit' for many came to mean an even more thorough liberation from the rigours of this system, with its undercurrent of what we now know to be hidden horrors of abuse and sin.

One key reason the abuse prevailed was that the Iwerne system actively avoided controversy and 'rocking the boat'. Criticising those in authority was seen as 'bad form', especially if they came from your 'set'.

Controversy is eschewed by "Bash campers"; it is held to be noisy and undignified- and potentially damaging. As a result, many issues which ought to be faced are quietly avoided. Any practical decisions that must be made are taken discreetly by the leadership and passed down the line. The loyalty of the rank and file is such that decisions are respected; any who question are likely to find themselves outside the pale...It does not give a place to the process of argument, consultation and independent thought which are essential to any genuine co-operation, inside the church or outside the church.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Green, *Adventures*, 23-29.

¹³⁸ See Gordon Wakefield (ed.): *The SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. (United Kingdom: SCM, 2003), 139

¹³⁹ King, *The Evangelicals*, 159.

In recent years Gumbel, like Justin Welby, has taken understandable pains to distance himself from Iwerne.¹⁴⁰ Nash was edited out of the aforementioned anecdote on power by the time the 2019 version of *Bible in One Year* was published, and replaced by John Collins, (who is given the same eulogy verbatim as had been attributed to Nash in 2011).¹⁴¹

John Stott

Background History

According to TIME magazine John Stott was in the 100 most influential people of the 20th Century.¹⁴² Nash was a key part of this story. After a school visit on 13th February 1938, Nash took Stott (aged 16) out in his car to ‘discuss the way of salvation’ seeing that he was a ‘seeking soul’. He then left him alone to his own reflections and that night Stott was converted.¹⁴³ Nash prayed regularly to see the conversion of the most talented young men,¹⁴⁴ and continued to write with detailed instruction to Stott over the next five years. He later described the young Stott ‘as the most thoroughly converted young man he had ever met.’¹⁴⁵ Stott recalls Nash’s early letters as so formidable to read that he often had to pray for 30 minutes before opening them.¹⁴⁶ Nash’s impact was such that Alistair Chapman sees Nash as the primary influence on Stott’s early spiritual development and that ‘much of Stott’s own life, thought and ministry would be traced to the outline provided by Nash.’¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ The Times: 1 June 2017. ‘*Welby changes his tune about abuse*’. Welby was previously reporting saying his involvement in camps finished when he went to France in 1978 and recalling another perpetrator of abuse John Smyth as “charming” and “delightful” in 2017, before having to backtrack in the wake of further revelations. cf Andrew Atherstone *Archbishop Justin Welby: The Road to Canterbury*. (United Kingdom: Darton, Longman & Todd, Limited, 2013), 35.

¹⁴¹ Nicky Gumbel. *The Bible in One Year: A Commentary*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton. 2019), 129

¹⁴² ‘Heroes and Icons: John Stott’ by Billy Graham, April 18 2005 in *2005 TIME 100*, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1972656_1972717_1974108,00.html [accessed 20.3.21]. See also Michael Cromartie in 2004: ‘if evangelicals could elect a pope, Stott is the person they would likely choose.’ [cited in Brooks, David (30 November 2004), ‘*Who is John Stott?*’ New York Times

¹⁴³ Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, USA, 2012), 13. See video testimony from Stott <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/80-years-ago-today-conversion-john-stott/> [accessed 6 March, 2020], and Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 83ff for his own account of Nash.

¹⁴⁴ "Lord, we know that thou dost love one talent and two talent men, but we pray that thou wouldst give us a five talent man." Sheppard, *Steps Along Hope Street*, 256.

¹⁴⁵ Nash to John Collins, recalled in pers. comm 19/02/2018

¹⁴⁶ Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, 85-86.

¹⁴⁷ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 14.

Whereas Nash offered a simple theological scheme, described as ‘deep-rooted anti-intellectualism’, Stott refused to follow suit on the Iwerne tendency of ‘fulfilling minimal requirements while essentially ignoring the implications of what was taught’ when it came to studying theology for ordination.¹⁴⁸ Whilst Nash was praying for another Wesley, appealing to Whitefield’s New Birth and focused on the full conversion of a limited number of public school boys, Stott became a central figure in the rapid development of evangelicalism on an international scale and interpreter of the movement to a rapidly developing culture. Chapman sees him as ‘a standard bearer for the changes that made 2000 evangelicalism very different to that of 1940.’¹⁴⁹ He was a leading figure in helping Christians respond to cultural change. Born in a country that saw itself as ‘strong, proud and Christian’ Stott lived to see ‘all three claims lose their plausibility by the time he had reached mid-career.’ At the same time global evangelicalism, for which he was a figurehead, boomed. ‘He had to deal with both revival and marginalisation.’¹⁵⁰

Stott’s significance within the Anglican Evangelicalism the HTB network would eventually emerge from, can be seen from Gavin Reid’s 1976 scheme which identified four stands of Anglican evangelicals:

- 1) ‘Protestant’: the last bastions of the Book of Common Prayer.
- 2) ‘Keswick’: emphasised personal spirituality and missionary minded – heirs of the ‘holiness tradition’ that traced its origins to the Evangelical Revival.
- 3) ‘Eclectics’: the emerging leaders of the movement since the 1950s, often younger clergymen who looked to John Stott, Rector of All Souls Langham Place as a father figure.
- 4) ‘Charismatics’: the youngest group, small by comparison but willing to align with non-evangelicals who had also experienced renewal, but often still influenced by Stott.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Bryan Cones, James Tengtenga, Stephen Burns, *Twentieth Century Anglican Theologians: From Evelyn Underhill to Esther Mombo*. (United Kingdom: Wiley, 2020), 121.

¹⁴⁹ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 7.

¹⁵¹ Gavin Reid, ‘The Evangelical Coalition’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 26 March 1976. On the difficulty of describing Anglican evangelical history note Atherstone and Maiden (eds.), *Evangelicalism*, 34 who argues the recent history of evangelicalism within the Church of England is, ‘wide open for future research’, with the three key texts by Randle Manwairing, Kenneth Hylson-Smith and Roger Steer that have been ‘foundational in formulating and propagating conventional wisdom’ on twentieth century evangelicalism ‘open to critical challenge.’ In their evaluation Manwairing portrays John Stott and Billy Graham as heroes saving the

Raymond Turvey would certainly be in group 3, whereas his successor John Collins was clearly seen by others as being in group 4 but actually overlapped with group 3 substantially, and considered that ‘all my theology was Stott’s’.¹⁵²

Stott: A Normative Theology for HTB?

For Stott, evangelicalism is the historic Christian faith revealed through Christ and confirmed in Scripture:

At the risk of oversimplification and of the charge of arrogance, I want to argue that the evangelical faith is nothing other than the historic Christian faith. The evangelical Christian is not a deviationist, but a loyalist who seeks by the grace of God to be faithful to the revelation which God has given of himself in Christ and in Scripture. The evangelical faith is not a peculiar or esoteric version of the Christian faith – it is the Christian faith. It is not a recent innovation. The evangelical faith is original, biblical, apostolic Christianity. Our fundamental desire is to be loyal to the biblical revelation.¹⁵³

Timothy Dudley Smith sees Stott as entirely committed to Bebbington’s quadrilateral.¹⁵⁴ The uniqueness of Christ, personal conversion, the Scriptures as God’s living word, and the centrality of the cross are all foundational to Stott. Stott was by no means anti-intellectual

movement from itself, a narrative arc continued by the more measured Hylson-Smith and adopted in ‘racy’ fashion by Roger Steer. (Hylson-Smith described his own 1983 PhD thesis on (pre-war) Anglican Evangelicals as ‘a voyage of discovery into scantily chartered waters.’). Colin Buchanon, ‘Released from the Ghetto’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 8 December 1978, p.12 described Evangelicalism as ‘a river which had broadened from a narrow stream into a wide delta, with less momentum or clarity of direction but which now irrigated a much larger area beyond its original banks.’

¹⁵² A point Collins repeatedly made clear in interviews over 3 years.

¹⁵³ John Stott, Presidential Address to the 1982 Conference of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, quoted in Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: An Introduction*, 21-22. See further Stott’s own definition of evangelicalism, in chapter ‘Evangelical Essentials’ in his own book *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 13-34, 39.

¹⁵⁴ Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: An Introduction*, 21. Dudley-Smith’s works on Stott include *Authentic Christianity: From the Writings of John Stott* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1995); *John Stott: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995); *John Stott, the Making of a Leader—The Early Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); *John Stott, A Global Ministry: A Biography—The Latter Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

although he was a teacher-pastor more than an academic.¹⁵⁵ He ‘consistently taught a religion which claims to be true and not merely enjoyable or useful; which asks people to think, not merely to tremble or glow; which bases itself on a book which can be argued about, not on experience which convinces only the individual who has had it.’¹⁵⁶

His discipleship goals were clearly stated in his 24 word definition of preaching:

To preach is to open the inspired text with such openness and sensitivity that God’s voice is heard, and God’s people obey him.¹⁵⁷

The Christian is to be obedient to whatever is revealed through careful exposition of God’s word to them. The task of the preacher here is paramount. They carry the responsibility of faithfully determining what the text meant as written and sensitively applying this to the world they live in.

Stott’s tendency is to bring to light whichever aspects of discipleship he feels are lacking.¹⁵⁸

Hence in 1992 he focuses on:

- 2) listening (to God in Scripture, each other and the world).
- 3) mind and emotions (how God relates to us as both emotional and rational beings).
- 4) guidance, vocation and ministry (how we are called to serve).
- 5) the fruit of the Spirit (love).¹⁵⁹

Whereas, in his 2012 final book he calls the church to:¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Robert L. Reymond describes Stott as a mature pastor-theologian, a practised craftsman in the art of communication the gospel. Review of *The Cross of Christ*, by John Stott, *The Evangelical Review of Theology* 13 (July 1989): 280, and also Peter Williams, “John R. W. Stott” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 338-352.

¹⁵⁶ Edwards, “Power of the Gospel,” in David Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 16. He also refers to Stott as ‘the great teacher of the church’ (Essentials, 4). See also Stott on the need to abandon anti-intellectualism and employ minds in the quest for truth. John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 7-10.

¹⁵⁷ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (United Kingdom: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 208

¹⁵⁸ ‘My choice may be accused of being random except that all of them tend to be underrated and even overlooked.’ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*: 1992, 99-100

¹⁶⁰ John Stott *The Radical Disciple* (United Kingdom: InterVarsity Press 2012)

- 1) creation care, recognising God will renew all things.
- 2) nonconformity under his Lordship, ruling out escapism and conformism as available options.
- 3) Christlikeness in his incarnation, his service, his love, his endurance, and his mission.
- 4) grow, but to be far more concerned with depth than with impressive numbers.
- 5) simplicity as a community and in our personal lifestyles, allowing us to better respond to the needs of the poor and giving credibility to our evangelistic witness.
- 6) a way of life that holds in balance “our comprehensive identity” as followers of Christ: both individual discipleship and corporate fellowship, both worship and work, and both pilgrimage and citizenship.¹⁶¹
- 7) dependence instead of rugged individualism, recognizing that we’re intended to belong to a family and to a church, both characterized by “mutual burdensomeness.”
- 8) Christian understanding of death, not as something to be ignored or feared, but as the road to life — “one of the profoundest paradoxes” we’ll ever encounter.

As can be seen from this one of the hallmarks of Stott’s ministry, alongside his systematic biblical exposition was a willingness and ability to speak into contemporary issues. He steered the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 towards both social action and socio-political involvement, not least because of his commitment to ‘double listening’, which meant listening to God through scripture and the voices of men and women around us.¹⁶² Throughout 1978/9 he preached occasional sermons at All Souls (interspersed between the usual diet of systematic expository bible teaching series) on ‘Issues Britain Faces’, which then grew into lectures for the newly founded London Institute of Contemporary Christianity and the seminal 1984 book *Issues Facing Christians Today*.¹⁶³ This covered wide ranging issues from life in a post-Christian society, through global politics, inequality and the environment, social issues and sexual ethics. It concluded with a call to Christian leadership in which he calls for people of ‘clear vision, hard work, dogged perseverance, humble

¹⁶¹ Here he follows John Wesley when ‘he described Christianity as essentially as “social” religion and to make it a “solitary” religion would destroy it.’ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 219

¹⁶² What In Eden and Wells’ describe as, ‘a Christianity that is both biblical and contemporary’. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells, eds., *The Gospel in the Modern World: A Tribute to John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991)

¹⁶³ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering, 1984). Preface.

service and iron discipline,' to put into the action the extensive discipleship manifesto he has outlined and fulfil their own God given visions.¹⁶⁴

In many ways Stott outgrew Nash, and his theology had a far greater scope than Nash's in its desire for the transformation of society and not just young converts. Yet Stott did maintain that the greatest influences on his spiritual life had been Iwerne and the CICCUC.¹⁶⁵ This can still be seen in his summary of Scripture in *Contemporary Christian*. Stott maintains that God's word begins with the 'human paradox' that we have both 'dignity' and 'depravity' and concludes with the urgency of mission resulting from the 'parousia' of Christ when we will face judgment.¹⁶⁶ So he anchors his doctrine in a theological sweep that takes into account creation, fall, promise, salvation and continues onto judgment and eschatology. He is consistently Scripture-based arguing for the authority of Old and New Testaments 'out of plain loyalty to Jesus.'¹⁶⁷ His 1986 work *The Cross of Christ* described by Christina Baxter twenty years later as the 'most lucid defence of substitutionary atonement', shows the centrality of the cross in his thinking.¹⁶⁸ Stott remained a convinced evangelical teaching the uniqueness of Christ, personal conversion, the Scriptures as God's living word, and the centrality of the cross while also demanding an obedience to God in public areas of life (eg simplicity/creation care) that others might overlook. He saw the world as a 'place where God had revealed himself through Jesus Christ and through the Bible, and where people need to come to Christ for their salvation.'¹⁶⁹

Critique

Stott's theology was not static but evolved over time. Chapman notes he became more conservative on the issue of abortion, in contrast to his gradual liberalization on other issues, such as ordination of women.¹⁷⁰ Most controversially within evangelical circles was

¹⁶⁴ Stott, *Issues*, 378

¹⁶⁵ See Chris Wright, *John Stott: Pastor, Leader and Friend*. (Switzerland: Lausanne Movement, 2012), 75.

¹⁶⁶ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 371-374

¹⁶⁷ John Stott, *The Authority of the Bible*. (United States: InterVarsity Press, 1974). p.6

¹⁶⁸ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*. (United Kingdom: InterVarsity Press, 1986). Endorsement by Baxter in 2006 edition.

¹⁶⁹ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 8

¹⁷⁰ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 124-5

his nuanced and tentative support for the doctrine of annihilation (after judgement) argued for in 1988.¹⁷¹

Key to this study is Stott's (lack of) reception of the charismatic movement and the impact that was to have on distancing future versions of All Souls and HTB. As someone who believed he could hear God speak through his rational and prayerful exposition of Scripture, he was never able to embrace the (perhaps more feelings orientated?) charismatic movement which had impacted some of those closest to him including John Collins. When reflecting on whether the charismatic movement will finally prove to have strengthened or distracted the church, he replied in 2014:

I am not a prophet. I can't look forward. I think it is bound to have been more blessing than the opposite. But I'm very worried about the anti-intellectual aspect of it. Not all charismatics are anti-intellectual, I know, but there are very many who are. They dismiss me, again, because they say I'm not open to the supernatural on account of my Western rationalism. I disagree with that. I'm not a rationalist and I'm absolutely open to God; but I refuse to surrender my mind.¹⁷²

Nevertheless, Stott and the Eclectics' reception (or lack thereof) of the charismatic movement cannot be overstated in its significance for the divergence between the 'streams' that was to come. Maiden has helpfully showed that in 1960 John Stott was asserting in the parish magazine that 'only a revival could prevent the country from lapsing into complete paganism', a position Maiden argues helps account for the increasing religious fervour on his staff team and their subsequent openness to 'seek the pentecostal blessing'.¹⁷³ However this was 'ultimately to [Stott's] dissatisfaction, and while the 'work of the Spirit infiltrated the "Vatican" of Anglican evangelicalism', it led to tensions whereby the charismatics left.¹⁷⁴ Ultimately his 1964 work 'Baptism and Fulness: The Work of the Holy

¹⁷¹ Edwards, D. L. & Stott, J. *Essentials : A Liberal–Evangelical Dialogue* London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, pp. 313–320. Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 2012, 124-5

¹⁷² John Stott, *Balanced Christianity*. (United Kingdom: IVP, 2014). See also Stott, *Issues*, 31-32 for his longing that minds are renewed and a rebuke of 'anti-intellectual mood of this world.'

¹⁷³ Maiden, *Age of the Spirit*, 69

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 69, 59.

Spirit' was seen as an attempt to dampen, rather than kindle, the flame of the charismatic renewal revolution; although as Maiden reports by 1976 Stott recorded to his dismay from Singapore that 'the charismatic movement has engulfed the Anglican church from Bishop downwards,' after not appreciating their 'lively but banal choruses.'¹⁷⁵

Stott's critiques were echoed by many in the Eclectics, not always with his general charity. This impacted one of those closest to him, John Collins after his experience of the Spirit recounted in the next chapter which led him to a realised eschatological interpretation of Romans 6.

John Stott preached an alternate reading of Romans 6 at the Keswick Convention. John comments: "I learnt all my theology from John Stott so it was very difficult for me." John had to contend with significant ostracizing from peers and patrons, which to some extent left him out on a limb. David MacInnes recalls that there were a number of key larger churches that John would have been eminently suited for that he was subsequently overlooked for. This was probably exacerbated by stories where renewal had caused churches to implode, such as nearby Christ Church Beckenham, where a move of God under George Forrester had ended up in a mess.¹⁷⁶

A different critique came from JI Packer who represented a 'puritan' evangelicalism not fully accounted for in Reid's scheme above. JI Packer's biographer Ryken asked the intriguing question regarding Iwerne Camps: 'what kind of theology did such privilege produce?', and concludes that for Stott and others it resulted in an outlook that reflected a certain social grooming where an an upper-class lifestyle both isolated them from a 'seamier side of life' and gave a 'relatively optimistic view about human nature.'¹⁷⁷ Ryken argues that Packer, a 'blue collar' rural lad from 'unobtrusive stock' and of 'puritan temperament' saw himself as supplementing Stott's theology with the realities of sin and life. 'For Packer, Stott's

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 196.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Moy, *A Short Account of the Life of John Collins*, p.13
<https://yournameislikehoney.com/2023/05/19/a-life-lived-well/> [accessed 12.12.23].

¹⁷⁷ Leland Ryken, *J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life*. (United States: Crossway, 2015).

approach to evangelical renewal in the Church of England was “too bland for the reality of our pastoral world.” In particular, it lacked a sufficient view of human sinfulness.’

Ryken overstates the differences between Packer and Stott when he argues that Packer had an approach that was more intellectual than Stott’s.¹⁷⁸ Yet whilst Packer focused on training the mind to ‘know God’, he sees Stott as imitating the work at Iwerne and thus being much more focused on the role of community based experience in generating faith. So despite Stott’s reason-orientated lecture style of sermons Ryken argues, ‘Stott and his followers stressed *pietistic community based on experience*, while Packer stressed the importance of thinking in the parish.’ [emphasis added].¹⁷⁹

So, given Stott’s links to John Collins and Raymond Turvey and the number of other HTB staff members in the 1970s and 1980s who were also Eclectics and Iwerne graduates, this ‘pietistic community based on experience’ may well be an often overlooked influence on the development of HTB and Alpha, and the ‘relatively optimistic view of human nature’ and the aforementioned tendency to ‘avoid controversy’ should also be kept in mind as we explore discipleship goals and theologies, even if Ryken is overstating his case.

Stott’s Legacy: A Fading Impact on HTB?

In the late 1970s and early 1980s it is hard to overstate how pervasive John Stott’s influence was on evangelicals at HTB. As an illustration, a November 1980 edition of the *Brompton Magazine* carries a portrait of a young merchant banker, Ken Costa, who had been at HTB for four years, following his conversion in Cambridge 6 years previously. Although never having been a member at All Souls he still considers John Stott as the Christian who has most influenced him.¹⁸⁰ This influence was also evident in the interview findings reported later in this thesis. Alongside John Wimber, Stott was the most common influence on the

¹⁷⁸ See e.g. Roger Steer who argues Ryken ‘doesn’t quite get Stott right’ “*Review of Leland Ryken: J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life*” in *October 28, 2015* <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/ji-packer-evangelical-life/> [accessed 21.3.21]

¹⁷⁹ Ryken goes considerably further in this claim than Packer, who described Stott as a ‘first-class biblical theologian with an unusually systematic mind, great power of analysis, great clarity of expression, a superb command of his material, and a preacher’s passion to proclaim truth that will change lives.’ J. I. Packer, review of *The Cross of Christ*, by John Stott, *Christianity Today* 31, no. 2 (1987): 35.

¹⁸⁰ *The Brompton Magazine*, Nov 1980, 4.

older generation interviewed, and, partly because both Gumbel and Millar continued to recruit some key young staff who bridge the charismatic-conservative divide, has remained an influence for an (albeit diminishing) percentage of younger interviewees.¹⁸¹

In the 1980s the normative, espoused and operant discipleship goals at HTB would have been very similar to those at All Souls Langham Place. But evangelicalism of all flavours would diverge considerably from these roots over the coming decades. By 2008 JI Packer would make a general lament of evangelicalism:

Worshippers in evangelical churches, from the very young to the very old, and particularly the youth and the twenty- and thirty-somethings, know far less about the Bible and the faith than one would hope and than they themselves need to know for holy living. This is because the teaching mode of Christian communication is out of fashion, and all the emphasis in sermons and small groups is laid on experience in its various aspects. The result is a pietistic form of piety, ardent and emotional.¹⁸²

Some churches went further and faster in this direction than others, with HTB among those to make a substantive operant shift. In 2016 Cartledge et al, in a 'formal theology' assessment of London Mega Churches with 2000+ attendees which included All Souls Langham Place and HTB, concluded that a substantive theological deviation has occurred between the two since the 1980s.

They represent two different types of mega church, even though they belong to the same denomination: one is Conservative Evangelical, reflecting reformed commitments, and the other is Charismatic Evangelical, reflecting pietistic in particular Pentecostal impulses.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Examples include Jago Wynne, David Walker, Stuart Wright, and Jez Barnes. John Collins had a penchant for recruiting conservative evangelicals most dramatically John and Ele Mumford. See "The Global Vineyard – Meet John Mumford" <https://vineyardusa.org/library/the-global-vineyard-meet-john-mumford/> [accessed 26.5.21].

¹⁸² Packer JI "Evangelicalism's Winter?" *Modern Reformation* Nov./Dec. (2008) Vol. 17 2008, 30. see also Rob Warner: *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 2007 where he argues that there is an evidencable socio-political heterogeneity among younger evangelicals.

¹⁸³ Hunt et al, *Megachurches*, 4.

Without conceding that this description is entirely accurate, the following two chapters will explore two possible reasons for the undoubted divergence. Firstly, the impact of three waves of renewal in the 1960s, 80s and 90s, and secondly the expansionist agenda at HTB and the impact of importing what might be seen as secular success strategies or what Millar calls 'marketing'.

The success strategies are examined in detail later, but the evangelistic motivation is worth mentioning here in brief. Millar maintained that 'the trouble with the Church of England is that as the market is distancing itself from us we have been forced to change either the message or the model'.¹⁸⁴ He states that changing the message is a 'total failure' as the market hopes to hear that the church 'actually does believe in something'. Rather it is the model that needs changing, to connect with the young.¹⁸⁵

The lingering question remains whether it is possible to change the model without fundamentally changing the message. Market demands led to a substantive operant theology shift when Gumbel took over Alpha in October 1990. He found much of the group discussion was orientated around bible study and was focused on those who were already Christians.¹⁸⁶ Gumbel's second small group had all come to the course after the Christmas Carol service and to his surprise all came to faith. This made him realise Alpha could work evangelistically, 'but people who weren't Christians did not want to do bible study. When we sent out questionnaires asking, "What would you improve?" and they said, "We only enjoyed the small groups when we were allowed to discuss the talk." So, we changed the small groups.'¹⁸⁷ A similar operant shift was to move teaching on prayer before the teaching on the Bible, as people liked something they could experience.¹⁸⁸ It will be clear later that

¹⁸⁴ Furlong, *CofE*, 274. 'Millar seems to be uncritically referring to 'market' here.' This offers a fascinating parallel to Lambert's revisionist account of Whitefield playing for market share. If he is intentionally referring to the language of competition does this reflect a Ken Costa influence, or Millar's own CEO like abilities [cf. pers. comm Paul Perkins, 2015]? How much does a concerted drive for market share expansion account for Alpha's successes?

¹⁸⁵ Furlong, *CofE*, 274.

¹⁸⁶ Facing the Canon with Nicky Gumbel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sCruydnwso> from 34min.10 seconds [accessed 12.2.21].

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

what seemed like small operant shifts in the early 1990s developed into more fundamental espoused theological shifts as years and decades passed, and may have fundamentally altered the normative theology as well.

However, despite this operant shift in Alpha, bible-based expositional and systematic expositional teaching remained a norm for HTB and Gumbel in the 1980s and 1990s, with Stott's 'double-listening' process very much in evidence in their espoused theology. So, the official published follow up material for Alpha (which has been reprinted 11 times) was a fairly challenging exposition of the Sermon on the Mount named *Challenging Lifestyles* (1996).¹⁸⁹ In the introduction Gumbel acknowledges, 'the question often asked by our culture is not so much 'Is Christianity true?' but 'Is it real? Does it work? The world is watching. This is the challenge set before us.'¹⁹⁰ This has obvious echoes of Stott's own opening words in *Contemporary Christian* (1992) where he tells the story of two brothers who did not have a problem with whether Christianity was true but whether it was relevant.¹⁹¹ This follow on material roots believers back in the scripture by quoting Stott extensively in a way that would have few deriders among the Iwerne Camps alumni. This shows the connectivity of an earlier HTB to conservative evangelical roots. An alternative Alpha follow up book covers the Book of Philippians which was also published in the height of the Toronto Blessing era. It is titled: 'A Life Worth Living: Live a life of Purpose, Passion and Joy'. It is similarly expositional and challenging although marketed as 'practical and positive' with 'anecdotes never far away'.¹⁹²

All Souls / HTB Today in the 2020s

Teaching Topics at HTB – A snapshot from 2020

However, by the 2020s this pattern of trying to grow disciples through systematic expositional teaching has been shaken off in many HTB network churches, and particularly at HTB itself. An emphasis on 'practical and positive' teaching however has endured. This

¹⁸⁹ Nicky Gumbel, *Challenging Lifestyles* (United Kingdom: Kingsway, 1996). See later for comments on the fully revised 2018 edition retitled '*The Jesus Lifestyle*' and how and why it has been substantively rewritten for today's HTB and Alpha base. Gumbel, Nicky. *The Jesus Lifestyle: Practical Guidelines for Living Out Jesus' Teachings*. (United Kingdom: John Murray Press, 2018).

¹⁹⁰ Gumbel, *Challenging Lifestyles*, 9.

¹⁹¹ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 1992, 16-17.

¹⁹² Nicky Gumbel, *A Life Worth Living*, (United Kingdom: Kingsway, 1994).

can be illustrated in tabular form below with an 11-week review of teaching at HTB from autumn 2020:¹⁹³

Diagram Two: Autumn Teaching at HTB 2020.

Date	Title	Key words/phrases ¹⁹⁴	Speaker	Passage(s)
23/8	Living with purpose in uncertain times	'Living in uncertain times and how God uses these times to bring new things from within us'	Jonny Gumbel (Nicky Gumbel's son, on staff at St Peter's Brighton)	Esther 4
30/8	A time to cross	'Jacob questioned, struggled and had confrontation with God, but he still steps forward and overcame his struggles - we have a decision to cross into all that God calls us to'	Pete Wynter (associate vicar HTB)	Genesis 32
7/9	Don't lose your voice	'Don't be afraid... your God given voice has been given to speak strength to those who are struggling and comfort those who are having a hard time'	Stephen Foster (teaching pastor at HTB)	Acts 18:9-10
13/9	'I am the way the truth and the life'	'There's nothing wrong in working in modelling but God had a different purpose for me... I didn't have a sense of direction... sometimes it's the smallest seeds that we sow into people's lives that can have such an impact.'	Tash Kusi, former model and trainee pastor.	John 14:6
20/9	In stressful times put first things first	'You don't need to do anything to earn God's presence, or to earn God's favour, you can come exactly as you are.'	Nicky Gumbel	Luke 10:38-42
27/9	A conversation with Nicky Gumbel	Shared experience of grief (Mick Hawkins) 'Care for the poor, weak and vulnerable...' 'finding love, finding purpose, finding a sense of belonging...' 'church must take a lead on social justice [not criticise] – it's about love, God's love done through humility – the model of Jesus'. Successes of Alpha and HTB's social outreach 'Love Your Neighbour' campaign.	Nicky Gumbel	Isaiah 61:1
4/10	The Power of Love	'What I didn't expect to encounter was the amazing love from the people I met [at HTB] eyes so twinkly, had this life I knew I didn't have, so attractive, such love... came on Alpha, heard how you could have this relationship with Jesus... first time I was prayed for to be filled with the Spirit it felt like Jesus himself stepped into my pit. Felt like liquid love was filling me.' 'Non-judgemental love and the power of the Holy Spirit' 'Love that gives resilience, courage, hope... and helps anxiety' Testimony about Love Your Neighbour... Make church famous for Jesus' love.	Sarah Jackson (CEO church revitalisation trust)	John 13:34-35
11/10	The faithfulness of God	Over 8.2 million people in the UK suffer with anxiety disorder...so I want to talk to you about how to live in God's peace. It's easy to turn in to yourself but God calls us to Himself... when we feel lost and out of control even if nothing else changes he will give us the peace of God – a peace that confuses people when they see us.	Jemima Haley (HTB Alpha curate)	Phil 4:6,7
18/10	How to make the most of your next 6 months	How to 'bloom where you are planted' during this challenging season... historical reflections on verse quoted from 'Bible in One Year' readings this week... 'in the middle of this period there is HOPE' God has a good purpose for you... where you are right now is where God	Nicky Gumbel	Jer 29:11

¹⁹³ This 11 week survey was conducted during COVID-19 lockdown, so all the teaching presented to the church was straightforward to review in online format. See <https://www.htb.org/sunday-talks-archive>

¹⁹⁴ Quotes taken either from the official summary from the website, or where that is brief and non-descriptive from key quotes distilled from the audio.

		wants you to be... bringing hope to those around you. (final 25% is a 5-minute+ ministry time invoking the Holy Spirit to give hope)		
25/10	10 words to transform your year	Exposition of 'Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer' 'encouraging us to root our joy in Jesus, stand firm in the midst of trouble, and turn our worries in prayer.' 'if your joy is dependent of circumstances it is always going to be limited by them.'	Stephen Foster	Romans 12:12
1/11	How to find an unshakeable hope	'She found an unshakeable hope in the person of Jesus' 'where do you put your hope'... 'the love, the hope, the healing that you can have in Jesus has no limit' finishes with prayer to invite Jesus into your life... ,	Katherine Chow	Mt 12:20

These consecutive weeks are illustrative, but not unusual, in having a wide range of speakers, standalone topics and diving into scripture at well-known passages conducive to making positive and practical comments on the presenting issue of the day – viz Covid-19. In the Autumn term of 2019, prior to COVID-19 and any need to make a response to this, the series presented was on 'Life Hacks' covering ten topics such as 'passion over anger', 'forgiveness over resentment', 'trust over worry.' This was again presented by an assortment of speakers and a medley of favourite bible verses interwoven with simple application and uplifting illustrative and often personal stories. An earlier series that year was focused in the Book of Judges, albeit with a piecemeal approach looking at so-called 'Imperfect heroes' and with each talk branded with purposeful titles such as 'How to build strength of character' or 'How to have confidence'.

'How to...' is the most common descriptor for talks on the HTB archive, ranging from 'how to live with hard times' to 'How to change a city'. The second most common category (although they overlap) is about improving your (own) life: 'Living a joy-filled life', 'Reorienting and rededicating our lives', 'How to have a stand-out year'.

Comparison: Teaching topics at All Souls Langham Place

A simple contrast with the All Souls Langham Place sermon series over the same period tabulated above is illustrative.¹⁹⁵ A range of (male) speakers spoke, but each were disciplined to a clear brief and passage selection for their exposition. They ran two Sunday teaching streams and a midweek one over this time period including the end of a series on *Lessons from the Book of Ezra* (one chapter per week), *Questions God Asks* directly of

¹⁹⁵ <https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx>

people in the Old and New Testaments, *Journeying with Jesus* in the gospel of Luke (verse by verse coverage from Luke 9 onwards), and another systematic expositional series in 1 Peter '*Strangers in a Strange Land*' considering how to practice holiness as a scattered people. The mid-week series was on prayer at work. Whilst there is one 'how to...' title, few titles in these expositional series are about self-improvement or handling anxiety and other emotions. Where Covid is addressed directly in a one off special the theme is on 'rediscovering awe in lockdown'. Titles and themes include '*the path of suffering*' – the way to heaven is unavoidably the way of the cross, the '*privilege of mission*' – get on with evangelism, '*facing temptation*' – heed the warnings of God against temptation, and be equipped for the battle to resist, '*right fear, wrong fear*' – choosing the fear of the Lord over the fear of man, '*cutting corners*' – remember who you are working for, pleasing the King of justice, integrity and generosity.

Cartledge (Re-) Considered: Divergence between All Souls / HTB

This brief survey shows that in content, scope, structure and methodology underlying these teaching programmes the two churches in 2020 are distinct enough to validate Cartledge's contention that they represent different types of mega church. His categories of 'Pietistic' HTB and 'Puritan' All Souls, while simplistic, are well illustrated here. The HTB topics focusing on self-improvement and overcoming anxiety, peppered with anecdotes about the success of their programmes (Alpha / Love Your Neighbour) contrast markedly with the systematic teaching of All Souls whose themes orientate around who God is and what allegiance we may owe Him.

However, while HTB (in this snapshot at least), can be shown to have moved away from Stott's preferred form of expositional teaching, there is a sense in which they are doing a more focused job than All Souls at following Stott in speaking directly into 'Issues Facing Christians Today.' A government survey of the UK population in March 2020 found that almost half (49.6%) of people in Great Britain reported "high" (rating 6 to 10) anxiety; this was sharply elevated compared with the end of 2019 (21%), and equates to over 25 million people (out of the population aged 16 years and over).¹⁹⁶ This suggests that HTB's teaching

¹⁹⁶ ONS (2020) Personal and economic wellbeing in Great Britain: May 2020

series was a profound example of applying Stott's double listening. Furthermore, like HTB, Stott was not averse to addressing issues of emotion. He tells how he had to overcome his upper-class aversion to emotion when he became a Christian and how it led him to believe that there was a place for emotion in spiritual experience, public worship, gospel preaching and social and pastoral ministry.¹⁹⁷ Many charismatic Anglicans from a similar background came to the same conclusion through profound experiences in the charismatic movement. Nash reportedly called Stott, 'the most thoroughly converted boy I have ever met from the moment he was converted', so one explanation might be that Stott imbibed such a full measure of the Spirit at conversion that it took most others a few 'encounters with the Spirit' to catch up with.¹⁹⁸

Whoever is the true heir to Stott (if indeed either church is), the current divergence between the churches remains profound. This could be seen in embryonic form in the development of a 'rival' evangelistic course to Alpha in 2001 by Rico Tice at All Souls Langham Place. 'Christianity Explored' (originally 'Christianity Explained') is at least in format 'consciously modelled on Alpha'.¹⁹⁹ According to Ireland the key difference between Alpha and Christianity Explored is the 'difference in theological position between the churches' summarised in terms of pneumatology and approach to Scripture:

All Souls does not share the charismatic emphasis of HTB, and stresses the centrality of biblical exposition rather than personal experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, there is one talk on the Holy Spirit (compared to [a whole weekend on] Alpha), and the first five weeks are all Bible Studies on the person of Jesus as recorded in Mark's Gospel... Christianity Explored has a very strong emphasis on sin and grace. As the handbook explains, "A firm and counter-cultural emphasis on sin makes Christianity a disturbing experience... Grace is only amazing when sin is seen clearly."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 1992, 121-123 (perhaps contra Packer – see above).

¹⁹⁸ See further: Alister Chapman *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* Oxford, OUP, 2012, 115, a theory John Collins warms to, pers conv 06/11/2017.

¹⁹⁹ Ireland, in Ireland and Booker, *Evangelism*, 50

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 50-51. If Stott does have a 'relatively optimistic view of human nature' (as per Packer) it is interesting to question whether it is Gumbel or Tice's course that most reflects that starting point.

Opposition to Alpha and HTB within conservative evangelical circles, as well as a desire to 'market' Alpha more widely and ecumenically are partly behind Gumbel's reluctance to own the label 'evangelical', despite his roots in Iwerne and affinity to Stott. (This reluctance predates the times when political usage of 'evangelical' in a North American context became internationally toxic and abusive practices within the Iwerne camps by Fletcher and others became widely known). One typical response from Gumbel when pressed was 'I hate the word evangelical! If you torture me, I'm Anglican. But it's not helpful. We label people in order to dismiss them.'²⁰¹

Choruses, Conferences and Courses:

Despite Gumbel's aversion to the label, in 2014 Andrew Wilson, influential commentator and columnist for *Christianity Today*, (the media magazine first published by Billy Graham in 1956) made a compelling argument that HTB had come to represent 'The New Centre of British Evangelicalism'.²⁰² This is because its espoused theology has been broad and embracing, often focusing on operant practices rather than creeds and controversies. Wilson argues that:

Firstly, evangelical identity and alignment is now formed through 'conferences, courses and choruses' rather than denominational affiliation.

Secondly, this has significant theological implications, as the sorts of things that denominations had to agree on are not the sort of things conferences, courses and choruses need to agree on. An inter-denominational course does not need a policy on baptism and church polity and will likely stretch its soteriology to attract as many people as possible, although it will need to agree on whether men and women can teach or whether we can have charismatic ministry times. This elevates the perceived importance of the later above

²⁰¹ Matthew Bell, 'Inside the Alpha Course – British Christianity's biggest success story', *Independent*, Sunday 31st March 2013.

²⁰² Andrew Wilson, 'The New Centre of British Evangelicalism', 12th February 2014, *Think Theology*, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the_new_centre_of_british_evangelicalism [7th August 2019]. As Wilson sees it HTB has become central precisely because its espoused theology has been broad and embracing, often focusing on operant practices rather than creeds and controversies. If he is right then what HTB espouses matters even more for UK evangelicalism.

the former. Hence Alpha is presented as neither Calvinist or Arminian but it is clearly a conduit of charismatic experiences and therefore over time an encounter with the Spirit becomes the core identity of the course. and, as will be argued, a default soteriology.

Thirdly, this elevation of 'secondary issues' over doctrinal ones both contributes to and fits well with 'decreasing levels of doctrinal clarity in British evangelicalism as a whole.' In Wilson's words 'they have numerous staff and even worship leaders, let alone church members who do not agree with each other on all sorts of doctrinal issues... and allow huge theological diversity to be represented by speakers in their churches, conferences and Focus weekends.'

How many people who run Alpha or the Marriage Course, I wonder, know what view (if any) HTB have of penal substitution, or hell, or predestination, or gay marriage, or any number of other contentious issues in the contemporary church? (Egalitarianism, as mentioned above, is probably the exception that proves the rule). Most evangelicals will wonder why it matters: if someone has a good course, or runs a good conference, what difference does it make what they think about penal substitution, hell, gender roles or gay marriage?

He sees this as broadly positive noting that:

HTB represents British evangelicalism's friendly face: biblical but not dogmatic, evangelistic but not ranty, activist but not politicised, Anglican but not really, centred rather than boundaried. Hard not to like, right? And certainly more likely to unite evangelicals, and to get favourable write-ups from cultural gatekeepers in the Telegraph or the Guardian, than the hardline confessional types.

Wilson's lingering question regards 'some of the theological issues that wash through HTB' which 'haven't (in 2014) come to any public expression yet'.

Conclusion

Whether it likes the label 'evangelical' or not, the HTB network has emerged from a particular dominant school of upper-middle class Anglican Evangelicalism that was historically rooted in the 'activist, conversionist, biblicist, crucicentric' movement Bebbington describes.²⁰³ Some of this heritage and culture was subverted by charismatic renewal in its various waves as will be seen in Chapter Two, and other parts were challenged by the expansionist agenda explored in Chapter Three. The sort of 'evangelicalism' Wilson describes above where conferences, courses and choruses make a new unity around operant (lowest) common denominators also understandably pushes the network away from a confessional identity and normative theology. However, there are riches in their heritage, particularly in the highly able pastoral-theologian John Stott, which the network should consider drawing from again. There is a normative theology for HTB that self-consciously roots itself back to Wesley and Whitefield in evangelical history, and to exposition of Scripture for matters of discernment and discipleship goals. Stott's 'godly ambition' for church and society was not limited to individual salvation but mirrors HTB's own stated aims: 'The revitalisation of the church and the transformation of society.' Those members of the network who benefited from an evangelical heritage before coming into charismatic experiences may also like to reflect if they have 'thrown the baby out with the bath water' in their rejection of some aspects of classical evangelical culture and may also like to reflect whether they have adequately passed on what was good from that heritage to the following generations.

²⁰³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2-3.

Chapter Two: Waves of the Spirit

This Chapter continues to build a thick description of HTB by chronicling the three ‘waves’ of charismatic experience in the 1960s, 80s and 90s which it will argue have successively unsettled HTB from the evangelical ‘rock from which it was hewn’ normative theology. These ‘waves’ are in fact the second, third and fourth ‘waves of charismatic phenomenon’ commonly identified as occurring within the twentieth century.²⁰⁴ None of these waves should be defined too tightly, as they overlap and have antecedents, including the Divine Healing Mission which operated out of HTB from the 1950s onwards.²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, there are significant distinctions to each wave. The chapter shows how the reception of each by Collins, Millar and others at HTB, both fuelled the growth of HTB, its network and influence and also subsequently changed the espoused and operant theology at HTB substantially as it had to adjust to new paradigms of theology-model-practice in each ‘wave’. It considers the degree to which Wimber became a new ‘normative theology’ for HTB and what with hindsight may be lacking in that model. It also highlights how a reaction against these ‘moves’ of the Spirit within (increasingly) conservative circles exacerbated the separation between ‘Conservative Evangelicals’ and ‘Charismatic Evangelicals.’

The chapter is informed by my semi-structured interviews and other ethnographic research explained more fully in Chapter Four. Where indicated interviewees are referred to by the codes CLA – CLU (Church Leader A – Church Leader U).

The Renewal (Second) Wave – 1960s

Origins in All Souls Langham Place

The story of Anglican Renewal from the 1960s, has been well covered in Peter Hocken’s *Streams of Renewal* and James Steven’s summary chapter in his study on Charismatic Worship.²⁰⁶ Graham Smith adds helpful analysis relevant to the story of HTB in his study of

²⁰⁴ See e.g. Nigel Goring Wright, ‘The Charismata and the Second Naïveté’, in Percy and Ward, *Wisdom of the Spirit*, 2014, 128.

²⁰⁵ See Andrew Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 2.

²⁰⁶ Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Developments of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain*. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986), 67; James Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 11-37

spiritual warfare within Anglican Charismatic Renewal.²⁰⁷ All see the stirrings into renewal of some of the curates at All Souls Langham Place as particularly important for imbedding renewal among 'Oxbridge [Iwerne] men who were "Anglican to their bones"' thus rooting the charismatic movement into the Church of England.²⁰⁸

There are three sets of reasons for beginning an account of renewal at HTB at All Souls Langham Place. Firstly, the impact of All Souls on John Collins and the grounding it gave him in church growth, bible exposition and personal evangelism meant his normative theological understanding remained very closely aligned to John Stott.²⁰⁹ Secondly, the intercessory ministry of key lay people in All Souls, in particular George Ingram, whose prayer meeting for world revival was so significant in Collins' subsequent experiences of the Spirit. Thirdly there was a confluence of charismatic curates from All Souls and closely related churches who helped embed renewal into the Anglican evangelical world.

Firstly Collins. All Souls gave Collins a paradigm of church growth that predated the charismatic movement. Together Stott and Collins saw the evening congregation grow to 2000 people and Stott longed to see this discipleship goal of an entire church converted and growing replicated outside of London.²¹⁰ Collins also saw remarkable growth in Gillingham from 1957 to 1963 before his 'night of power' recounted below. This meant that Collins' narrative was that faithful biblical ministry grows churches regardless of whether it is conservative or charismatic. He held to the adage of the Assemblies of God co-founder Doanld Gee that 'all word and no Spirit dries up, all Spirit and no word blows up, but Spirit

²⁰⁷ Graham Smith, *The Church Militant: Spiritual Warfare in the Anglican Charismatic Renewal*. (United States: Pickwick Publications, 2016). It can be seen as a part of an international 'Second Wave' of the Holy Spirit in the 20th Century, following the rise of Pentecostalism and pre-dating the 'Third Wave' associated with John Wimber. Cf. C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* Ann Arbor: Servant Publications Vine Books, 1988.

²⁰⁸ See Hocken, *Streams*, 78; Smith, *The Church Militant*, 2016, 31

²⁰⁹ This dependency continued even after his experiences of the Spirit in February 1963 caused a distinct rupture between him and the most prominent evangelicals of his day, which included Michael Vaughan, Dick Lucas and most painfully Stott himself.

²¹⁰ See Timothy Dudley Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* IVP 1999 249-289 for full account.

and the word grows up.’²¹¹ And, despite Stott’s apparent rejection of renewal, Collins continued to see Stott’s expositional ministry as in being full of the Spirit.²¹²

All Souls led Collins to the ministerial discipleship goal of becoming a thoroughly disciplined evangelical exegete and minister. He saw the key lesson of the curacy was to rest in Jesus in order to ‘find the strength and determination *to discipline myself* for the on-going hard work and reading necessary for any attempt to expound and to apply the Bible in a way that would feed the souls of the congregation.’²¹³ He elaborates that *three* processes, exemplified by John Stott, were essential and which he holds to this day:

(i) serious ongoing Bible study; (ii) application which would include patient collecting of illustrations; these first two being about equally difficult and equally time consuming. I quickly came to the conclusion that these two tasks *must* be carried out. (iii) to win the prayer battle. Only then could I climb the pulpit stairs with a proper confidence in God Sunday by Sunday by Sunday.²¹⁴

One to one bible reading known as ‘Personal work’ was the source of much of the early growth at Gillingham. Collins and his curates replicated the discipleship goals evident at Iwerne and All Souls.²¹⁵ This was how David Watson himself had been converted.²¹⁶ Collins spoke in a ‘tenacious’ and ‘winsome manner’ at a ‘nondescript’ Christian Union evangelistic

²¹¹ See David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) ; see also David Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*. (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004). 225; Robert Fisher (Ed) *In Spirit and in Truth*. (United States: Pathway Press, 1985). 45; for attribution of quote to Gee see Hughes, Selwyn. *Every Day with Jesus Daily Bible*. (United States: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 239

²¹² Collins maintained that Stott was filled with the Spirit at least as much as any charismatic and quite probably more. Interview: Collins 19.3.2018: ‘Bash described him [Stott] as the “most thoroughly converted boy I had ever met”’ For Stott’s own espoused theology of the Spirit see for example, John Stott *God’s New Society : The message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press. 1979), 208-209, where he argues from Ephesians 5 that believers must be filled with the Spirit, which is 1) an imperative 2) for all believers 3) a passive reception of a gift from God 4) in the present continuous tense and therefore ongoing. Stott had been writing about this since publishing *Baptism and Fulness* in 1964 in reaction to the charismatic movement.

²¹³ Collins, *Interview*, 19 March, 2018.

²¹⁴ *ibid*.

²¹⁵ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 8.

²¹⁶ See Matthew Porter *David Watson Evangelism, Renewal, Reconciliation* (Grove, 2003), 4 and David Goodhew “The Rise of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, 1910–1971.” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54, no. 1 (2003): 62–88.

tea-party which Watson attended in Cambridge.²¹⁷ This led to a follow up breakfast meeting with Collins, who then arranged for David Shepherd to continue one-to-one bible reading with Watson.

The second key influence was a former missionary at All Souls called George Ingram who was in turn influenced by Paget Wilkes (1871-1934), the co-founder of the non-denominational fellowship 'Japan Evangelistic Band' in 1903. Ingram had followed Wilkes into his rooms one day demanding to know the secret of Wilkes' life as 'you have got something that I have not got'. Paget opened his Bible and explained the secret to be "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." "Now", he said, "you will never know peace or power until you accept that as God's standard for you. If you really mean business, get alone with God and pray for three things: first that God will give you a hunger for a greater blessing than you have ever had; secondly, that he will show you your sinful nature as he sees it; and thirdly that he will give you a vision of the cross of Calvary and what it cost him to purchase a full salvation for you."²¹⁸ This led Ingram into what he described as the 'blessing of sanctification, which revolutionised my whole Christian life.'²¹⁹ It was this blessing, and what he called 'dimensions of the fullness of the Holy Spirit' that he thought was lacking still in Collins and his peers at All Souls, although it was George Ingram who would wait for the young Curate after his sermons, and 'with a warm smile, say slowly and with great emphasis, "remember, John, you are chosen for this"'. It was often this old missionary's encouragements that rescued Collins' mind from the 'pressure of preaching to the cultured congregation' and directed him towards God.

The third factor was the pioneering ministry of current and former All Souls curates in developing strategies, writings and conferences for perpetuating the experiences of Renewal. Foremost in this was Michael Harper who left All Souls in 1964 to start Fountain Trust.²²⁰ This wider movement gave Collins, MacInnes and Watson further cover as they

²¹⁷ David Watson, *You Are My God*, 18-23; see also Saunders and Sanson, *David Watson*, 1992 for further details.

²¹⁸ Isabel Govan Stewart *Dynamic Paget Wilkes of Japan*, (Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1957), 41.

²¹⁹ Ingram, a former Church Mission[ary] Society missionary in India, led the Nights of Prayer for World-Wide Revival, and an Anglican Prayer for Revival.

²²⁰ see John Maiden, *Age of the Spirit: Charismatic Renewal, the Anglo-World, and Global Christianity*, 1945-1980. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2023), 99.

developed in renewal ministries. Without this support and the sense of being part of an international move of God that arose from visits such as the American Episcopalian David Bennett, Collins would have been even more isolated in what happened next.

Fragmentation and Discontinuity

Collins had aggravated Nash by not 'sending' Watson and MacInnes back into the public-school system as chaplains post-curacy and Nash threatened to dry up the supply chain of prominent Iwerne curates for the rapidly growing St Mark's Gillingham. But a much more fundamental break occurred soon after as Collins, Watson and MacInnes began exploring the discipleship goal of being 'dead to sin' from Romans 6, which Nash himself had frequently highlighted.²²¹ They had been impacted by the visit of Corrie Ten Boom to their parish and her 'almost saint like charismatic qualities'. Inspired by her they were longing for victory in their own internal battles for holiness. When both of these curates moved on to parish ministry elsewhere Collins was left trying to continue the burgeoning work in Gillingham with less resource than previously was available. A series of events culminated in a night of prayer in 1963 where there was visitation of the Holy Spirit that lasted for three weeks in the parish and left those who had been there utterly transformed.²²² Both Watson and MacInnes have similar encounters elsewhere at a similar time.

But Collins' experience overspilled shortly afterwards at Tyndale House in Cambridge. He was booked to speak at a breakfast meeting for evangelical ordinands and expected to tell a few encouraging stories, expound the word and leave the ordinands encouraged to carry on in the same direction. However, the night before speaking, Collins found that he had another deep spiritual experience whereby he could not do anything but pray and 'prophesy' throughout most of the night. Eventually after minimal sleep he took Romans 6 as the theme, explained what had happened to him that night and that he felt that he was 'done with sin'. Future evangelical grandees Michael Vaughan and Dick Lucas were both

²²¹ See discussion in Chapter One; Collins, *Interviews* 6 June 2017, 11 February 2018; Watson, *You Are My God*, 42-48.

²²² Graham Smith. *The Church Militant: Spiritual Warfare in the Anglican Charismatic Renewal*. (United States: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 33; interviews op cit.

present and this led to as serious a fallout out between Collins and the evangelical hierarchy as the rift had been between Whitefield and Wesley. This rift included John Stott who went on to denounce Collins's interpretation of Romans 6 in an address to the Keswick Conference on that chapter.²²³ Although Collins' interpretation differs from John Wesley's 'Perfect Love' he was considered an extremist both by Anglican hierarchy (for charismatic practices) and the evangelical hierarchy (for charismatic practices and perfectionism) and effectively blocked from preferment in either setting. Whatever the pains of lost patronage and preferment for Collins there was a further loss of a mentor figure.

Discomfort with new charismatic practices was evident by the Evangelical Congress at Keele 1967 which noted that 'we have no united opinion on whether current 'charismatic' manifestations are of the same sort as the corresponding New Testament 'gifts of the spirit' or not.'²²⁴ However despite the fractures after Nottingham 1977 Stott insisted 'we are over the hump' and Michael Harper announced 'the charismatic divide has been given the last rites.'²²⁵ A new tone of mutual acceptance had been arrived at.²²⁶ As Reid's tentative fourth category of 'charismatic' in 1976 suggests, the 'renewed' Anglicans, while suspect for 'emotional enthusiasm', could largely be accommodated into the Eclectics.²²⁷

To some degree this can be explained by assimilation. While the Fountain Trust took the 'humanely astonishing decision to close' in 1980 claiming that Renewal was well enough established in parishes for its role to end,²²⁸ Sandy Millar believed that there were only three men in the country who could lead HTB in a charismatic direction when they were looking for a new vicar.²²⁹ Some of the more radical Anglican charismatics had left, but

²²³ See John Pollock and Ian Randall. *The Keswick Story: The Authorized History of the Keswick Convention—Updated!* (United States: CLC Publications, 2006), for account of Stott's teaching in 1965 and the rebuff that came from Alan Redpath in 1967 who (along traditional Keswick lines) urged people to experience deliverance from sin's tyranny. Stott eventually prevailed and 'the traditional Keswick teaching about how to receive the indwelling Christ for victory over sin became less distinct.'

²²⁴ From Clause 14, Keele-1967

²²⁵ John Carpon *Evangelicals Tomorrow: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress 1977*. (Glasgow: Collins, 1977) 58-63.

²²⁶ See Warner, Rob, *Fissured Resurgence: Developments in English pan-evangelicalism 1966-2001* <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2929985/430439.pdf>, [accessed 12.5.21] 213

²²⁷ Colin Buchanon observed that Michael Harper kept a very low profile in the Eclectics, Colin Buchanon, *Encountering*, 6 n.1; NEAC 1967 produced a 10,000 word statement without any reference to renewal

²²⁸ so Gunstone, *Pentecostal Anglicans*, 26;

²²⁹ Interview Millar, 14 September, 2017.

others had maintained a theological position akin to the Eclectics and simply added on a carefully expositied biblical understanding of charismatic gifts, which might often be used very sparingly. There are indications Renewal may have reached its zenith in the mid-1970s.²³⁰ Steven's shows how Renewal impacted Anglo-Catholics and a wider ecumenical circles and so encompassed a spectrum of underlying theologies every bit as disparate as the most divergent aspects of Wesley and Whitefield's Arminianism and Calvinism that quickly grew.²³¹ While charismatics often brought their doctrinal inheritance with them from existing denominations Mark Noll notes that the charismatic movement 'unleashed' 'new music, affective worship and expressive spirituality', with the effect of 'eroding old barriers and building new bridges' including eventually blurring even Protestant and Catholic demarcations in some cases.²³²

So despite some harmonisation within the Eclectics between conservatives and charismatics evangelicals, and Stott's advocacy of 'double listening' to bridge between Scripture and culture, the Iwerne culture seemed prohibitively legalistic alumni who had been impacted by affective worship and expressive spirituality. They had discovered a new freedom in the Holy Spirit that did not sit easily with rejecting theatre going, abstinence from alcohol and avoiding any Sabbath breaking, and found they had little desire to propagate holiness restrictions Nash would have seen as crucial.²³³

Stirrings at HTB pre-Wimber

Atherstone does an excellent job of mapping early renewal at HTB in the 1960s and 1970s, following on from hosting the Divine Healing Mission from the 1950s onwards. This was very

²³⁰ So whereas Gunstone, *Pentecostal Anglicans*, 26, see the closing of Fountain Trust as 'humanely astonishing', Steven indicates that this is debatable. Andrew Walker suggests Charismatic Renewal had been in decline since the mid-1970s, the dissolution was a symptom of this and the leadership had been marked by increasing tensions, see Stevens, *Worship in the Spirit*, 23-4; also Andrew Walker, 'Pentecostal Power: The "Charismatic Renewal Movement" and the politics of Pentecostal Experience' in E. Barker (ed.) *Of Gods and Me; New Religious Movements in the West*, 89-108.

²³¹ Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 2002, 14-25

²³² Mark Noll *Is the Reformation Over?*, An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism. (United States: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 65

²³³ See Alister Chapman *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2011); Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: the Making of a Leader*. (United Kingdom: IVP, 1999), 512; Eddison, *Spiritual Power*.

much a small sub-culture within an otherwise 'society church', but these seeds of renewal should not be underestimated either. In particular, Atherstone singles out HTB Curate and chaplain to the DHM Nicholas Rivett-Carnac as one who 'laid foundations for the spiritual life that followed in the subsequent decades.'²³⁴ Michael Harper and Colin Urquhart were among the weekly speakers at the healing service and Atherstone details how their charismatic books were sold in the bookshop alongside great missionary stories. But 'these remained minority interests at HTB...with little public backing from the leadership.'²³⁵ He also details how the 'Kitchen and the Cloud' became part of St Paul's Onslow Square in 1975, bringing a demonstration of both community hospitality (the Kitchen) and an up to 23-piece contemporary worship band to St Paul's and HTB after the 1976 merger. The Cloud led by Phil Lawson-Johnston were originally allowed to lead worship just once a month in the evening at St Paul's.²³⁶

Of particular relevance to the development of discipleship goals at HTB from 1975 onwards were the growing ministries of three such Iwerne alumni: David MacInnes, David Watson and John Collins who had served together at St Mark's Gillingham were each leading growing churches alongside itinerant ministry. Watson, based at St Michael le Belfry, became one of the leading evangelists and apologists for charismatic practice and had a tape ministry that was instrumental in discipling Sandy Millar and many others in renewal, and was later key in introducing John Wimber to the UK.²³⁷ After Gillingham, Collins began a new ministry in semi-rural Canford, Dorset (partly at the invitation of Ken Costa's future father-in-law). Beyond the parish he led Stewards Trust houseparties and parish missions including the 'Leap Step Forward' campaign at HTB. That mission has been credited with birthing HTB as the charismatic evangelical church it is today. He also modelled the sort of evangelistic 'supper parties' that became enshrined in Alpha methodology, before agreeing to come as Vicar of HTB in 1980.²³⁸ MacInnes, who became Rector of St Aldates, led a

²³⁴ Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 3

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid 9-11.

²³⁷ See "Fuller and Wimber" Chapter 21 in Saunders and Samson, *David Watson*. Michael Mitton sees the love and respect for Watson in the UK as the reason 'people instinctively warmed' to Wimber when Watson introduced him. Michael Mitton *Anglicans for Renewal*, 45 (Summer 1991), Editorial.

²³⁸ Spoken of by Nicky Gumbel at John Collins memorial.

<https://vimeo.com/user110114410/johncollinsfuneral>. (19 May, 2023).

Cambridge University mission that saw the conversion of the ‘5 Nicky’s and Ken’ who became the backbone of HTB in subsequent decades. These graduates joined Millar’s housegroup in 1976 at a time when there were few people under 50 at HTB.²³⁹

Millar recalls that when he was 28, ‘thanks to my wife I was prayed for (by Michael Harper and David DuPlessis) to be filled with the Spirit within a month or so of being converted and was never impressed to be told that the New Testament church wasn’t a full on, gifts of the Spirit ‘pentecostal’ church with a small ‘p’’.²⁴⁰ Despite an Etonian background and gifting that would have made him a prime candidate he bypassed Iwerne’s austere influence as an adult convert.²⁴¹ When Millar replaced Fletcher as Gumbel’s mentor after university Gumbel perhaps understates the difference between them in this testimonial:

Sandy Millar did the same as Jonathan had done, in a different way. He showed me a model of how to live the Christian life, to which I still aspire.²⁴²

Collins has said of Millar that he could have been the CEO of any FTSE 100 company.²⁴³ Following his own radical conversion into renewal at a time when it was perhaps in danger of being domesticated elsewhere Millar longed to appeal to the ‘head, heart and will.’²⁴⁴ His influence upon HTB’s growth is undoubtedly pivotal. His leadership abilities, interpersonal skills and keen charismatic identity proved crucial in the developments at HTB for the next 50 years.

Millar has been the man behind the throne or the man on the throne for nearly 50 years of HTB’s history. As an ordinand at Cranmer Hall Durham he used taped recordings of David

²³⁹ see Facing the Canon with Nicky Gumbel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sCruydnwso> from [accessed 12.2.21].

²⁴⁰ Millar, *Interview*, 6 March, 2020.

²⁴¹ He recalls ‘I had tea with Nash once when I started on the staff at Holy Trinity’. Millar, *Interview*, 6 March, 2020. Millar, a barrister was on the PCC (church council) at HTB before this conversion.

²⁴² <https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Youthwork-past-issues/2016/August-2016/Nicky-Gumbel-Three-Ways-to-Empower-the-Next-Generation> [accessed 6 March 2020].

²⁴³ Collins, *Interview*, 21 May, 2018.

²⁴⁴ in Gordon Kurht, (ed.) *To Proclaim Afresh: Evangelical Agenda for the Church* (SPCK, London, 1995), 146-147.

Watson to help other students discover life in the Spirit.²⁴⁵ As curate from 1976 he established the home group that incubated the young Cambridge ‘firebrands’ who would go on to define so much of HTB’s ministry through Alpha and related courses. With his consummate charm he helped to ease the society church into a charismatic direction with the admiration and blessing of Raymond Turvey. He played a key part in bringing Collins to be the next incumbent of HTB, and then worked so harmoniously with him that in an extraordinary piece of ecclesiastical history they were able to swap both roles and accommodation and continue to minister together when it seemed like Millar might otherwise have to leave. As Vicar this meant he was able to exercise the leadership he so clearly displayed even more fully. When the time came to hand on his ministry in 2005 he effectively coronated his own successor, Nicky Gumbel, who he had been mentoring and developing for 25 years. As a church planter in the tough urban area of Tollington he remained an honorary curate of HTB as well as a church planter, and assistant Bishop within London Diocese and remains to date the father-figure of the HTB network. Where Stott had been the great scholar-pastor-teacher behind All Souls’ growth, Millar was the unique leader behind HTB’s and came in the mould of a consummate and charming after dinner speaker.

As a charismatic revolution then took place at HTB the new experiences of the Holy Spirit led those at HTB increasingly to believe that it was the Spirit who changed behaviour. There was a sense, particularly for those drilled in ethics at Iwerne and University Christian Fellowships, that this this was a new improved way to achieve the same discipleship goals. As one interviewee put it: ‘It became clear that we saw the Holy Spirit working in people’s lives to change people from the inside - rather than because we say “you’ve got to live like this”’. The old ethical code was described as a heavy burden that could now be taken off in a metaphor commonly used:

²⁴⁵ Peter Smith, pers. comm, 12 October, 2019.

‘Imagine carrying a backpack called Law for many years, then taking it off, eating the heavy food inside it and finding that what had been a burden on your back sustains you when eaten inside you.’²⁴⁶

Millar was unencumbered by Iwerne sensibilities, and Watson had been dismayed by Nash’s rejection of renewal. But it took some trips to California for both Watson and Millar to find a new normative theology and paradigm for living. This was pioneered by John Wimber (1934-1997), a self-styled ‘fat American trying to find his way to heaven’ who was a convert to the Christian faith with a background in pop music. This was the beginnings of an era defined by those Robert Webber would label ‘pragmatic’ evangelicals,²⁴⁷ and many of the young converts and clergy at HTB wanted to know ‘does it work?’ at least as much as ‘is it true?’ Whereas ‘classic’ evangelicals like Stott, Collins and many of the Iwerne sub-culture needed a biblical mandate or at least a ‘proof text’ for decision making, the more pragmatic generation that followed were less concerned to exegete their way to an answer as long as there was not a clear prohibition against it. As ‘pragmatic evangelicals’, the big question is ‘can we get the job done?’ As Wimber put it, they wanted to ‘do the stuff’.²⁴⁸

The Wimber (‘Third’) Wave: A New Normative Theology/Praxis?

Background

John Wimber’s influence on the Church of England began not long after the closure of the Fountain Trust in 1980. Steven states that ‘neither Anglican charismatics or Restorationists could have predicted at the beginning of the 1980s that the Charismatic Movement was about to take a fresh turn.’²⁴⁹

David Watson’s annual encounters with Wimber while teaching at Fuller Seminary led to Watson recommending Wimber to Collins. Millar then visited Wimber’s base at Anaheim

²⁴⁶ Bishop Ric Thorpe, pers. comm, 1.4.15; There are parallels here with the 1738 conversion of Wesley, but his conversion took him in a renewed focus on holiness, believing that it was now possible, rather than the more stand off approach that seems to have been taken at HTB.

²⁴⁷ See Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. (United States: Baker Publishing Group, 2002).

²⁴⁸ see Christy Wimber, *John Wimber: Everyone Gets to Play*. (United States: Ampelon Publishing, 2007) for compilation of his writings on this theme.

²⁴⁹ Steven, 2002, 25.

Vineyard in 1981. As will be seen these connections are seismic in their importance in understanding the emergence of HTB as a movement within the Church of England today.²⁵⁰ Millar and Watson were quickly kindred spirits with the Californian pastor and both men were electrified by the possibilities of power evangelism which Wimber seemed to model and practice.²⁵¹ Millar and Wimber took to each other 'like long lost brothers' and Wimber infused the team at HTB with firstly, a quest for intimacy with the Holy Spirit through some simple worship songs (building on some of their earlier experiences of this with the 'worship of the kitchen movement' and Chuck Smith); secondly, a radical challenge to church planting; thirdly, a direct experience of the Holy Spirit at work in healing and prophetic ways; and fourthly, 'Kingdom Theology.'²⁵² John Irwine, a curate at the time, remembers him as someone who was just so normal and down to earth and fun to be with. A meeting would happen with scores of people wanting prayer ministry and Wimber would walk off to the nearest burger house to feed himself leaving his young team to do all the necessary work.

Wimber's impact on those who had already encountered Renewal can be summarised through David Watson's story. In 1976 Watson published *I Believe in Evangelism* where 'he was not really expecting miracles', yet in 1981, after beginning a friendship with Wimber (that Wimber himself considered 'fore-ordained'), he wrote *Discipleship* where he clearly argues that 'signs and wonders are still available to those who believe.'²⁵³ Wimber's first large scale conference in the UK was held in Westminster Central Hall in October 1984 which the organiser Douglas Bain described as a 'major turning point for large sections of the charismatic church.'²⁵⁴ There were follow up conferences 'Equipping the Saints for Evangelism in the Power of the Spirit' in Sheffield, Harrogate, Brighton (twice) and Wembley (twice) over the next two years. Peter Wagner, Wimber's colleague at Fuller, coined the phrase 'the Third Wave' to differentiate this era from the Renewal of the late 1950s/1960s and the Pentecostal Movement before that. This 'Third Wave' was characterised by being

²⁵⁰ Cf Mark J. Cartledge. *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007).

²⁵¹ Saunders and Samson, *David Watson*, 207.

²⁵² See below for description.

²⁵³ See Saunders and Samson, *David Watson*, 205, 209; also Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 8.

²⁵⁴ Anglicans For Renewal, 35 (Winter 1988/89), 12; see also Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 26

filled or empowered with the Spirit (rather than 'baptised' in deference to Stott's exegesis) with the aim of releasing all Christians for 'power healing' and 'power evangelism'.²⁵⁵

By 1986 his latest visit to the UK would be heralded as 'New Power for "Bankrupt" Britain' by the Anglicans for Renewal magazine.²⁵⁶ Cartledge is helpful in mapping both the revolutionary significance of Wimber's visits and the opposition they caused.²⁵⁷ Even Hunt who is ambivalent in his assessment of Wimber's ministry and considers it ranged from the 'constructive and laudably sublime' to the 'truly ridiculous',²⁵⁸ agrees that prior to Wimber's visits the charismatic renewal movement had not just spread out, but also thinned out and thus sees Wimber's 1983 visit as the beginnings of a theological, pastoral and tactical revolution in many British charismatic churches.²⁵⁹

A theological, practical and tactical revolution

Bishop David Pytches, a missionary bishop who had returned from a revival experience in Chile to run the suburban parish of St Andrews Chorleywood, was a key apologist and gatekeeper for Wimber's ministry in the UK. He interpreted Wimber to an Evangelical Anglican audience as someone following John Stott, Jim Packer and Michael Green in his evangelical theology whilst also influenced by charismatics such as Michael Harper, David Watson and Tom Smail.²⁶⁰

But there was a distinctive in Wimber's teaching which was derived from George Ladd's 'Kingdom Theology'. This argued that Western Christianity had been squeezed into a mechanistic and rationalistic worldview, but that Jesus came to bring a Kingdom that was supernatural whereby the 'age to come' would 'invade' this present age, bringing healing, wholeness and heaven. As Jesus brought teaching in word and deed and trained his disciples to do so, so too the church must 'demonstrate these signs of the Kingdom' and operate in

²⁵⁵ See Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 26.

²⁵⁶ Anglicans for Renewal, 27 (Winter 1986) 32.

²⁵⁷ op cit.

²⁵⁸ Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha*, 25.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.18.

²⁶⁰ David Pytches, *Living at the Edge: Recollections and Reflections of a Lifetime* (Bath: Arcadia 2002), 256-58;

the power ministries of healing and evangelism.²⁶¹ One of Wimber's many adages was that 'for everything you do you need a theology, a model and a practice,'²⁶² and his success in embedding this theology so deeply into the UK charismatic church was due to his ability to simply model and enable others to practice what he was teaching. As Bishop Stephen Sykes puts it, Wimber 'needs to be taken more seriously than is apparent in theological circles', due to his widespread influence and reception.²⁶³

Don Williams, a theologian operating within the Vineyard movement, gives a useful summary. He sees Wimber not as a modernist and therefore not a fundamentalist either. He argues that despite many modernist techniques used in his leadership 'rationalism had not indoctrinated him' and that he was more like a pre-modernist than a postmodern. Hence, he was at home in the age that dominated the church and the West before the Enlightenment, inspired by the likes of the miracle performing St Cuthbert. This meant he was able to position the 'Vineyard' to bring a spiritual reality to the 'emerging antimodern ethos of the emerging postmodern age'.²⁶⁴

For Williams, Vineyard under Wimber was strongly evangelical theologically, but 'surprisingly open', and influenced particularly by five movements in history. He described Vineyard as centre-set with Christ at the centre holding the whole together, as opposed to bounded-set churches where more formal theology, liturgical or ecclesiology might provide the coherence, (as in historic Anglican Evangelicalism).

The Vineyard Statement of Faith draws on these five movements spanning church history:

- 1) The Patristic Period – which gives it a Trinitarian orthodoxy.

²⁶¹ Wimber's main explorations of this are found in: *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today, and Power Healing and The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth*. See Robert Warren, *In the Crucible* (United Kingdom: Highland Books, 1989), 206 for a four part summary of this teaching, and Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 27

²⁶² Interview, Millar, 17.7.15 Sandy Millar *Remembering John Wimber* <https://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/resources/remembering-john-wimber/> [accessed 6.1.21] 'John's strength was that he provided the theology. I use it all over world now, if it is not too pretentious to say. If there is anything new in the church, he used to say, you will need a theology for it, a model for it and a practice for it. That is to say, you need to do it. He provided a theology for the song 'Isn't He beautiful, Beautiful, Isn't He?' Otherwise we would have thought it was wet.' See also Williams 2005, 167-179

²⁶³ Sykes, 2006, 106.

²⁶⁴ Don Williams, "Theological Perspectives on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship", in Roozen and Nieman (eds) *Church Identity and Change* Eerdmans 2005, 167.

- 2) The Reformation – underlining the sufficiency of Christ alone, and the final authority for the written Word of God ‘separating the Vineyard from neoorthodoxy and liberal evangelicalism’.
- 3) The Eighteenth-Century Great Awakening – emphasizing new birth, conversion, regeneration and a life of holiness ‘personal sanctification’.
- 4) The Modern Missionary Movement – driving back the kingdom of Satan by evangelization.
- 5) The Biblical Theology Movement – essentially George Ladd’s Kingdom Theology that was taught at Fuller Seminary.²⁶⁵

Building on this Williams has summarized Wimber’s values as:²⁶⁶

1) Evangelistically Driven, 2) Word Driven, 3) Spirit-driven, 4) Prophetically driven, 5) Compassionately driven, 6) Theologically driven, 7) Pragmatically driven, 8) Ecclesiastically driven, 9) Missionally driven and 10) Devotionally driven. The most obvious reflection is that those values are very driven, but he is also able to evidence their efficacy in the Vineyard movement as late as 2005, claiming for example that two out of three churches extended ‘altar calls for salvation’, half the pastors ‘led someone to the Lord’ a few times a year; two-thirds of pastors report that half or more of their 30-45 minute sermons were devoted to biblical exposition; 98% of pastors reported praying in tongues, and 90% of pastors receive or give prophetic revelation more than once a year. In compassion ministries he evidences that Vineyard churches served a million meals each year and that this ministry fuels prayer ministry for healing. 95% of pastors report having seen physical healing in response to prayer and 40% report seeing healing a few times a year. He also concluded that in 2005 Vineyard pastors retained an evangelical normative theology reporting that 98% agreed Christ is the only way to salvation, and that the devil really exists, and 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the bible was ‘inerrant, literally accurate’.

Williams’ understanding of Wimber’s theology was that as a ‘pragmatic American’ Wimber wanted a ‘working theology’, and Ladd’s Kingdom Theology provided him with that. He

²⁶⁵ Ibid 180-181.

²⁶⁶ Williams, in Roozen and Nieman (eds) *Church Identity and Change* Eerdmans 2005, 167-179.

allowed both for a present expectation of deliverance from evil, and a future aspect that explained why not all were saved or healed. This led him to abandon ‘the triumphalism of much Pentecostal teaching (and its roots in Wesleyan holiness)’, as he ‘realized faith could never force God’s hand’. His signature espoused theologies of ‘power evangelism’ and ‘power healing’ built on John 5:19 as a paradigm, where Jesus ‘could only do what he saw the Father doing’. He saw his role as joining in, or blessing, what the Father was already doing. In Williams’ view ‘this distinguished his view from an Arminian view of ministry and made him more Calvinistic. It also prepared him for his own bouts with severe illness.’²⁶⁷

So, while Wimber may have introduced, in Cartledge’s terms, a ‘theological, pastoral and tactical revolution in many British charismatic churches’ it is easy to see how, at least initially, Wimber’s teaching and praxis were an add on to, rather than an alteration, of the biblical, historical Anglican Evangelical faith as distilled by Stott. The Vineyard Statement of Faith builds on the patristic period, reformation and evangelical awakening before introducing a more dualistic-sounding Kingdom theology. The Wimber values emphasised evangelism and the word, among their ten driving forces. Indeed, there is much of the above summary that could complement rather than rival Stott as a possible ‘normative theology’ for the HTB network. However, as will be seen, there was also something perhaps inherent in this more experiential, feelings orientated and pragmatic approach to Christianity that would exacerbate a divergence between them within two decades.

Impact on HTB

Wimber’s impact on HTB is hard to overstate and effects each of the categories of ‘Theology, Model and Practice’. His pneumatology and realised eschatology had a particular impact, and Hunt argues these are enshrined in the Alpha course.²⁶⁸ He gave a model whereby ambitious clerics could church plant beyond the confines of the Church of England parochial system. Millar took a group of church members to Wimber’s ‘International Pastor’s Conference’ in California annually from 1982-1985.²⁶⁹ Part of the ‘revolution

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 145-158 for full debate on this.

²⁶⁹ 28 church members at one time. Interview Millar 14 September, 2017.

Wimber brought', according to Hunt, was in developing homogenous unit principles of church growth (people join churches where there are other people like them), which became enshrined in small homogenous 'cell' mid-week discipleship groups.²⁷⁰ But what, perhaps accidentally, had the biggest impact on theology and discipleship goals in the long term were the new worship practices Wimber helped introduce.

Steven gives a helpful description of Wimber's worship-teaching-ministry methodology which became enshrined in the way HTB and church plants still largely operate. It began with 20 minutes of 'musically seamless' sung worship developing from 'soft rock to items with an emotionally intense ballad melody.' Worship developed twin themes of responding to the immanence of God in loving adoration and submitting to God's sovereignty reflected by the prevalence of 'You' and 'Lord' in the songs.²⁷¹ The middle teaching section focused on a rejection of a western materialist mechanical worldview and a proclamation of the Kingdom of God that needed to be expressed in word and deed with disciples actively continuing the Kingdom ministry of Jesus, driving out evil and bringing wholeness and healing. It then culminated in 'ministry time' where the announced Kingdom of God is put into practice, 'overthrowing the controlling power of Satan' through the prayer 'Come Holy Spirit' and the physical, emotional and spiritual responses to that in the congregation.²⁷²

One reason Wimber's influence was so disturbing to the status quo was because this 'non-liturgical' worship pattern was introduced by Millar into the main services. Renewal had already played a part in taking Evangelical Anglicans away from the 'Protestant' anchorage in the Book of Common Prayer as new patterns of worship and liturgies had been devised and simple choruses written. Wimber offered a solution to the problems some of the younger team were perceiving with Anglican liturgy. The Alternative Service Book, while freer than the Book of Common Prayer was still very structured. He offered a format where

²⁷⁰ Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 37. In this Hunt is partially wrong in that Millar had been leading such a group at HTB since the start of his curacy in 1976, which had led to many conversions - including Caroline Welby. It was the mid-sized pastorate groups that were Wimber's distinct sociological contribution. Millar notes that Wimber 'provided a model to which we could move if we wanted to.'

²⁷¹ Following Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 73-8.

²⁷² Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 28 See also Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 18.

you just scrapped it. A block of worship followed by extensive encouraging, anecdotal Bible teaching and then a time of ministry was all that was needed to 'do the stuff'.

The adoption of Wimber's methodology of worship-teaching-ministry style accelerated the process of removing a new generation of Christians (and eventually clergy) further from the anchoring normative theologies of Anglicanism that had been passed on through the Book of Common Prayer including liturgy, collects, historic creeds and lectionary readings. Even the unpopular straitjacket of the newer Alternative Service Book was cast off as 'intimacy' in worship became the stated goal. This brought a shift in the operant theology evident in a worship service with a well catalogued reorientation towards a hymnody emphasizing an individual's immediate encounter with God.²⁷³

'Suddenly we're confronted with a new kind of charismatic renewal. We were already evangelical charismatics but Wimber came over and said "now we're going to do it" and suddenly there was new intimacy in worship, prayer for healing on a regular basis and seeing things happen – a much greater expectation of God to actually work, and with him one of the other things was the idea of church planting... for which he was undoubtedly the catalyst.'²⁷⁴

Having been constrained by the 1662 service and frustrated by the ASB Wimber's simple 'Worship, Teaching, Ministry' model became the paradigm for HTB and its daughter plants.²⁷⁵ Initially these freeform services were an addition to a more varied Sunday diet, that often included a BCP communion service early in the morning. HTB network leaders who were grafted into existing churches often maintained a traditional liturgical service, as Millar did at HTB. Yet as time has passed many of the new ordinands have been drawn from non-liturgical services and churches have been planted with only freeform services. Today most churches in the HTB network have main or sole services with minimal reference to

²⁷³ See Glenn Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come: Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship*. (United Kingdom: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 38f for detailed description.

²⁷⁴ Irvine, pers.comm, 28 March 2015.

²⁷⁵ Millar, interview, 14 September 2017.

Common Worship [CW] (the eclectic and versatile liturgy that replaced ASB),²⁷⁶ and the use of Nicky Gumbel's *Bible in One Year* is far more common than the collects and prayers of the daily offices for personal spiritual devotion.²⁷⁷ It has been well argued elsewhere informal charismatic services are still liturgical,²⁷⁸ but the typical outworking of a CW 'Service of the Word' is essentially a playlist of Contemporary Christian Worship songs, an abridged 'liturgy of the Word' (one reading and a motivational talk), a ministry response time and an (often informal) blessing to close, perhaps with intercessions including the Lord's Prayer at some point in the service. The adage *Lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi*: (As we worship, so we believe, so we live) means that for 40 years charismatic Anglicans have been formed by a liturgical diet that emphasises immediacy, personal encounter and invoking the Holy Spirit, but has a tendency to become what worship-leader-turned-theologian Glenn Packiam calls 'a theological Happy Meal'.²⁷⁹

Thus while HTB network churches within the Church of England still nominally continue to have the same Anglican normative theological inheritance of the 39 Articles, Creeds and Liturgy that Stott, Collins or even Millar grew up with, the practical outworking of liturgical and daily devotional changes will have had a significant impact on the operant and espoused voices with the HTB network. These liturgical changes are effectively also a change in espoused theology and leverage a gap between normative and operant theologies. So instead of praying the Collect for Purity, (a prayer that deeply impacted John Wesley in his quest for holiness in each service), which asks for the thoughts of our hearts to be cleansed that 'we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name', these 'liturgies' can easily create an espoused theology whereby God's role is meeting our felt

²⁷⁶ CW is so versatile that the Service of the Word 'consists almost entirely of notes and directions and allows for considerable local variation and choice within a common structure.' The authors of CW wrestle with the freedom this allows in their instructions for use: 'A Service of the Word is unusual for an authorized Church of England service... At the heart of the service is the Liturgy of the Word. This must not be so lightly treated as to appear insignificant compared with other parts of the service.' <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-1> '

²⁷⁷ Although one church was using ASB liturgy for a baptism at a 2019 visit.

²⁷⁸ see Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 21-24, developing Cheryl Forbes' critique of contemporary evangelical services and how the informality of the liturgy embeds even greater power in the service leader.

²⁷⁹ Packiam, Glenn. *Discover the Mystery of Faith: How Worship Shapes Believing*. (United States: David C Cook, 2013), 10, 20. The book explores whether contemporary worship is 'compassing people towards a transfiguring experience of God or pandering to our culture's addiction to peak experience, entertainment and celebrity,' and whether being 'relevant' means 'keeping the customer satisfied.'

needs. As shown in Chapter Four this impacts the doctrine of God, anthropology, theological framework and the discipleship goals in the network.

Steven notes that a number of parishes became teaching centres for what he terms the 'new Wimber gospel'.²⁸⁰ Churches like St Thomas Crookes Sheffield, St Andrews Chorleywood and Holy Trinity Brompton rapidly developed the charismatic party within the Church of England. But as they aligned closer to 'revivalist' methodology they diverged from some of the older practitioners of Anglican renewal, with a particular break coming after 1990 and again in 1994.²⁸¹ Steven's study focuses on the liturgical shift made by this new charismatic 'churchmanship label' and concludes that the adoption of a Wimberite worship pattern enabled an unpremeditated assimilation of contemporary culture that happened, he believes, without conscious reflection.²⁸² At his most generous Steven sees it as an apt 'inculturation' enabling an 'authentic "live" presence of God' to be experienced. In a slightly more loaded conclusion he states that the 'benefits for participants were understood in ways that resonate with the therapeutic sensibilities of late modern culture.'²⁸³

Critiques of Wimber

Wimber's paradigm came as a radical discontinuity to many of the churches that embraced his Power Evangelism and Power Healing. That he was a phenomenon can be seen in the scale and scope of critiques he attracted from contemporaries and later from academics. A key aspect of this was his advocacy of Kingdom theology which Hunt sees as having a profound theological dualism inherent in it, which together with an emphasis on signs and wonders was less obviously compatible with Anglicanism.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 29.

²⁸¹ Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 32, due to first the Kansas City Prophets and then the Toronto Blessing.

²⁸² Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 211.

²⁸³ Steven, *Worship in the Spirit*, 211. cf Mark J. Cartledge. 'Liturgical Order and Charismatic Freedom: A Reflection on the Development of Anglican Practices', *Liturgy* 33.3 (2018), pp. 12-19.

²⁸⁴ Stephen Hunt, "The Anglican Wimberites", *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 17.1 (1995), pp. 105–118, 111. See further Graham Smith, *The Church Militant: Spiritual Warfare in the Anglican Charismatic Renewal*. (United States: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 42.

Hocken questions the depth of the new charismatic stream and whether it can be a lasting phenomenon.²⁸⁵ He considers Martyn Percy's study of Wimber to be a penetrating critique, noting Wimber is advancing a modern form of Pentecostalism that goes beyond Pentecostalism in equipping all the saints to be like Jesus as ongoing channels of the power of God.²⁸⁶ Percy has pulled back from some of the most strident critiques in his doctoral dissertation which (unjustly) sees Wimber as a fundamentalist caught in a propitiatory ('angry God') motif of atonement, but maintains that Wimber's Christology is 'reductionist and subordinationist, reducing Christ to a power-broker for the Spirit seen as the power of God.'²⁸⁷

Percy sees Wimber's theology as centred on power with Jesus as the 'ultimate power agent'.²⁸⁸ In Percy's analysis this search for efficient forms of belief that demonstrate power most effectively impacts his views on worship, eschatology and holiness.²⁸⁹ Evangelical theologian Alistair McGrath agrees with the issue of power. Writing in the early days of the Vineyard influence on the UK he notes that the darker side of evangelicalism has been fourfold: Guilt, burn-out, dogmatism and personality cult. 'Power corrupts and power evangelicalism too easily becomes a corrupt evangelicalism'.²⁹⁰ McGrath draws on Max Weber's essay *The Sociology of Charismatic Authority* which argues people look for someone they can believe in during a time of decline or confusion. McGrath states that power evangelicalism owes much of its force to the force of conviction: 'perhaps not so much the views that are held, or the doctrines that are preached, but the conviction and authority with which they are preached.'²⁹¹ So McBain concludes that while Wimber has brought a positive contribution 'there remain serious doctrinal weakness in his position.'²⁹²

²⁸⁵ Hocken, Peter. *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements: The Tensions of the Spirit*. (United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 51,

²⁸⁶ Ibid. see Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 100.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 85

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 84, 102, 'Jesus is constantly presented as a powerful personality who can take hold of and transform the inner life of others.' See Hocken, *Challenges*, 2013, 51, 84-85

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 110

²⁹⁰ McGrath 1988, 164

²⁹¹ McGrath 1988, 160. McGrath sees evangelical culture as too easily anti-intellectual.

²⁹² Douglas McBain, *Fire Over the Waters*, London, 1997, 105

For some conservative evangelicals Wimber quite simply represented ‘another gospel’. In a book provocatively entitled *‘John Wimber: Friend of Foe’* Sydney evangelical Philip Jensen imagines Wimber playing the role of a ‘compassionate, loving, genuine, sincere’ loaded dog of Henry Lawson’s short story who ends up unwittingly carrying an explosive cartridge around in his mouth.²⁹³ Jensen articulated the concerns of many conservatives in the UK. Renewal might be benignly tolerated in the interest of unity, but this Californian ‘doing the stuff’ approach was a loaded dog. As well as being concerned about Wimber’s ‘unverifiable’ emphasis on healing they were concerned that he was changing the core of the gospel from atonement, sin and repentance to a heuristic individualist self-help therapy.

Analysing Vineyard discipleship goals is made complex as it is possible to plot a dramatic contrast between the espoused and operant theology of Vineyard churches in 1980 with those of 2005. In the introduction we noted TM Luhrmann’s findings in *When God Talks Back* which maps how some Vineyard churches in the USA developed away from John Wimber’s original theology and describes the therapeutic perspective on Jesus on offer in experientially orientated evangelical churches. Percy plots a similar development. After an initial first flourishing phase, Percy describes a secondary phase of ‘fear, obedience and purity’ teaching in the mid 1980s, that helped prevent Vineyard disintegrating as it grew. He claims that there was an inevitable ‘movement towards purity-as-holiness’ to prevent dissolution.²⁹⁴ But the tertiary transition in Vineyard from the late 1980s to 2000s is more striking still. Joel Daniel reading back over Percy’s work notes:

The contrast is dramatic. In earlier years, powerful, supernatural experiences of the Spirit were a requirement of group membership and highly valued by the community. By 2002, however, [five years after Wimber’s death, and eight years after ‘The Toronto Blessing’] the fervour had subsided, the costs have lowered, and the requirements of group membership had mellowed... at the same time, growth had stalled, group identity was hazier, and the denomination had splintered... it is

²⁹³ Jensen, Phillip, Tony Payne, et al. *“John Wimber, Friend or Foe?”* Reprinted from *The Briefing* (April 1990), 11.

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Ian Markham and Joshua Daniel (eds.) *Reasonable Radical? Reading the Writings of Martyn Percy*. (United Kingdom: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018). 37-8.

remarkable to see the correlation between the cessation of costly behaviours and the decline in group flourishing. The price of admission, so to speak, in the early years, would have been allowing oneself to be physically and emotionally bowled over, to lose oneself in that communal/personal upheaval. The price of admission in 2002 was rest.²⁹⁵

It was a similar tendency over a similar timespan at HTB which led critics like Brooks in 2007 to bring a charge of subjectivism and emotionalism triumphing over truth and reason,²⁹⁶ and Hunt in 2001 to dismiss Alpha as a 'give me now' theology whereby an attender would feel a right to be rewarded (by God) for their attendance and new found belief bereft of any particular accompanying moral changes.²⁹⁷ HTB, in JI Packer's analysis discussed in Chapter One, was already built on an upper-middle class 'relatively optimistic view of human nature' and 'pietistic community based on experience' common to the Eclectics. Wimber's 'Third Wave' had helped to liberate them from the constraints of an ethical system enforced at Iwerne, described as 'taking off a heavy rucksack and finding there was life giving food in it' in the analogy previously used. As in Vineyard this gradually led to less ethical teaching about specific types of prohibited behaviour:

And so, there's been a subtle shift over time where HTB will still say 'this is the way to live' but there won't be that 'stop doing this, stop doing that'. Just much more 'follow the Spirit and let Him convict you.'" [CLD]

This was almost certainly not Wimber's intention. He emphasised intimacy with God but it 'wasn't sappy; it was responsible and responsive and obedient. It is the same with children, if intimacy with children means a child can do what he likes, then we have misunderstood the word intimacy.'²⁹⁸ (For an English audience Millar sometimes translated 'intimacy' as 'the closest possible relationship with God' but reverted to

²⁹⁵ See Joel Daniel, in Markham and Daniel, *Reasonable Radical*, 39.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Andrew Brooks (ed.) *The Alpha Phenomenon*. (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2007), 121.

²⁹⁷ Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha*, 49.

²⁹⁸ Millar, op cit <https://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/resources/remembering-john-wimber/> [accessed 6.1.21]

‘intimacy’ after finding Scriptural precedent for it in the Song of Songs, and finding ‘closest possible relationship with God’ too much of a mouthful.)²⁹⁹ Yet as we have seen however much the paradigm shift Wimber introduced may have disengaged many within HTB circles from conservative evangelical Anglican practice, Wimber remained thoroughly rooted in Scripture, influenced by Stott, Packer, Watson and Green and would be shocked by some of the developments described above.³⁰⁰

The Toronto (Fourth?) Wave – an Operant Theological Shift.

History – Kansas City Prophets

Wimber was hugely influential in the development of HTB as a church planting network, the adoption of church growth strategies and its increasing emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit. But, if Wimber’s most original contributions to operant and espoused theology were most lastingly promoted in the UK nationally and internationally through the HTB Alpha Course as Hunt has suggested, it is perhaps ironic that this happened whilst Wimber’s own influence was waning in the 1990s. Even more so that this arguably happened through ‘The Toronto Blessing’ [TTB] a spiritual ‘injection of energy’ of which, as will be seen, he did not quite approve.

The highly critical newspaper *Prophecy Today* considered that by the 1990s there had been ‘an almost imperceptible down-grading of the Bible from its place of centrality within the Protestant tradition.’³⁰¹ This they claimed was largely due to restorationist teaching in the house churches (which *Prophecy Today* saw as elevating spiritual gifts apart from expositional teaching rather than following it), and then through Wimber who was made

²⁹⁹ As in Sarah Jackson’s testimony in Chapter One this language often evolved into ‘relationship with Jesus’.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Martyn Percy who in his early writings saw Wimber as a fundamentalist, see Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*; also Sandy Millar, *Interview*, 14 September, 2017. ‘You cannot say John was not biblical, everything he did he sought to show from the Bible.’ Stephen Hunt (ed.) *Charismatic Christianity 1997*, 81-2 considered that Percy ‘to a large extent removed’ the apparent contradiction between Wimber’s desire to make the gospel appropriate to the contemporary world and fundamentalism, by describing fundamentalism as a ‘multifaceted reality’ and complex worldview involving claims to a unique interpretation of scripture brought to bear for its own legitimation, not simply a reaction against modernity (cf Barr, 1978) or a cognitive reality (cf Marty, 1987). But there comes a point when you are stretching a word beyond its plain meaning, and few within Vineyard or charismatic Christian circles found ‘fundamentalist’ had explanatory power for what Wimber represented. See also Don Williams in David Roozen and James Nieman (eds) *Church, Identity, and Change*. (United States: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 167-179.

³⁰¹ See e.g. *Prophecy Today* (ed.) *Blessing the Church? XXVII* on <https://prophecytoday.uk/study/teaching-articles/itemlist/tag/cain.html> [accessed 5.4.2020]

acceptable in mainline denominations through the endorsement of David Watson, Millar and David Pytches.³⁰² In July 1990 Millar invited Wimber and the 'Kansas City Prophets,' Paul Cain and Bob Jones to run two weeks of meetings at HTB, and was himself a leading figure in an impressive array of house church and Anglican charismatic ministers who publicly endorsed the Kansas City Prophets in the build up to Wimber's Excel Centre October 1990 rallies in the UK.³⁰³ These rallies were expected to be the culmination of a mighty revival breaking out in London as prophesied by Paul Cain in July 1990 at HTB.³⁰⁴ Expectations were already high as Wimber had 'declared that Cain was never wrong in his prophesies.'³⁰⁵ They were then heightened with 'supra-biblical' teaching from Bob Jones, who Wimber had apparently acknowledged had a 'demonic problem' but had nevertheless endorsed as highly prophetic.³⁰⁶ Jones promised a dramatic increase in signs of wonders for a 'new breed of men' and an 'army of locusts' who would sweep across the nation in a Holy Spirit revival.³⁰⁷ The revival never came, and a few months later Wimber contracted cancer of the throat which stymied much of the rest of his ministry. His wife Carol's post-humous biography of John Wimber tells how many people tried to link his embracing of these prophetic ministries with his illness, but also tells of both of their regrets about endorsing Jones and Cain.³⁰⁸ Wimber died in 1997 and a year before he gave a retrospective to UK Vineyard leaders saying that:

During the period of the 'prophetic era' [Kansas City Prophets] and on into the 'new renewal' [TTB] our people quit starting small groups, they quit prophesying, they quit healing the sick, they quit casting out demons, because they were waiting for the Big Bang, the Big Revival, the Big Thing... I thought, My God, we've made an audience out of them. And they were an army!³⁰⁹

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Published also in *Renewal*, August 1990, See Clifford Hill *The Reshaping of Britain*, 2018, 166-178 for a full discussion of Hill and Prophecy Today's critique of Kansas City Prophets, Wimber, HTB and Toronto Blessing.

³⁰⁴ Hill, *Reshaping*, 174

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Hill, *Reshaping*, 173-174

³⁰⁷ Elsewhere Jones had 'prophesied' that there would be the elect company of last generation believers who would complete Christ's work and establish a glorious church on earth reigning over the nations. Vineyard Ministries School of Prophecy, Anaheim, 1989, transcript of tape, p10.

³⁰⁸ Carol Wimber, *John Wimber: The Way It Was*. N.p.: Independently Published, 1999. 179-181

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 180

This 'audience' had been waiting for the next big thing which came in TTB in 1994. In Hunt's term the Airport Vineyard Church in Toronto where TTB started became a 'charismatic mecca'.³¹⁰ Richter calculated that 300,000 guests visited Toronto Airport Fellowship by June 1995, 20% of them clergy professionals and 10% from the UK.³¹¹ Elsewhere he summarises the phenomenology accompanying TTB as: 1) bodily weakness and falling to the ground; 2) shaking trembling, twitching and convulsive body movements; 3) uncontrollable laughter or wailing and inconsolable weeping; 4) apparent drunkenness; 5) animal sounds; 6) intense physical activity.³¹² Revd Dr Mark Stibbe the influential charismatic Anglican leader and thinker, who had succeeded Bishop David Pychtes at St Andrews Chorleywood, argued in 1995 that TTB is the first sign of a coming 'fourth wave' which will result in global revival.³¹³

Impact on HTB – 'A wonderful, wonderful thing'?

HTB was first impacted by TTB when Elie Mumford returned from a visit. She was married to John Mumford, one of John Collins' former curates, and together they headed up the UK Vineyard Churches.³¹⁴ After a core HTB team of Sandy Millar, Jeremy Jennings and Emmy Wilson visited Toronto on 31 May 1994, HTB became the most prominent of several 'satellite' Toronto Blessing centres attracting attendees from all denominational backgrounds including the influential pentecostal Ken Gott.³¹⁵ In the wake of the world revival prophesied by Paul Cain in 1991 many churches within the UK were still looking for a fresh move of God. TTB released a 'vast amount of energy' and gave HTB an increased profile in the UK. As has been regularly noted it is a highly convincing hypothesis that HTB's prominence in hosting TTB phenomena left it primed and ready to spread this 'revival' through the mechanism of Alpha.³¹⁶ Indeed Hunt argues it is hard to explain the growth of

³¹⁰ Stephen Hunt, 'The "Toronto Blessing": A Rumour of Angels?', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10, 3 (1995) 257–71.

³¹¹ Richter P. The Toronto Blessing: Charismatic Evangelical Global Warming. In: Hunt S., Hamilton M., Walter T. (eds) *Charismatic Christianity*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1997), 98. Heard and Walker describe its effect on the UK church as 'startling', Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 15

³¹² Richter 'God is not a Gentleman' in Stanley Porter and Philip Richter Eds *The Toronto Blessing, Or is It?*. (United Kingdom: Darton, Longman and Todd), 1995, 7-9

³¹³ Mark Stibbe, *Times of Refreshing: A practical theology of Revival for Today* (London Marshall Pickering 1995), 10, 21-29.

³¹⁴ Heard...

³¹⁵ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 14.

³¹⁶ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 21-23., see also: Anderson, Allan. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 164, who notes the shared

Alpha and HTB's influence without factoring in TTB.³¹⁷

HTB's adoption of TTB was initially helped by Wimber describing TTB as a 'time of refreshing'. But, 18 months later the Toronto Vineyard was finally censured by Wimber for making 'the focus of the revival into revival itself'.³¹⁸ In January 8 1996 *Christianity Today* announced that Wimber had severed ties with Toronto.³¹⁹ One common critique of TTB explored below picks up Wimber's aforementioned concern, that it was an inward-focused and essentially therapeutic event for an 'army that had become an audience'.³²⁰

Within HTB itself the reception was also mixed. Jonathan Aitken, (a disgraced senior politician turned cleric who became closely associated with HTB through attending Alpha and Gumbel visiting him in prison)³²¹ recalls one senior member of the congregation calling this time 'the unhappy time when Sandy Millar and Nicky Gumbel went off the rails,' and the Bishop of London's 'studiously polite neutrality.'³²² Indeed, both Millar and Gumbel have been subsequently careful to distance the phenomena experienced in Kensington from the Toronto Airport Fellowship. As Millar puts it, 'we continued to pray the prayer we had always prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit!"'³²³

However, Ken Costa's personal response shows some of the energy associated with TTB. He stated that the Toronto Blessing 'put us on the rails' and notes 'our evangelism became more intense'.³²⁴ In fact interviews in this thesis show that TTB was a turning point in churches engaging with social action, with church planters before TTB having far less focus on local community transformation than those who were impacted by it.³²⁵ Cartledge

experience of leaders from all denominations and church streams coming to HTB to experience TTB at HTB as a key reason for Alpha expanding in non-denominational charismatic churches.

³¹⁷ See Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha*, 28-30. Hunt quotes from Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, rev. edn (Eagle, Guildford, 1998) to make this point.

³¹⁸ Wimber, C, 1999, 181

³¹⁹ James Beverley 'Vineyard Severs Ties with 'Toronto Blessing' Church' *Christianity Today* January 8 1996 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/january8/6t1066.html>

³²⁰ Wimber C, 1999, 180

³²¹ The Holy Spirit weekend was a 'major turning point towards repentance' see Aitken, Jonathan. *Porridge and Passion*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006, 72-72

³²² Aitken, Jonathan. *Heroes and Contemporaries*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006, 240

³²³ Millar Interview

³²⁴ Aitken, *Heroes*, 2006, 240

³²⁵ See Chapter Four

concurr, seeing TTB as a spur to holistic discipleship,³²⁶ (contra part of Andrew Walker's analysis which suggests TTB produced 'little social transformation', and was conveniently eclipsed by the rise of Alpha).³²⁷

Growth of Alpha

TTB certainly did coincide with the growth of Alpha at a national level. In 1993 the course had 4,600 guests on 200 courses, and this jumped in 1995 to 100,000 guests on 2500 courses and in 1998 to 1.3 million guests on 10,500 courses. It added a million more guests worldwide each year over the following decade following its first national initiative. Hunt's cynical stance on this is that either the take up of Alpha was partly a mechanism to force the (still) expected revival and fulfil Cain's prophesy,³²⁸ or that it was initially simply 'something to do...after the excitement of TTB and its array of ecstatic phenomena.'³²⁹ While Hunt's analysis has some limited merit, it lacks explanatory power for the shift in momentum, focus and operant theology for the charismatic church following on from TTB. For many participants their encounters with the Spirit during TTB were every bit as significant as John Wesley's 'my heart was strangely warmed' Aldersgate St encounter on 24 May 1738. Walker subsequently described HTB as a church 'renowned for its theandric therapy rather than its theology.'³³⁰ Following TTB a personal, tangible, warming experience of the Spirit was to become the very core of what it meant to be a Christian for millions of Alpha graduates and it was this 'strangely warmed' experience that would become so well marketed to those invited to 'try Alpha,' and the core of the operant theology in Alpha.³³¹

³²⁶ Mark Cartledge 'A Spur to Holistic Discipleship', in David Hilborn (ed.), *Toronto in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s* (Carlisle: Evangelical Alliance / Paternoster, 2001) pp. 64-74. See also Mark Cartledge 'Catch the Fire: Revivalist Spirituality from Toronto to Beyond', *PentecoStudies* 13.2 (2014) pp. 217-238.

³²⁷ David Hilborn (ed.) *Toronto*, 313. See also Stephen Hunt, *A History of the Charismatic Movement in Britain and the United States of America: The Pentecostal Transformation of Christianity*. (United States: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 571.

³²⁸ Stephen Hunt, "The Alpha Course and Its Critics". *PentecoStudies*, vol. 4, (2005), 6., see also Hunt's more 'rigorous' study *The Alpha Enterprise*, 52-54.

³²⁹ Ibid. Warner notes Gumbel's response to Hunt's *Anyone for Alpha* in his thesis <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2929985/430439.pdf>, 149 [accessed 20.3.21]. 'Gumbel cited the author's self-description as an "agnostic sociologist". While stressing that "there are things that we can learn", he summed up this book as a parallel to Sanballat and Tobiah's hostility to Nehemiah. Like Nehemiah, *Alpha* should not be put off by "sneers, ridicule and opposition".'

³³⁰ See Hilborn (ed.), *Toronto*, 313.

³³¹ See Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 49-50 for a description of the Holy Spirit Weekend on Alpha and similar conclusion.

Heard concludes that not only does there seem to be a strong link between TTB and the rise of Alpha, but that the ‘experiential dimension’ of the Alpha Weekend was ‘pitched perfectly’ for the 4000-5500 churches affected by TTB. Gumbel made an explicit link between Alpha and TTB in 1995 in his article *The Impact of Toronto*, but in the wake of controversy and criticism has been more circumspect now. In 2000 he commented ‘I don’t talk about it now, it divides people. It splits churches. It is very controversial. But I’ll tell you – I think the Toronto Blessing was a wonderful, wonderful thing.’³³²

Apologists note how the phenomenon was anteceded by Wimber’s power ministry in the 1980s and Charismatic renewal in the 1970s, and claim continuity with the likes of Wesley and Whitefield.³³³ But TTB has attracted a series of academic critiques,³³⁴ some within charismatic circles.³³⁵ Poloma’s review locates TTB in post-modernity, with experience eclipsing the need for propositional truth claims. Martyn Percy sees TTB within a postmodern cultural context of revivalism where the ‘discreet branding of manifestations created a market hungry for larger and/or powerful spiritual epiphenomena’ which he suggested eventually smothered the movement as people ‘oddly.... became bored and disenchanted with the spectacular.’³³⁶ For adopters of TTB there is clearly an operant theology of individual blessing which had a strongly therapeutic nature, and this seems to fit two wider patterns in the contemporary Christian church.

³³² Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 22

³³³ Porter and Richter, *Toronto*, 11; Hunt, *Anglican Wimberites*, 260; see Francis MacNutt 1994,2; Guy Chevreau, 1994, 77 for continuity claims. But see also Kent J “Have We Been Here Before: A historian looks at the Toronto Blessing” in Porter and Richter, *Toronto*, 86-102 who takes issue with the idea of continuity between TTB and phenomenon associated with Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, not least because the 18C revivalists operated in (and helped create) a culture where there was an ‘existential state of anxiety about future divine praise and punishment.’

³³⁴ Including Poloma, M (1999) “The Toronto Blessing in Postmodern Society: Manifestations, Metaphor and Myth” in Dempster, M [ed] *The Globalisation of Pentecostalism* pp.363-85; Poloma, M. (2003) *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism*, New York: Altimira Press; P. J. Richter, ‘Charismatic Mysticism — a Sociological Analysis of the “Toronto Blessing”’, in S. E. Porter (ed.), *The Nature of Religious Language* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

³³⁵ Lloyd Pietersen *The Mark of the Spirit? A Charismatic Critique of the Toronto Blessing* Paternoster 1998, Clifford Hill *The Reshaping of Britain*, Wilberforce, 2018 see also Stanley Porter and Philip Richter (eds) *The Toronto Blessing – Or Is It?* DLT, London 1995

³³⁶ Cf Martyn Percy, Review of *Toronto in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid-1990s*, 202

Wider Patterns

The first is described by Mark Noll's in his 1994 *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and the second is Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton 2004 *Moral Therapeutic Deism* (MTD). In *Scandal* Noll describes Vineyard churches as weak on tradition, while strong on experience, and argues that an emphasis on experience devoid of the anchor of tradition runs the risk that 'you, rather than God, will become the centre of religion'. Noll contrasts this with 'first rate intellectuals' like Wesley and Edwards who 'communicated that personal experience of God was a key matter', while not detaching themselves from historic faith.³³⁷ *MTD* picks up the theme of 'you-centred religion', arguing that a 'hodgepodge of banal, self-serving, feel-good beliefs' have replaced traditional Christianity, which in Creasy Dean's analysis is due to churches proclaiming 'a bargain religion, easy to use, easy to forget, offering little and demanding less' instead of a 'God who calls believers to lives of love, service and sacrifice.'³³⁸ It is not hard to argue that TTB fits easily into the espoused and operant theological patterns *Scandal* and MTD describe.

Wimber was the great disruptor without whom TTB could not have been countenanced at HTB. However, as above, it is possible to plot a path within the Vineyard movement from Wimber's initial call to that wholehearted 'physically and emotionally bowled over Christianity' to a much more therapeutic model within a few years of his death. By 2003 'its charismatic intensity had begun to fade', the 'glory years' of the 1980s were referred to as when 'you felt Jesus was moving by your side like a mighty wind, and when the wall between the eternal supernatural and the mundane was tissue thin', but 'it doesn't feel that way anymore.'³³⁹ Williams, writing at a similar time, concurs that there has been slippage from Wimber's vision with one wing 'committed to the prophetic-holiness of repentance preceding end time revival,'³⁴⁰ and another wing downplaying overt manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit following the seeker sensitive methodology. Nevertheless, he sees and evidences the Vineyard mainstream as still holding to Wimber's values.³⁴¹

³³⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2004/04/16/april-16-2004-mark-noll-extended-interview/11416/> [accessed 1/12/2020]

³³⁸ See Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. (United States: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³³⁹ Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 34.

³⁴⁰ A by-product of the Kansas City Prophets

³⁴¹ As above

Luhrmann concurs that the 'basic impulse of the church is still recognizable as the one Wimber founded,'³⁴² but offers an intriguing, less 'driven' more relaxed and certainly 'therapeutic' perspective on the Jesus on offer in Vineyard and 'experientially orientated evangelical churches.'

Their Jesus is deeply human and playful, magically supernatural... [their God is] a deeply human, even vulnerable God, who loves us unconditionally and wants nothing more than to be our friend, our best friend, as loving and personal and responsive as a best friend in America should be; ... a God who is supernaturally present, it is as if he does magic and if our friendship with him gives us magic too. God retains his majesty but he has become a compulsion, even a buddy to play with, and the most ordinary man can go to the corner church and learn how to hear him speak... this God seems implausible to those raised in the more conventional mainstream, but he is – to some extent – the Jesus of the Gospel of Mark.³⁴³

Whether these critiques outweigh the benefits of TTB for the HTB churches, depends partly on how much you value the success that accrued from Alpha/HTB riding the wave of TTB so dramatically. Or do the theological ripples of a more human-centred religion marketing a more therapeutic Jesus undermine that success in any way? What remains to be seen is if this experiential centre, communicated in largely consumerist tones, will gradually take people further away from some of the older anchors of faith (that are still presumed upon as normative theological voices and influences) including understandings of the plight of humanity in terms of original sin and judgement, the centrality of Scripture as containing all truths necessary for life and godliness, and even ultimately the necessity of (or interpretation of) the cross if sin and judgement are underplayed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has mapped out three 'waves of the Spirit' and shown how these have both energised the growth of the HTB network and yet also progressively unsettled the

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid* 36

HTB network from its grounding in evangelicalism. A more detailed look at the legacy of Wimber and TTB suggests that despite all the positive impacts each wave had on HTB, and indeed how significant they have been in galvanising HTB into the network it is today, there is not a strong enough core to Wimber's theology-model-practice or the TTB experience to make a sustainable normative theology for HTB (or any other movement) today. Indeed, there is a sense that Wimber's early aspirations for churches, his values and vision, have been better preserved in Anglican Evangelical church networks such as New Wine and HTB which had prior theological commitments and structures, (even where those commitments have been shaken by their encounter with Wimber) than it has in the more footloose Vineyard Churches. Neither can the domestication of 'Life in the Spirit' under the banner Generous Orthodoxy provide a coherent centre for the HTB network. Despite the centrality of an experience of the Spirit in espoused and operant theology at HTB a stronger argument could be made for a normative theology for HTB drawing more fully from its evangelical heritage via Stott and adding to that normative theology the particular inspirations of each wave of the Spirit that have produced such growth. Stott plus Wimber allows for a continuation of Anglican Evangelicalism mediated through lens of double listening, inspired by the life in the Spirit.

Chapter Three: Success Culture

Chapter Three shows that while HTB as a network has been birthed out of an evangelical heritage (Chapter One), and midwifed and nannied through three successive waves of the Spirit (Chapter Two), it has also breathed the air of ‘success culture’ as it has grown up. This culture is fuelled not just by factors inherent to that charismatic and evangelical heritage but also by the socio-economic setting and expectations in which it is primarily located, and the psychology of some of the key leaders drawn to work and minister there. The chapter explores some of the ways that success has been defined, encouraged, prized and propagated. It also considers the impact that this has had on those who have been interviewed. This sets up discussion about how a ‘success culture’ may have put pressure on how discipleship goals are described, packaged, branded and marketed, and the corresponding impact on espoused and operant theology. It shows the gap that can develop between normative, operant and espoused theologies, from what was once a self-evident normative theology in the early 1980s when John Collins could say ‘all my theology is Stott’s’, or even from the mid-1980s when Wimber’s theology and praxis was becoming normative (even when a praxis or ‘value’ like ‘intimacy’ in worship might put some people off), with an operant theology increasingly focused on reducing barriers to entry into the church/Alpha, and an espoused theology that deliberately self-edits to achieve the same goal.³⁴⁴ We will see later how this shift in operant and espoused theology shifts normative theology away from Stott and Wimber as well and how this shift has happened in a largely unconscious, unrealised and unacknowledged manner.

Drivers for Success

The current success orientation can be illustrated through two of the key contemporary practitioners: Firstly, Nicky Gumbel on the spread of Alpha in 2014:

³⁴⁴ See Percy, Martyn. *The Salt of the Earth*, 183 for discussion on a therapeutically tuned version of the gospel that is intentionally socially relevant being doomed to be ‘a fashion victim’. Where success is being ‘at the forefront of spiritual fashion, riding on the crest of the latest wave’ the danger is that ‘punters eventually become bored’ without ‘anything new to sing about.’

I genuinely feel like I am a bad steward because I see this amazing gift [Alpha] and only 18 million people around the world have done it and you think what a big world we live in. What I see on our own course is that so many people, not everybody, but so many people: cynics, sceptics, agnostics, atheists, lapsed church goers, nominal church goers, have an encounter with Jesus, they are filled with the Holy Spirit, their lives are changed and they start doing amazing things and I think “how come only 18 million people have done this? How do we accelerate this, get this to as many people as possible?” And the same in the UK...³⁴⁵

Secondly, Bishop Ric Thorpe (former associate vicar at HTB and leader of the HTB network) describing his ambition for exponential growth in church planting in 2017:

‘The expectation will be for each City Centre Resource Church [CCRC] to grow and plant onwards within three years, and subsequently to then further plant every three years. Following this model, we could see 15 new churches by Year Three, 30 by Year Six, and 45 by Year Nine. This has been shown from experience to be an ambitious but realistic target. Assuming that each CCRC will eventually grow their congregation to 1,000, and that each ‘2nd generation’ plant will grow to 500, this will result in around 30,000 additional churchgoers by 2025. If current trends in declining weekly attendance continued at the same rate, these additional attendance numbers would represent an increase in 2025 in national weekly attendance of over 3.5%, helping to reverse the long-term decline of the Church of England. If growth happened at a slower rate than we have already evidenced and the 15 grew to 500 and planted a further 30 churches with 250 each in them that that would still be an increase of 15,000 attendees per annum, mainly from a younger demographic, and would have sparked or birthed a range of other ministries including (as we have seen already) vocations to ordination in the Church of England.’³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Nicky Gumbel in J John and Nicky Gumbel, *Facing the Canon Interview*, 39-41 mins. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sCruydnwso>] (accessed 2 February, 2019). In this interview Gumbel clearly locates the failure of some Alpha courses with local leadership beyond the HTB network’s control.

³⁴⁶ ‘SDF’ London Diocese funding bid to the Church Commissioners, October 2017.

As with that of Whitefield and Wesley, the success of HTB itself can be rooted in a variety of socio-religious factors. The location, leadership, conducive ecclesial authorities, early adoption of Wimber and TTB phenomena, financial muscle, talented personnel, marketing savvy, and Alpha have all played a part. What is harder to quantify, and is similarly missed in some revisionist histories of Wesley and Whitefield, is 'life in the Spirit'.³⁴⁷ Insiders will consistently point to an openness to the Holy Spirit as the key factor in growth.³⁴⁸ A second factor, equally hard to quantify, and yet related to the first, is the extraordinary 'ecclesial friendship' between the leaders of HTB that has its origins in the way the staff team was run and organised in the 1980s.³⁴⁹ But both these factors have had to compete with the success culture that has been both a contributor to and a by-product of the extraordinary growth along with the managerialism that has helped sustain that.

Collins had already seen growth at All Soul's, St Marks Gillingham and planted onto a housing estate in his parish while at Canford,³⁵⁰ while Millar had also seen dramatic growth in the 'small' group he had pioneered at HTB. Yet John Wimber's model was key for helping them 'succeed' beyond the parish. They, and many of the older planters interviewed, cited John Wimber as the main driver behind their church planting exploits. Wimber offered a model that would eventually change the paradigm for Anglican Evangelicals from growing a strong gathered church base to extending beyond traditional parish boundaries.³⁵¹ As HTB

³⁴⁷ Although Whitefield's contemporary detractors were not adverse to seeing an alternate supernatural hand behind his ministry, so Adam Gibb: Whitefield's 'practice is so disorderly and fertile of disorder', so his 'success must be diabolical', and 'people ought to avoid him from duty to God.' See Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*. (United States: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1877), 511-513 for further damning extracts. Cf. Harry Stout in David Bebbington, George Rawlyk, Mark Noll (eds.) *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1900*. (United States: Oxford University Press, 1994). 58-72.

³⁴⁸ Sandy Millar: "My feeling is that God had a plan, and all of us are part of that plan for God to renew the world. Just as at the Reformation Justification by Faith was not a new idea, but it was as though God had decided that it was about time it came to the top of the pile again, I feel that was what God was doing with things of the Holy Spirit... it was happening long before Wimber" Millar speaking to Gumbel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhV2l_klYe0 [accessed 20.1.21]; 'I feel that I've simply stumbled into a move of God that many other people have been praying to see for years. Each day I feel like I am clambering to keep up with the Holy Spirit as he moved forward' Tim Matthews, *Love Church*, (United Kingdom: John Murray Press, 2018), 10-12.

³⁴⁹ Cf Chloe Lynch: *Ecclesial Leadership As Friendship*. (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Limited, 2021) for the importance of this theme.

³⁵⁰ See Ian Saville, "Canford Magna Church", in Eddie Gibbs (ed.), *Ten Growing Churches* (London: Marc Europe, 1984), 173-87; see also Atherstone and Maiden (eds.) *Evangelicalism*, 224.

³⁵¹ Cf Anglican Church Planting Network, www.acpi.org.uk

plants got established they became new inspirations for future plants, but without Collins, Millar and Gumbel taking on Wimber's philosophy of 'give it away' that vision would have not come to birth.

I learned a basic Kingdom premise is you only get to keep what you give away. I already knew that through evangelism you gave away your faith and your faith was sharpened in the process. I knew that by teaching you give away the things that nurture you, in the process yours are replenished. I found out that the same thing was true in the leadership dimension: I had to give it away in order to see it multiplied and spread.³⁵²

My first set of interviews with church planters in the HTB network focused on three pairs of planters representing three eras of church planting from HTB.³⁵³ Each of these planters articulated their 'human motivations' with an impressive level of reflexivity describing how:

- 1) they wanted to succeed to please Collins/Millar/Gumbel and others who had sent them,
- 2) they wanted to succeed for themselves,
- 3) once success happened, which was often very quickly, they then felt the need to defend and maintain that success to keep within the narrative of 'healthy things grow'.

What was striking about these interviews is that while these initial six had been selected because of their measurable church growth indices, 'success' for most came with an inherent fragility.³⁵⁴ In my assessment none of them had (yet) fully lived up to Ric Thorpe's allegedly 'ambitious but realistic' growth target in the introductory quote and two of the churches represented had experienced substantive decline following the initial decade of growth. My follow up interviews included a further 14 church planters/leaders from the network who were chosen deliberately as a more eclectic group, including two whose

³⁵² John Wimber, *The Way In Is The Way On*. (United States: Ampelon 2006).206

³⁵³ See Appendix for full list of the first-round questions.

³⁵⁴ In each case the church or group of congregations that they led had more than 500 members.

plants had stagnated/closed.³⁵⁵ The 20 interviewees are anonymised and randomly coded from Church Leader 'A' [CLA]- to Church Leader 'U' [CLU].

Whether the respondents shared the scale of Gumbel and Thorpe's ambitions or not, it was clear that planting growing churches was a substantial validator and motivator for ministry. One commented:

Success has been too strong a motivation, I think. Only it was always dressed up in godly language and that sort of thing. I acknowledge that it's far too easy to be over concerned about growth and numbers for the wrong reasons. So, at its best, it's concern for spiritual growth. But the danger is always, you spill over into adding up the wrong things. [CLB]

Others talked about a self-perpetuating adrenaline rush as numerical growth led to more work, excitement and more growth [CPA/CPC/CPD]. This has led to near burnout on several occasions for many planters. Although there is a degree of awareness about the issues arising from communicating the 'ABC success indices' (attendance, building, cash), these have been consistently used as a validator and status symbol. Several commented that the pressure is sometimes the subconscious by-product of which stories are chosen to be celebrated and what is highlighted from those stories. A well-rehearsed illustration is the way the growth of one church plant was repeatedly told as, 'the astonishing story' of one plant which grew from '11 adults and four children ...to 574 people after 26 weeks.'³⁵⁶

Such exponential growth has not however been the norm and in such situations where it has been dramatic growth there has sometimes been an implosion of another prominent church or churches in that town, (which may or may not have been directly linked). There are plants that have peaked at a relatively small size, some that have dissolved, and other

³⁵⁵ See Appendix for full list of these second-round questions.

³⁵⁶ <http://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2015/August-2015/Nicky-Gumbel-and-the-evangelisation-of-the-nation> [accessed 14 June, 2015].

flagship plants that have since seen dramatic decline.³⁵⁷ Yet, with the success paradigm platformed so consistently, the expectations on planters have increased. In my observations I noted several young would-be planters consciously dismissing opportunities to move to churches that would require a 'slow burn' ministry as the prevalent model that they had learned was one of immediate rapid success. This is a serious issue for a movement that is now trying to 'fish' in places where the sort of fish they are used to catching are not usually found. One mitigating value prevalent in the majority of my interviewees was the 'give it away' principle, learned from Wimber and propagated so successfully by Millar. A little like a pyramid scheme, success in the network is collective, demonstrated not by creating your own strong independent brand, but by perpetuating HTB culture into an increasing array of newer plants.³⁵⁸ Success is bigger than any individual plant, and the ultimate measure of a plant is whether they can help add a layer to the pyramid by planting and planting again.

Realistic Expectations? Fear and Fantasy

Perhaps contrary to the official network positions and espoused intentions for growth my interviews show an increasingly reflective range of definitions of growth over time. Even those who had seen prolific increases in attendance had a more nuanced definition when thinking about their fellow planters. Two were genuinely perplexed at the growth of their own church. The earliest planters tended to have initially seen success most clearly aligned to the ABC of attendance, buildings, cash, but over time this had changed, with one church leader referring to Graham Tomlin's ABCDE as his benchmark – Adoration, Belonging, Compassion, Discipleship and Evangelism [CLR]. A key turning point seems to have coincided with the Toronto Blessing, with churches begun after TTB more likely to have a focus on community transformation as a core part of their vision. As [CLP] put it 'I would now define a successful church plant as having brought health to a local community.'

Nevertheless, success is most commonly seen as something that could and should be measurable by both qualitative and quantitative criteria. In qualitative terms there were

³⁵⁷ So, two churches once considered to be over 800+ Usual Sunday Attendance now are at 200+, another has reduced from 500+ to 200+. Some have had abortive starts, some plants of plants have slowly folded, others have settled into more local churches despite grander original intentions.

³⁵⁸ Several off the record conversations showed that planters and leaders who had sought to develop their own brands tended not to survive in the network.

responses such as ‘success is very simply changed lives’, [CLU] where testimonies are the clear evidence for blessing. In quantitative terms the answers were more tangible but not directly linked to the data driving the funding. Few of the more recent planters responded with anything like: ‘I see success as gathering 1000 people, planting twice and having an array of smaller church plants’, although some of the most entrepreneurial e.g. [CLO] defined success as ‘our building is full, planting out into other buildings,’. However the most common stated ambition was simply of healthy, growing self-sufficiency: ‘A church planted as an ongoing viable church,’[CLR] ‘I want it to grow in an organic way – outlasting the person in charge – I can’t get away from the fact that “living things grow”’ [CLJ]. The capability (and desire) to plant again, even from a small base, was highlighted by several [e.g. CLD/CLE]. One circumspectly commented that while, ‘[growth in] numbers is a sign, some [difficult] people moving on is also success!’ [CLS].

Nevertheless the ABC measures of church growth were clearly weighed on the minds of many respondents, particularly those who had received substantial (and time-limited) start up funding. This comment was typical of several:

A big problem here is that culture and the church define success in terms of numbers, growth and probably increased parish share. A healthy church will grow but the pressure of a plant, in terms of needing to be seen to grow, is actually a very heavy thing to carry. [CPP]

Irrespective of whether success is considered to be quantifiable it is clear that it has been a significant motivator. [CPU] ‘Success certainly helps. When things go well it encourages me and spurs me on.’ [CPK] speaks of success ‘feeding me’. It was clear that both success and failure had an impact on identity for many planters. A solution for one planter came through his self-identity:

I do not think of myself often as being a leader at [church name] I just think of myself as [first name]. It’s about not making it too important... I like journaling and so even with failure I can see self-improvement. [CPE]

In this he was dislocating his identity from his externally validated success story. Yet others who had gone through church stagnation found this dislocation in times of perceived failure much harder to achieve.

Coping with Failure

Most participants were remarkably able to talk about failure in an undefended, if sometimes regretful, fashion. This was commented on by an older leader at a retreat I attended where another significantly younger leader was telling his (now published) story of losing £0.5million in 30 minutes. Addressing another older leader across the room he commended the younger leader and others in that generation for their emotional honesty, saying that 'we would not have done that in our day, would we?' [CPB].

The younger leaders surveyed were remarkably quick to own stories of failure and many mentioned mental health strains. It is clear that many had benefited from a culture shift where talking to a therapist was now quite normal.

Plenty of failure. I can get low and mope. Talking it through with my counsellor, friends and wife is a real help. [CPU]

I've always found the love, support and prayers of family and close friends the most important thing – alongside aligning myself with God's grace and mercy in my personal prayer times – whenever I have experienced disappointment and failure in leadership.[CPR]

I've not dealt with it well in the past, taken too personally. I started out and then got gut punched and had to go back to realising I knew less than I thought. It was hard to separate personal success/understanding and I have taken it too personally [CPJ]

I have failed in so many ways. It is hard at first. It is easy to take it personally. [CPO]

But for most leaders these stories could sit within a wider story of success and achievement. Many UK ministers would happily settle for the ‘failure’ of 50+ young adults attending an evening service which [CPO] experienced:

But I have learned that innovation involves failure and without it there is no breakthrough. In many ways our evening service was a failure. I had hoped it would be 200 strong and full of young adults by now, but we rarely have more than 50... I am quite a positive person and generally see the good even in a failure. [CPO]

The desire not to fail, and corresponding drive to show quick results was clearly as strong in most, and at least as significant a driver for some as the desire to succeed over the longer-term. The most gruelling failures across the generations, however, had to do with relationship breakdown. As will be seen, a culture of ecclesial friendship has been of pivotal importance in the growth of HTB network and where this has broken down, due to factors such as someone challenging the status quo, this has clearly been very painful. Several also dated their decision to lead a church plant from the point that they began to feel expendable while on staff at HTB. While an older generation generally took this stoically and pragmatically, there are signs that the younger church planters (and their younger still teams) are more fragile when feeling unneeded. Furthermore, at the highest levels of leadership there are signs that even longstanding friendships may crack when ideas of success diverge.

Grace and Grief Cycles

One tool for analysis which is familiar to many in the network is Frank Lake’s model of the Grief Cycle vs Grace Cycle.³⁵⁹ The ‘grace cycle’ has an explanatory power for showing how the ‘waves of the Spirit’ referred to in the last chapter could fuel a productive success strategy. This can be illustrated from Nicky Gumbel’s own story:

³⁵⁹ Known in the network primarily through its use in the Anglican mission agency CPAS’ ARROW leadership programme. Frank Lake, *The Dynamic Cycle*. (United Kingdom: Clinical Theology Association, 1986). For more on Frank Lake see Bridge Pastoral Foundation. www.bridgepastoral.org

In the 'grace cycle' the starting point is a deep acceptance. Gumbel experienced this from the human source of Sandy Millar when he began mentoring Gumbel at HTB in 1976. Ten years later, against strong opposition from the Area Bishop to curates returning to their 'sending church' (despite both Millar and Stott having so successfully done so), Millar managed to bring Gumbel back to HTB as curate in 1986. This was after nine other curacy options for Gumbel fell through/were rejected and Gumbel had even signed on as unemployed.³⁶⁰ Gumbel served Millar loyally as curate for 19 years.

He also experienced this acceptance supernaturally during both the Wimber visits and during TTB. Gumbel was initially sceptical about Wimber, but over three evenings moved from cynicism to a deep personal encounter with the Holy Spirit.³⁶¹ As he got prayed for there was a physical manifestation like '10,000 volts of energy going through me', whilst Wimber publicly pronounced over him: 'God is giving to that man the ability to tell people about Jesus.'³⁶² In Gumbel's words: 'at the core of the experience was an affirmation of the love of God,' which leads him to articulate that at the 'heart of Alpha is the opportunity to experience the love of God, not just to know it but to feel it. God's love is what I experienced and what I wanted others to know too.'³⁶³

Twelve years later on 24 May 1994, (coincidentally the anniversary of John Wesley's Aldersgate Street experience), something similar happened again to Gumbel. Nicky and Pippa Gumbel were present at Elli Mumford's house when she prayed for those there to receive the (Toronto) blessing and the Holy Spirit manifested. Gumbel then went to the staff meeting at HTB and gave the closing blessing which resulted in the same phenomenon being replicated among the staff at HTB. (Millar arrived at 5pm to see the aftermath of this outpouring and was quickly on a plane to Toronto to experience it for himself).³⁶⁴ Although

³⁶⁰ See Gumbel, *Facing the Canon* for Millar/Gumbel (23-29 mins) for Millar's influence on Gumbel leaving the bar to be a vicar, account of curacies (14 Feb 2014) 'it was like all my dreams came true in one moment.' 'I knew that Sandy was the star that I wanted to hitch my wagon to. I admired the way he ran the church, his family and his life and I wanted to learn from him.' He was curate from 1986 to 2005.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sCruydnwso>

³⁶¹ The call was for 10 people who had athlete's foot to respond. He was the tenth to respond and asked for prayer to be filled with the Spirit. *ibid.* 50mins

³⁶² see Heard *Inside Alpha*, 16 for fuller description.

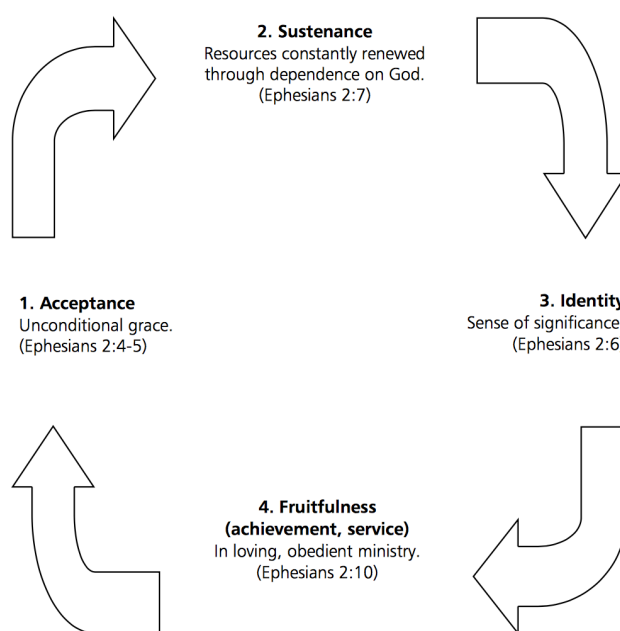
³⁶³ Gumbel, *Facing the Canon*.

³⁶⁴ See Hilborn, *Toronto in Perspective*, 160; Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 14

the contentiousness of TTB means Gumbel now rarely refers to TTB and has removed direct examples of these encounters from the Alpha talks, he is still on record in 2000 describing it as a ‘wonderful, wonderful thing.’³⁶⁵

Lake’s model argues that when ministry starts from mentoring relationship and experiences marked by ‘unconditional grace’ a virtuous cycle of ministry emerges.

Diagram Three: The Grace Cycle



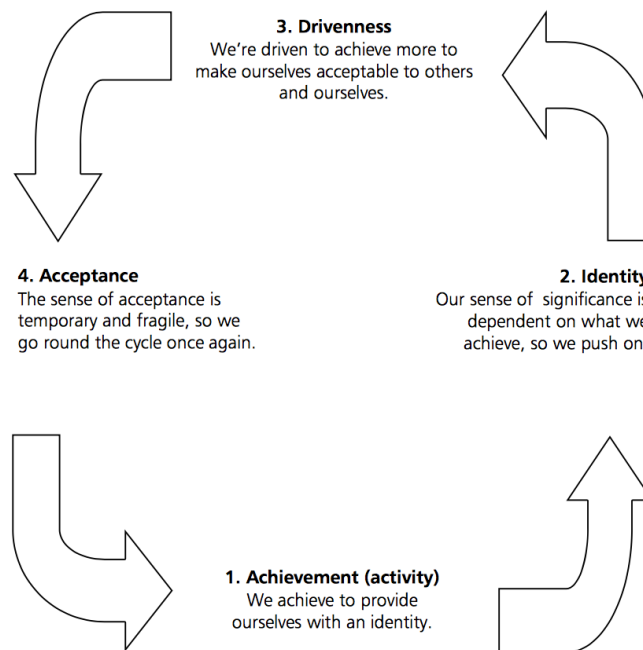
However, a side effect of success can be that the model begins to work backwards. This is known as the ‘grief cycle,’ and that version begins with identity arising from achievement. Gumbel has articulated his own experience of that while at theology college, having given up a successful legal career. ‘What I realised at theology college was that far too much of my self-esteem was tied up with what I did...’ but nearby curate David Hawkins was able to encourage him back into the ‘grace cycle’ by affirming to Gumbel that ‘what matters is not what you do, but who you are, and that your self-esteem comes from that.’³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Quoted by Heard *Inside Alpha*, 22.

³⁶⁶ Gumbel, Facing the Canon, 29 mins.

In my interviews many church leaders admitted to having moved from a ‘grace cycle’ into a ‘grief cycle’. This often occurred at the point that they had either achieved a certain level of ministry success and felt they had something to protect, or alternatively when faced by adversity such as criticism or difficult life circumstances:

Diagram Four: The Grief Cycle



In the model there is always a danger of shifting from ‘grace cycle’ to ‘grief cycle’ triggered by handling success, pressure, opposition or adverse circumstances. Aitken suggests that the international expansion of Alpha almost came at a calamitous cost to HTB. In the wake of 5000 churches taking up Alpha in 1995 and numerous international invitations to expand, Aitken claims Millar was reluctant to see Alpha dominate HTB. His more cautious approach led to ‘tension between the two close friends’, resolved only by ‘prayer and mutual understanding’ and because ‘Nicky deferred obediently’ to his vicar.³⁶⁷ Then ‘Sandy changed his mind and gave the green light to Alpha’s international expansion, subject, however, to the somewhat bureaucratic proviso that the number of Alpha staff in the HTB office should

³⁶⁷ Aitken, *Heroes and Contemporaries*, 240.

always be equalled by the church staff.³⁶⁸ On a very different note Aitken also records how the death of Gumbel's beloved squash partner Mick Hawkins at this time, while they were playing together during the Focus church holiday week, led Gumbel to throw himself into his work on Alpha 'with an obsessive attention to detail' as he 'constantly adjusted the presentation' and analysed every word in the course.³⁶⁹ And yet, in Aitken's account, this 'long dark night of the soul', also took Gumbel into a deeper spirituality based on the sharing of suffering.

Success and Expectations: Health Warning

We have already noted JI Packer's misgivings about upper-middle class Eclectics being 'overly optimistic' about the human condition. Robert Warner takes this further in his survey of UK evangelicalism from 1966-2001 which explores varying espoused and operant theologies of success in the UK church.³⁷⁰ Building on Brierley's 2000 survey, he analysed growth expectations by churchmanship.³⁷¹ He found that just 15% of Catholics expected significant growth, compared with 51% of evangelicals. Among that 51% only 25% of 'broad' Evangelicals expected significant growth compared to 43% of 'Mainstream Evangelicals' and 79% of Charismatics.³⁷² Whilst Mainstream Evangelicals attributed their optimism to 'confidence in the gospel', Charismatics attributed their heightened optimism to the continued or expected outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What is striking in Warner's research is that these expectations had no correlation to *actual* growth and decline patterns. In his analysis Charismatics experienced a 16% decline in the 1990s, but 79% expected a significant growth in the following 10 years, while Pentecostals underwent a 9% decline yet still 87% expected significant growth. By comparison 'Mainstream Evangelicals' who had experienced a 68% increase only had a 43% expectation of significant growth. Warner concludes that for Charismatics:

³⁶⁸ Aitken, 241; Tricia Neill tells a more harmonious story of this development in *From Vision to Action*, (United Kingdom: Alpha, 2006), 13.

³⁶⁹ Ibid 241.

³⁷⁰ Warner, R *Fissured Resurgence: developments in English pan-evangelicalism, 1966-2001* <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2929985/430439.pdf> p.130 [accessed 19.3.2021].

³⁷¹ Brierley, P. W., and Georgina Sanger, eds. *Religious Trends 2.2000/01 Millennium ed.* (London: Christian Research; Harper Collins, 1999).

³⁷² Warner, *Fissured Resurgence*, 130.

Optimistic expectations have become heightened beyond reality as a result of embracing later-modern assumptions of assured growth and success. Moreover, this ideology appears to have become unfalsifiable: if success is the automatic and intrinsic destiny of the true church, whenever churches suffer decline, it can only be, according to the law of inherent and assured growth because they are not Evangelical, Pentecostal or Charismatic enough... there has been a zealous stroking of vision inflation... when their growth expectations wantonly disregard the fact that the decade of evangelism has been a decade of decline evangelicals in general and charismatics in particular appear to be in denial ... and exemplify Fastinger's account of the characteristic response to cognitive dissonance – a defiant optimism that is essentially an escapist fantasy to sustain implausible convictions.³⁷³

Warner's thesis concludes that the conversionist-activist axis of evangelicalism is remarkably resilient within the contemporary charismatic church, and that this defiant optimism is the engine room for a 'pragmatic, non-reflexive entrepreneurialism'.³⁷⁴ Yet this comes with 'delusional tendencies...ever amnesiac to past disappointments' and confident that their latest initiative 'was sure to produce the advances in convertive piety that they continued resolutely to expect.'³⁷⁵

Adrian Hastings concurs:

'It seems characteristic of Evangelicalism both to appeal especially to youth and to make rather grand claims in regard to its advances... the consequence is that Evangelicalism looks like a tide always claimed to be just about to come in, yet never quite reaching the shore with the force proclaimed.'³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Ibid. 131

³⁷⁴ Contra this thesis which questions if 'conversionist-activist' can only be 'recruitment-activist' if separated from the demands of 'biblicist-crucicentrist', i.e. is it a true conversion if the way of the cross and scripture do not become central?

³⁷⁵ Warner, *Fissured Resurgence*, 130

³⁷⁶ Adrian Hastings, *A history of English Christianity 1920-2000*. (London: SCM, 2001), xlv.

It is worth noting that Warner is broadly positive about the success of Alpha as the ‘one initiative without which the decade of evangelism would have been invisible’, and ‘one of the most effective plausibility structures for Christian faith and witness in the post-modern world... a buttress against a widespread withdrawal into privatized and hidden faith.’³⁷⁷ Yet he also noted that ‘when we strip away the rhetoric of success 74% of churches using Alpha for three or more years are not growing’, and hence that the explosive growth and early successes of Alpha (largely reaching in to existing congregations) ‘could easily beguile enthusiasts into premature and exaggerated expectations.’³⁷⁸

Pragmatism and the mechanisms for sustaining success

Church Growth Movement

Heard sees the ‘Church Growth Movement’ [CGM] as key for understanding HTB’s growth mediated initially through Wimber’s teaching and influence. Wimber studied at Fuller Seminary under Donald McGavaran and Peter Wagner and then started a teaching role in 1974/5 establishing the Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth.³⁷⁹ Much of the CGM teaching stemmed from McGavaran’s discontent with ‘fruitless’ missionary methods in 1930s India as outlined in his 1955 work *The Bridges of God* which was revised in 1981.³⁸⁰ He argued for four things that are highly relevant to understanding HTB today: 1) evangelism should be intentional and quantifiable not just ‘faithful’ as God’s will is for salvation; 2) resources should not be spent on what does not make disciples; 3) racial, linguistic and social barriers to conversion should be removed so that whole communities could turn to Christ, not just individuals going against a tide of culture. This led to the Homogenous Unit Principle [HUP]; 4) Finally, and critically for its links with this study, he distinguished between ‘discipling’ (by which he meant conversion to Christ and church) and ‘perfecting’ (which might be more commonly labelled ‘discipling’ today i.e. the lifelong process of spiritual and ethical development in the lives of believers) as ‘two distinct stages of Christianization’. McGavaran warned that too many missionary activities had been diverted

³⁷⁷ Warner op cit. 155, 156.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ See Carol Wimber, *John Wimber*, 97ff including vague dating.

³⁸⁰ Revised edition produced in 1981.

to perfecting [ongoing deep discipleship] when the original mission charter demanded discipling [conversion].³⁸¹

Within the HTB network these principles can be seen played out repeatedly. The ABC indices are carefully counted under the adage 'what we measure we value'. There is a high clarity about resource deployment and adhering to the vision. HUP has been particularly significant for HTB and Alpha.³⁸² There is a clear emphasis on bringing individuals into a relationship with Jesus through Alpha and equipping them to bring others to Alpha. And this early stage of 'conversion/discipleship' has been prioritised over 'deep discipleship/perfecting'. Where detailed teaching on controversial issues threatened to undermine the 'making disciples/converts' they have been bypassed, dropped or at least sanitised to make it more conducive for a 21st Century audience.³⁸³

Millar recalls that 'for many years we had a dream that the way that we ran things around here would rival the best of what we saw elsewhere.'³⁸⁴ Gumbel recruited Trish Neill (a recent Alpha graduate) in 1994 from the business world to help develop Alpha. After three years the explosive growth of Alpha had been so effectively managed that Millar formed a senior leadership team of himself, Gumbel and Neill who then 'incorporated the ideas, professionalism and process of Alpha' into the running of HTB itself.³⁸⁵ The accepted shorthand mantra summarising Neill's philosophy is: 'aim for perfection, accept excellence.'³⁸⁶

The adoption of CGM theory has been paralleled in many parts of the Western evangelical church by an 'almost complete rapprochement' between 'business and religious

³⁸¹ See preface to Wagner, CP & McGavaran D, *Understanding Church Growth*, (United Kingdom: Eerdmans, 1990), viii-xi Third Edition. These ideas originally outlined in *The Bridges of God*, 1955 and in a revised edition in 1981.

³⁸² See Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 11

³⁸³ See discussion on *Search Issues* 1994, *Challenging Lifestyle* 1996, and *The Jesus Lifestyle*, 2018 below.

³⁸⁴ Millar, in his forward to Neill, *Vision to Action*.

³⁸⁵ Neill, *Vision to Action*, 13.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. 61 'Seek excellence in everything you attempt. Always run an event to the highest possible standards. Pay attention to detail.'

organisations.³⁸⁷ John Drane identified George Ritzer’s four priorities of managerialism with the church growth movement, showing that how uniform structures, building styles, success measured on attendance, and emphasis on giving and member retention have been key factors.³⁸⁸ There have been various critiques of ‘secular’ leadership concepts impacting the church. Influential evangelical leader Dallas Willard, critiquing a wholehearted adoption of the managerial worldview, laments that the ‘popular model of success’ has become maximising the ABC of ‘attendance, buildings and cash’.³⁸⁹ Budde emotively describes the use of quantitative indicators to ‘ensure more sheep-per-shepherding-unit’ and Watson and Scalon went as far as describing it as ‘dining with the devil’.³⁹⁰ For a more sympathetic take see Mike Bonem who suggests a both/and approach to integrating managerial leadership techniques with Christian formation practices.³⁹¹ This is a wide phenomenon and debate as seen in Richard Smith’s account of a Black Church Organisation becoming a global brand *Becoming McChurch*, where he summarises: ‘to lead is simply to perpetuate the system’.³⁹²

The practitioners with this approach who have had most impact on UK churches are Bill Hybels at Willow Creek through his Global Leadership Summit and Rick Warren through his Purpose Filled Life publications.³⁹³

³⁸⁷ Stephen Pattison, *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays*. (United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 87.

³⁸⁸ John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity, and the Future of the Church*, (London: DLT, 2000); George Ritzer key works were: *The McDonaldization of Society* (Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1993) and *The McDonaldization Thesis* (Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998).

³⁸⁹ Willard: ‘Instead of counting Christians, we need to weigh them. We weigh them by focusing on the most important kind of growth—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, kindness, and so on—fruit in keeping with the gospel and the kingdom.’ “*The Apprentices*”, www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=112, [accessed 9 January, 2021], Mike Bonem, *Great AND Godly Leadership*, 2012, 235-240.

³⁹⁰ J.B. Watson, Jr. and Walter H. Scalon, Jr., “‘Dining with the Devil’: The Unique Secularization of American Evangelical Churches”, *International Social Science Review* 83:3-4 (2008), Michael L. Budde, “The Rational Shepherd: Corporate Practice and the Church”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21:1 (2008), 96-116, 100. See also: Richard H. Roberts’ trenchant critique in: Religion, 161; “Order and Organization: The Future of Institutional and Established Religion” (78 -96) in G.R. Evans and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Managing the Church? Order and Organization in a Secular Age*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

³⁹¹ Bonem, Mike. *In Pursuit of Great AND Godly Leadership: Tapping the Wisdom of the World for the Kingdom of God*. Germany: Wiley, 2011.

³⁹² Richard M. Smith, ‘Becoming McChurch: A Case Study of a Black Church Organization’s Transition From Leading in the Local Community to Creating a Global Brand’, *JRL* 15:1 (2016), 5576, 71. This lament is echoed at HTB in Azariah France Williams *Ghost Ship* (cf. Chapter Five)

³⁹³ Both have been main speakers at HTB’s own Leadership Conference in the Royal Albert Hall (Hybels in 2013; Warren in 2012 and 2014).

Willow Creek is known for both its managerial approach to leadership and its equally pragmatic take on service which are devised as 'seeker sensitive' outreach events. These are characterised by 'embracing contemporary music styles, thematic preaching and skits that demonstrated the relevance of the issues being discussed.'³⁹⁴ Seeker-sensitive services had a mixed reception at HTB. Aspects of seeker sensitivity, like the 'homogenous unit principle' chimed in well with a Wimberite model and can be seen at work in the small and mid-sized groups at HTB and in the way Gumbel organised Alpha by 1994.³⁹⁵ Indeed the idea of being seeker-sensitive seems to sit well with Millar's, 'it's not the message but the model that needs changing to satisfy the market.'³⁹⁶ So Hunt and others claim that Alpha and the HTB model 'puts the customer first' from a 'need to satisfy consumer demand and provide answers for the erstwhile spiritual "seeker."³⁹⁷

However, on the other hand under Millar, HTB decided to prioritise Wimber's model of 'intimacy in worship' above 'seeker-friendly' non-participatory music.³⁹⁸ Indeed, this sort of Wimberesque worship remains integrated into even the Alpha programme despite prominent critics.³⁹⁹ This again suggests the extent to which HTB's growth mechanisms are pneumatologically centred. Encounter with God through the Spirit is the one key praxis they are prepared defend to the hilt and so a degree of organised discomfort is allowed to facilitate encounter with the Spirit - even if the 'consumer reviews' show e.g. that they dislike sung worship in Alpha.⁴⁰⁰ (This may be contrasted with 'normative theologies' that

³⁹⁴ Cf James Hudnut-Beumler and Mark Silk (eds.), *The Future of Mainline Protestantism in America*. (Columbia University Press, 2018).

³⁹⁵ See Gumbel, *Telling Others*, 153, and Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, for further discussion of this.

³⁹⁶ see "Marketing the Message" in Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 116-144 for an extended exploration of this. He concludes with a quote from Millar that every church should invest in excellent PR, by which he means 'prayer for revival' and that it was the blessing of Almighty God that was the ultimate endorsement HTB were looking for.

³⁹⁷ Hunt, *The Alpha Enterprise*.

³⁹⁸ Despite a (very) senior staff member wanting to shift to 'seeker friendly services' Interview 14.9.2017

³⁹⁹ See e.g. <https://www.psephizo.com/gender-2/why-dont-men-come-to-church/> [accessed 10.1.20] Although see Chapter 5 for Millar's comments to HTB network leaders on whether more recent music is conducive to 'intimacy' as Wimber modelled or has migrated to focus on performance/production based values.

⁴⁰⁰ See Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 117 for reported discomfort with sung worship at Alpha.

may be sacrificed or palatized at an espoused/operant level leaving what Hunt labels a 'comfortable theology' which avoids unattractive doctrines).⁴⁰¹

McDonalidisation

The notion of a McDonalidisation of the Church was advocated regarding Alpha as early as 1998 by the then Archbishops' Advisor for Youth Ministry, Pete Ward, who like Drane above was also echoing Ritzer.⁴⁰² Matthew Guest saw Ward's article as erudite but found that Alpha has not simply capitulated to consumerism.⁴⁰³ According to Percy, Ward has since revised his views,⁴⁰⁴ but Ward's 1998 description of Alpha as a simplification of religion, a stifling system spreading uniform spirituality, an illusion or 'simulacrum' and a convenience mission, certainly unnerved some at HTB.⁴⁰⁵

Heard has convincingly responded to this with regards to Alpha.⁴⁰⁶ He sees it as 'a bit of a truism' that Alpha includes elements of the McDonalization hypothesis, but notes three significant dissimilarities for which Ward failed to account: Firstly, the (financial) profit making motivation for rationalisation which is key to the McDonalization hypothesis is not present in Alpha. Instead Alpha International [AI] executives such as Ken Costa have given 'significant amounts of their own money to AI.'⁴⁰⁷ Secondly, 'Gumbel's instructions for choosing leaders could not be further from Taylor's ethos' when it comes to replacing humans with non-human technology.⁴⁰⁸ Alpha is deliberately labour intensive in order to enculturate Alpha graduates on to teams. Thirdly, contra Percy,⁴⁰⁹ Heard argues that Alpha

⁴⁰¹ See Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha*.

⁴⁰² In what proved to be a very controversial journal article Pete Ward, 'Alpha – The McDonalization of Religion', *Anvil* 15.4, 1999 pp.279-86; drawing from George Ritzer *The McDonalization of Society: An Investigation Into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. (India: Pine Forge Press, 1993).

⁴⁰³ Matthew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture. Studies in Evangelical History and Thought*. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 47, 177-8.

⁴⁰⁴ Percy, *Salt of the Earth*, 185, n.46 (where he refers to private correspondence from 29 January 2001).

⁴⁰⁵ See Stephen Brian, "Deconstructing the Alpha Testimonies," *Theology* 108 (2005): 193-202, and Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 64f.

⁴⁰⁶ Heard *Inside Alpha*, 65-68.

⁴⁰⁷ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 67. Which is not to say that executives have not gained other reputational benefits, profile and influence from their involvement.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰⁹ In a chapter on 'Shopping for God' in which Percy concludes that 'consumer-led religion has already arrived and may not be a bad thing, he describes Alpha as a beginners guide to Christianity, 'for people who are

cannot be dismissed for superficiality as ‘many testify to being profoundly affected by experiencing Alpha’.⁴¹⁰

Branded and Celebrity Church

Pete Ward more recently has described two phenomena worth attention: ‘Branded Church’ and ‘Celebrity Church’. In his terminology ‘branded churches’ have a brand identity, that is ‘carried by media generated commodities.’ He notes how products like Alpha enable branded churches to ‘become more than a local congregation.’ Their global reach comes through use of media, and for Ward, it is this use of media - not theology or message - that characterises these Megachurches:

Branding is the means by which these products develop an emotional connection with a wider audience. The brand operates as a personality that invites affective engagement from those who are drawn towards the products, and, through processes of identification and the formation of group identities related to the products and the events at which they are promoted, a connection is forged, between the brand and evangelical Christians around the world. This process leads to a new form of evangelical celebrity: the celebrity Church.⁴¹¹

Celebrity culture impacts HTB at various levels. Firstly by attracting (and keeping) ‘media-profile celebrities’,⁴¹² secondly in using celebrities for marketing (eg explorer Bear Grylls’ fronting the Alpha campaign and BAFTA winning TV presenter Gemma Hunt hosting the Alpha Film Series), and thirdly by making celebrities within the Christian sub-culture and leveraging existing sub-culture ‘celebrities’ for their brand.⁴¹³ Finally, by promoting other Christian celebrities (e.g by platforming them at the Leadership Conference based at the

already too busy , which offers a “light touch” in terms of demands of the gospel in exchange for a network of new relationships,’ and is a good fit for consumers. In Percy, *Salt of the Earth*, 189-190

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 68

⁴¹¹ Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2019).

⁴¹² Hunt, *Handbook of Megachurches*, 217. Note the complex relationship of celebrity with media and public discourse may make it harder for churches known to have prominent celebrities attending to speak into any issue that may upset fanbase.

⁴¹³ Since the 2005 appointment of prominent worship leader Tim Hughes HTB have appointed several well-known Christian figures to staff team sometimes absorbing pre-existing ministry... Martyn Layzell (worship) Pete Wynter (leadership) Will Van DeHart (mental health/pastoral) all brought name recognition and existing ministries to the church as well as generational connectiveness. See David French, “*The Crisis of Christian Celebrity*”, <https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/the-crisis-of-christian-celebrity> for a common critique.

illustrious Albert Hall) in the hope of a reciprocal promotion of Alpha (particularly in the USA).⁴¹⁴ A compilation of Nicky Gumbel introducing the now suspended founder of Soul Survivor, Revd Mike Pilavachi was circulated on social media by @God_loves_women on 2 May, 2023. It gives a taste of how Gumbel championed and platformed key celebrities. You hear him say: 'Mike, we owe you so much'; 'practically everyone [HTB church planters] said the main reason for being ordained was Soul Survivor and Mike Pilavachi'; 'Mike has been a really good friend to our family and church'; 'everything Mike says and writes is worth reading'; 'Mike is a hero and an inspiration' in a two minute clip.⁴¹⁵ Some key network church plants, are not alone in utilising the draw of celebrity church but there are many cautionary tales worth heeding, not least 'Hillsong' in New York.⁴¹⁶

As seen with the 1998 rebuff of Ward's 'McDonaldization' thesis, the brand needs protection. Cartledge found this across his engagement with megachurches describing how research sometimes took months of negotiation.⁴¹⁷ Branded and celebrity churches have a lot to lose when faced with reputational damage. In a branded church a simple answer to a problem tends to work best e.g., 'Alpha is our part in the evangelisation of the nation'. The revitalisation of the church is through 'planting resource churches.' Conversely there is an avoidance of either nuanced statements that may be misinterpreted, or bold statements which may be 'weaponised' against. (Despite substantive social media pressure Gumbel has even avoided publicly distancing himself from 'fallen' people he has previously promoted such as Jean Vanier, Bill Hybels, Mike Pilavachi and his University mentor Jonathan Fletcher). Ultimately Ward suggests this simplistic positivity and lack of boldness stifles innovation and risk taking. It clearly limits what discipleship goals are allowed to be articulated and curtails espoused theology.

⁴¹⁴ Eg Willow Creek began Alpha in 2014 - shortly after Hybels spoke at Leadership Conference. <https://www.apprising.org/2014/02/05/willow-creek-begins-the-sinfully-ecumenical-alpha-course/>

⁴¹⁵ Natalie Collins (@God_loves_women), "Hi @nickygumbel, as #lc23 starts again today, and given how influential you have repeatedly stated Mike Pilavachi to be, I hope you will be using your platform today to stand in solidarity with the men sharing their story in the Telegraph of being abused by Mike." https://twitter.com/God_loves_women/status/1653308312568438786 (2 May, 2023).

⁴¹⁶ See <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2021/02/carl-lentz-and-the-trouble-at-hillsong>

⁴¹⁷ Cartledge, *Megachurches*, 31 – notes that research 'took years of negotiation'.

Problems with Success

Firstly, the definition of success needs honest examination. For all the positivity, marketing, and expectations of growth (cf Warner above), there is some statistical analysis to suggest the story may not be as good as it claims to be. Jason Byassee, drawing on Bob Hopkins and George Lings, notes how at one time many dioceses seemed 'allergic' to church planting and were nervous of the HTB brand, but now, in the face of much diminished resources, the same dioceses in panic have courted the HTB brand.⁴¹⁸ Using evidence from 2013 research he claims that 80% of the members of new resource churches come from transfer growth,

HTB-style plants may not be trying to steal sheep, they must just be 'growing better grass' as apologists put it. But it is happening.⁴¹⁹

Hopkins argues that the places around the resource churches 'get darker and darker, because everyone is gathered at church and not doing mission in their own area.' He thus argues that the HTB model needs to be kept in context with the rest of the models and synergised rather than being singled out as 'the answer' to our crisis.⁴²⁰

Secondly, the pursuit of sustained success requires funding. This can leave HTB/AI and network churches in a position of financial dependency on major donors and funders. HTB, partly in a bid to get Alpha known in America, have courted key influencers via Leadership Conference such as Bill Hybels, Joyce Meyer and Rick Warren. While 'Purpose Driven Life' author Warren may have seemed a natural fit, Willow Creek founder Hybels has since been discredited and Meyer has always attracted a strong critique due to her positivist, prosperity-orientated Pentecostalism and large personal wealth gained from ministry.⁴²¹ Whether this is a sign of promoting unity or bending principles for potential

⁴¹⁸ Jason Byassee, *Northern Lights: Resurrecting Church in the North of England*. (United States: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 91 conversation with Bob Hopkins. Millar about this shift in Dioceses approach concurs; 'They think it's a short-cut to a full church, which of course it isn't, it's much more complicated than that – all the leadership and things Ric is going to help with, local leadership and sensitivity..' Millar, Interview, 2015

⁴¹⁹ Byassee, *Northern Lights*, 93 quoting "Church Growth Research Project: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions" (Oct 2013), 33 https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/church_growth_research_fresh_expressions_-_strand_3b_oct13_-_the_report.pdf.

⁴²⁰ Ibid p.92.

⁴²¹ On Meyer as controversial to come to Leadership Conference see Mike Gilbert "Would you hire Joyce Meyer?" <https://www.e-n.org.uk/2015/05/features/would-you-hire-joyce-meyer/9c3c6/> for a write up of her reception see Carey Lodge *Surprised by Joyce: How Joyce Meyer (more or less) won over the Brits* (6 May,

profit (or 'impact') will depend on the interpreter. Within the UK the HTB network and the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication (still dominated by members of the HTB network) have been major recipients of Church Commissioners' money as well as more local funding from individual dioceses.⁴²² St Mellitus College is dependent on funding from a still wider range of Dioceses and from central church funds. It remains to be seen what the full cost will be to the network of aligning so closely with the Church of England within the Welby era. If whoever pays the piper does indeed call the tune this may have more effects on espoused theology.⁴²³

Thirdly, there are theological questions as to whether the pursuit of success is morally good. Ritzer noted in McDonalised systems 'quantity must be equated with quality – if there is a lot of it then it must be good.'⁴²⁴ As HTB replicates network churches around the nation should it be the number of churches or, say, the quality of discipleship in those churches that validates the expansion? Chloe Lynch notes that the 'prevalence of managerialism in leadership has been impelled by the erroneous assumption that efficiency is neutral'⁴²⁵ drawing from MacIntyre, who questioned whether 'organisational leaders and managers [can be seen] as morally neutral characters whose skills enable them to devise the most efficient means of achieving whatever end is proposed'.⁴²⁶ Lynch helpfully draws on another aspect of Taylor's work on the *Malaise of Modernity*, to show that success is now commonly quantified as 1) the technical management of an organisation's success and 2) satisfaction

2015)

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/surprised.by.joyce.how.joyce.meyer.more.or.less.won.over.the.brits/53417.htm>.

⁴²² Despite an 'Electoral Role' [church membership] of over 4000 people, HTB's contribution to central church funds in 2019 through the Parish Share was just £250,000.

⁴²³ The current (2021-23) Church of England debates on human sexuality are one clear place that allegiances will be tested. A St Mellitus tutor was forced to apologise for his part in promoting a Church of England Evangelical Council film that restated the Church of England's current position on human sexuality. See further in David Baker *Bishops deplore 'personal insults and attacks' in Church of England sexuality war* 26 November 2020

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/bishops.declare.personal.insults.and.attacks.in.church.of.england.sexuality.war/135969.htm>

⁴²⁴ Ritzer, *McDonaldization*, 14.

⁴²⁵ Chloe Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership As Friendship*. (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Limited, 2021), 18

⁴²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3rd ed.), (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 25, 74

of individual (consumer) choices.⁴²⁷ Lynch argues that the second of these, ‘fulfilment of an individual’s narcissistic choices’, is in many ways a subset of the former – seeking to guarantee repeat business.⁴²⁸ So, she argues, in a vacuum of other clear goals ‘efficiency and individual fulfilment become the ultimate telos’ to which leadership should be directed. In pursuit of quantifiable success do network churches face the danger unwittingly orientating around meeting the felt needs of consumers they cater for in order to achieve ‘individual fulfilment’?

Lynch’s conclusion is:

It is not that pursuing increased attendance and resources or meeting needs is necessarily inappropriate; rather, these must be limited by a telos constructed from theological reflection instead of pragmatism and market exigencies.... churches may choose quantitative metrics not for theological reasons but because what might have been the church’s ultimate telos has been eclipsed by managerial priorities relating to organisational growth. I do not necessarily reject measurements of ecclesial movement towards its telos: certainly, where the telos is theologically defined, measurement of success would likely be beneficial. Yet measuring the ABCs may indicate focus on substitute teloi, dictated by managerial narratives of leadership.⁴²⁹

Fourthly, there are personal stories from people who have felt themselves to be spat out of the HTB success machine. Although several could be told the most damning public critique has come from Azariah France Williams (2020). In *Ghostship*, he describes HTB, with scant disguise, as ‘a global faith enterprise, the Amazon of the Christian world, distributing goods and services in an ever-expanding, ever-ambitious march.’⁴³⁰ He compares the ‘Delilah-

⁴²⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, (Ontario: Anansi, 1991), 5; Ritzer, *McDonaldization*, 46

⁴²⁸ Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership*, 18.

⁴²⁹ Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership*, 21.

⁴³⁰ Azariah France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England*. (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2020), 72. While HTB is not named neither is it in any way disguised that he is describing the church he served as a curate.

church' of HTB,⁴³¹ to 'Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.' This is a 'wonderland of rooms where one is taught how to make a product more addictive, more marketable.'

Charlie is chosen because he has 'the least power and is the most manipulatable.' He is the one boy who might run the factory in the way Wonka wants it run. Wonka, on the other hand, is idolised as a seemingly 'benign dictator' who ensconced Charlie through love-bombing and, in France Williams' words, his 'assumption of a father-figure role.' Charlie is suggestible and unquestioningly obedient, accompanied solely by an aging grandfather who will not challenge Wonka for the paternal place. France-Williams evocatively draws on an original telling of the story where Charlie is a black boy who saves the factory from but his not to inherit the factory, but to 'run a shop stockpiled with Willy Wonka products.'⁴³²

Writing of HTB and Gumbel he says:

[HTB] had three key values: loyalty, hard work and love, primarily on behalf of our very own Willy Wonka who really was the king in that setting, and emperor of a larger domain.⁴³³

Fifthly, France-William's account begs another key question for the network. What creativity and energy may be being sacrificed in order to maintain church growth and promote core products like Alpha? France-Williams describes how he wanted to create his own course, and he is not alone in having creative and entrepreneurial drive among an extraordinary capable cohort of creative ministers (and lay people) who have served in HTB and network churches. The Sigmoid Curve in business circles suggests innovation should occur in advance of what is currently going well plateauing. Is there a case to say that Alpha peaked in the UK back in 1998 as TTB began to fade and the next key innovation should have happened by

⁴³¹ This relates to a previous criticism he makes from the story of Samson and Delilah, where he portrays himself as a type of rebel Samson, in whom is a 'bubbling rebellion and desire for liberation' matched by a 'desire for power and validation', who becomes attracted to 'a high-class escort [Delilah] with whom [he] is infatuated'. HTB is Delilah. Being with her gives him access to this dominant (white) power, but it is access on their terms. Samson is a threat to established order and while he is 'furnished with the illusion' of welcome he is cut off from his people, expected to assimilate, alter his appearance and ultimately left as a 'neutered novelty' – a 'performer.' France Williams, *Ghost Ship*, 162-5

⁴³² Keyser, Catherine. "Candy Boys and Chocolate Factories: Roald Dahl, Racialization, and Global Industry." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 63, no. 3 (2017): 403-428.

⁴³³ France-Williams, *Ghostship*, 167.

then (perhaps whilst AI continued to expand abroad)? One minister remembers Ken Costa approaching him as a young staff member in 2001 encouraging him to innovate as ‘Nicky had done when he was your age.’ But how much scope has there been for such innovation when the machine has been so carefully managed? The recent Alpha Film Series may have prolonged Alpha’s life, and online Alpha may have been a great success, but would both of these projects have happened much sooner in the hands of a younger generation?

As Warner put it:

The seeds of future decline of Alpha may have been sown in the years of success – centralised control, ambitious and expensive expansion, a dated apologetic, a pneumatology that overstates glossolalia and thaumaturgy, an accelerating bureaucratization, and a self-reverential sub-culture that may make future modifications increasingly elusive. Above all, neither Alpha nor any other church initiative appears capable of reversing the tide of secularised alienation from traditional religion.⁴³⁴

Impacts on Espoused Theology

A key question for the network is how to present ‘sound doctrine’ winsomely without succumbing to what 2 Tim 3:4 describes as just giving people ‘what their itching ears want to hear’. At what point does adaptation of teaching shift from good marketing or changing the model, to (perhaps accidentally) changing the message?

Gumbel has been prepared to adapt the form of Alpha for ecumenical purposes and also due to participant feedback:

We don’t want anyone telling us what to do, or any authority outside of ourselves. That’s why we’ve changed the order of the Alpha talk. It used to be the Bible first, then prayer. Now, people love prayer, but they’re deeply suspicious of the Bible because it’s an authority outside of ourselves.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 155.

⁴³⁵ Gumbel interview with Jules Evans <https://www.philosophyforlife.org/blog/nicky-gumbel-on-encounters-with-the-holy-spirit> [accessed 21.1.2016].

Here Gumbel is arguably doing Stott's double-listening and notes the prevailing cultural 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. His conclusion is that a more experiential encounter with God in prayer needs to precede explaining the use of the bible due to a popular mistrust of external authority. The experience may then help participants come to terms with the Bible as an authority. In this his conclusion differs from Stott who perhaps had a greater conviction of the efficacy of Scripture to transform lives. But it is not just a question of primacy in authority of Scripture or experience. It is also worked out in espoused theology.

Guest's ethnographic study of groups working with follow up material to Alpha identified a conflation of middle-class values with bible teaching. In his perspective Nicky Gumbel's teaching on ambition 'seems to anticipate the concerns of his middle-class Knightsbridge audience' and it is not insignificant that this material was initially produced for those with lucrative careers who are financially comfortable:⁴³⁶

'To take a rather cynical perspective Christianity becomes appropriated in a way that avoids inconveniencing its members or challenging their existing lifestyles. As David Lyon sardonically put it, quoting from Henry Mair, "Jesus comes dressed up in the clothes of our own culture."⁴³⁷

The aspiration to ensure that 'The Good News is good news' has shone through the HTB model over several generations. This good news/positivity can be seen in Collins' teaching, Millar's pastoral care and Gumbel's evangelism. A good example is the *Bible in One Year*. Millar gave Gumbel a Bible in One Year in 1990, which he has read ever since.⁴³⁸ From 2009 he made his comments available to others and it is now available both in print and electronically as an app, website and email. The app has been downloaded over 3 million times.⁴³⁹ It draws on Gumbel's own private personal devotional practice over three decades,

⁴³⁶ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 177-178.

⁴³⁷ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 179-180.

⁴³⁸ Gumbel, *Bible In One Year*, preface.

⁴³⁹ <https://bibleinoneyear.org/en/about/>

and he continues to revise it each week.⁴⁴⁰ Gumbel has had a small army of young researchers and church staff help with the editing and digitalising. He acknowledges a particular indebtedness in the content to 4 Anglicans: Sandy Millar, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, John Stott and CS Lewis, 3 American megastars: Billy Graham, Joyce Meyer and Rick Warren, 2 Catholics, Fr Raniero Catalamessa (preacher to the papal household) and the since disgraced abuser Jean Vanier (founder of L'Arche community). Jackie Pullinger – a missionary and conference speaker completes the named list.⁴⁴¹ It is a deliberately eclectic mix, reflecting the broad influences on his thinking. Meyer is particularly prevalent in the commentary where each entry is edited to exactly 1500 words. The tone is similar to that of Joyce Meyer in that it is consistently uplifting and positive. Gumbel's commentary on the flood in Genesis 7:1-9:17 is an apposite example:

Christians should be positive people. We see in this passage that the blessings outweigh the battles. Of the four great themes that run through this passage (and the entire Bible) only one is negative (the fall that leads to the battles). The other three are about positive blessing.⁴⁴²

Alpha Course graduates who make it past the commentary to read the actual Scripture text about the destruction of every almost living creature on earth, may be forgiven for equating this slant on the text to that of the spin doctors we have got used to in the political sphere.⁴⁴³ The fall is mentioned, as he announces that God's judgement came because of

⁴⁴⁰ Interview, Gumbel.

⁴⁴¹ Gumbel, *BIOY*, preface

⁴⁴² Gumbel, *BIOY*, 8-9

⁴⁴³ Exacerbated on the BIOY website where readers are encouraged to choose between reading 'classic', 'youth' or 'express' versions, where the express version has the entirety of Gumbel's commentary (and the

the seriousness of sin, and yet the whole narrative is so joyously positive it is not surprising to find the summary prayer for that section on the flood is:

Lord, thank you that ultimately your blessings far outweigh the battles. Help me to remember that my light and momentary troubles are achieving for me an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Challenging Issues

Sexuality remains the hardest issue for the HTB network to grapple with. This is compounded by real and perceived reputational risks to 'brand Alpha'. The original bestselling *Searching Issues* (1994) had a chapter on homosexuality which was dropped in the 2013 revised edition four months after Justin Welby was elected Archbishop.⁴⁴⁴ Later *The Jesus Lifestyle* (2018) was introduced to replace the earlier exposition of the Sermon on the Mount *Challenging Lifestyle* (1996) which had already been partially revised as *The Jesus Lifestyle* in 2010. The 1996 exposition of Matthew 5-7 had a chapter entitled "How to avoid Sexual Sin," whereas the 2018 version became "How to understand Sex in the Twenty-First Century." The replacement chapter is completely reworked and expanded. It begins with an acknowledgment that pornography, adultery and premarital sex are now commonplace and

'Pippa Adds'), but just a few selected verses from each of the Wisdom/Old Testament/New Testament sections. Sampled days showed less than 20% of verses used. The Youth edition on sampled days was identical to 'Express', but with an 'Action for the Day' added at the end. *'Pick the edition that works best for you; Classic, Youth - for teens and young adults, or catch up with the Express edition.'* [emphasis added] <https://bibleinoneyear.org/en/> [accessed 1 June, 2021].

⁴⁴⁴ Released 24 May 2013. Welby was elected on 4 February 2013. For a sample of some of the pressure building for this revision see Rachel Stone 'Nicky Gumbel, evangelicals and homosexuality' 13 April 2009 <https://magistraetmater.wordpress.com/2009/04/13/nicky-gumbel-evangelicals-and-homosexuality-5939787/> Stone a research associate at Kings College London, succinctly discusses Gumbel's approach to homosexuality in the 2004 version of *Searching Issues* and his 'dilemma as an evangelist' that his approach has a) no rational basis and b) seems unjust; for an example of a more 'hostile interviewer' see Adam Rutherford 'Nicky Gumbel: messiah or Machiavelli?' 28 August 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/aug/28/religion-christianity> after a dialogue where Gumbel is careful to align Alpha stance to the 'whole Christian church' Rutherford concludes 'This whole dialogue was a politician's answer. Gumbel is very aware of how the evangelical stance that homosexuality can be healed is homophobic to many people's ears, mine included, and thus plays his cards carefully. It's frustrating, because no matter how offensive I find this sentiment, I just can't work out whether he is naive or sinister. Certainly, the proclaimed welcome of gay people into Alpha, coupled with their insistence that gay sex is a sin, leads me to think that celibacy is what Alpha wants. Gumbel left the interview to play squash with a gay friend.' But see also Stephen Hunt's chapter "Is Alpha homophobic" in Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 221-232.

acceptable, and then gives a biblical overview that sex is 1) good, 2) complicated 3) restorable 4) not an end in itself. He then gently encourages the 'romantic' option of committing to one partner for life, 'repentance' for any lust or sexual relationship outside of marriage, and a 'ruthlessness' about keeping any urges in check that might lead to adultery, including not getting too close to anyone of the opposite sex. 'Sex is designed in a way that the association of the pleasure of sex should be with one person only, and in that context it acts like glue.'⁴⁴⁵ So, it remains a restatement of what many evangelicals would term 'biblical orthodoxy', albeit through a very pastorally non-demanding and gentle presentation, concluding with practical tips for abstinence.

Conclusion

Percy's contends that Charismatic Christianity apparently succeeds quickly as it has no great substance in terms of doctrine or praxis to 'burden believers with'. Instead 'believers are offered an immediate form of spiritual experience – a kind of bathetic sentience through which one discovers quasi-numinous phenomenon'.⁴⁴⁶ In this paradigm faith grows through a community of feeling. The earlier HTB of the 1980s, more grounded in classic evangelicalism would not have easily fit this assessment. John Collins' ambition in his summary of his life's work and teaching *A Diagram of God's Love* clearly sought to inculcate spiritual blessings through key doctrines and leave readers with a Christian maturity characterised by 'prayerful, scripturally instructed imagination' that will take them on the adventure of 'loving God, trusting him, obeying him, serving him and others; great friendships, opposition, suffering, fulfilment, battles, joy'.⁴⁴⁷ This chapter has shown that the network needs to consider whether pursuit of success is always positive, or even neutral, and has begun to identify some of the impacts success culture may have already had on espoused and operant theology. Faced with the possibility that it may not just be 'Life in the Spirit' that has impacted the theology of the HTB network but also success culture, the need for the network to recover a sound plumbline of normative theology presents even larger.

⁴⁴⁵ Nicky Gumbel, *The Jesus Lifestyle: Practical Guidelines for Living Out Jesus' Teachings*. (United Kingdom: John Murray Press, 2018). Chapter 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Percy, *Clergy*, 140

⁴⁴⁷ John Collins, *A Diagram of God's Love*. (London: Alpha, 2014) 210.

Chapter Four: Further Research Findings

Having considered HTB's evangelical heritage, its charismatic legacy and the impact of success culture, this chapter continues to paint a thick description of the wider HTB network. Drawing from interviews and immersive involvement in the network it focuses on discovering the operant and espoused theologies and corresponding discipleship goals that are prevalent in the network. It shows the diversity that has arisen as influences become more eclectic, the network disperses and the evangelical heritage and the charismatic waves become part of its history rather than current experience and how that continues to unsettle the network from its normative theological roots.

Methodology

It draws on seven key sources of information to build up this ethnographic picture:

1. Participation in the HTB network since 2013 through social media, conferences, invitation events, retreats and friendship groups.⁴⁴⁸
2. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews conducted in 2015 and 2017 with six church planters leading churches of more than 500 people.
3. Leading a seminar in 2015 entitled, '*I'm Going Nowhere? Can we do Discipleship in the 21st Century?*' at the HTB 'Big Day In' network churches training day for staff teams, after the first round of semi-structured interviews with the six church planters. The findings of that seminar from 63 participants inform part of this chapter.
4. Semi-structured interviews with a further 14 planters/church leaders within the HTB network. The earliest date from 2017 and most recent from 2021.⁴⁴⁹
5. Interviews with the three incumbents (vicars) of HTB from 1980 to the present.

⁴⁴⁸ I was invited to join in 2013 by Ric Thorpe, and was asked to speak at and host events while Archie Coates ran it. However by late 2018 (after I took on a wider church role with the New Wine Network and the HTB network had also changed hands), New Wine diary commitments meant I had been unable to keep points 2 and 4 of the newly defined 'five marks' of HTB Network membership viz. 1) practice the DNA of HTB, including ministry of the Spirit and church planting 2) send senior leader to annual retreat 3) bring staff team to leadership conference 4) come with church to Focus (the Network's 'annual church holiday') 5) run Alpha in a resourcing way. Nevertheless, many friendship, contacts, mentoring, links and invitations to events remained with those in the HTB network and there remains a substantial overlap between the networks.

⁴⁴⁹ Interrupted twice due to a pause in research and COVID-19

6. I was privileged to have additional access to John Collins during the writing of this thesis which has helped to develop my overall understanding as an ethnographer of the network and the contents of Chapter One and Chapter Two especially. With the encouragement of Sandy Millar and the help of David and Claire MacInnes, I was able to do a deep background investigation into the ministry of John Collins, which included eight one-to-one interviews during 2017-2018 and regular visits thereafter, access to his papers, (including early editions of the Brompton Magazine and personal correspondence), group interviews with previous staff team members from Gillingham and Canford Parishes and informal conversations with key people at HTB.⁴⁵⁰
7. Continued engagement with published and online material from network churches, including worship songs, articles, books and podcasts, and videos, and dialogue with people in the network as I started to blog my findings.

This engagement spans what Robert Webber called classic, pragmatic and younger evangelicals,⁴⁵¹ and shows divergences both between and within each 'generation'. In building a thick description it I have tried to be aware that while it may be tempting to assume high commonality between members of a network in formulating patterns, this has to be counterbalanced by an understanding of each individual's uniqueness.⁴⁵² Nevertheless Joanna Collicutt argues that an additional degree of commonality can occur within a Christian group, 'if they understands their culture as the normative or unique way of expressing the fruit of the Spirit.' When this is the case 'the rules for living' and 'what people are expected to do to enact those rules are overly rigid (and often unstated); for example the virtue of joy must be expressed by smiling all the time.'⁴⁵³ Where a network prizes

⁴⁵⁰ This began as a parallel project and resulted in a short biographical sketch of John Collins aimed at future leaders (yet to be published).

⁴⁵¹ Note the term 'younger evangelicals' was coined in 2002 by Robert Webber to refer to both those emerging leaders under 35 (young in age) and those 'young in Spirit'. He sees it as a group emerging out of the end of modernity, triggered by destabilising events like 9/11 and more likely to be influenced by Brian McLaren than the pragmatic evangelical icon Bill Hybels. Hence for this study 2 decades later the 'younger evangelicals' currently church planting are predominantly in their early 40s to mid-50s. Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 2022.

⁴⁵² Joanna Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*. (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2015), 47

⁴⁵³ Collicutt, *Psychology*, 155.

friendship and loyalty to leadership as much HTB does, commonality is also likely to be seen and patterns can be shown.⁴⁵⁴

Swinton and Moffatt rightly identify the difficulties in identifying ‘value-free, objective truth’ through research and how all reality needs to be processed through an ‘interpretative universe’ in which the researcher is themselves ‘enmeshed’.⁴⁵⁵ Their charge is to attempt to understand what is actually going on and the reasons communities act as they do, however they may present their agreed truths. To combat this, they draw on Lincoln and Guba’s charge to researchers to ‘provide the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description.’⁴⁵⁶ Furthermore, although research may have applicability elsewhere (‘theoretical generalisability’) they see the researcher’s priority as painting a picture as multi-textured as possible so that others can discern truth in it that may enlighten other situations. So, while these findings may resonate with wider contemporary charismatic circles, this chapter aims to describe one network well, while aware that others may see themselves in the reflection.

Within this study the attempt has been made to understand interviewees as individuals and avoid, for example, making assumptions that even the most common of theological terms such as ‘sin’ and ‘grace’ will mean the same to each person. By paying attention to the subtleties of understanding and to the varying influences that effect each practitioner’s interpretative field, the hope is to paint a more nuanced picture of their praxis in articulating and working out their discipleship goals and clarifying normative theologies. This will show the network to be both more diverse and perhaps organic than an outside

⁴⁵⁴ A typical exchange comes in Collins, *Diagram*. In the preface Collins thanks Nicky Gumbel for self-sacrificially including a draft of the book in his *holiday* reading and his ‘all-too-generous reaction’ Gumbel’s reaction reproduced on the back cover is ‘this book will not only feed your soul, it will change your life.’ Similarly in a podcast exchange Nicky Gumbel refers to Millar as ‘the best leader he has ever come across,’ <https://www.alpha.org/blog/conversations-with-nicky-gumbel-podcast-sandy-millar/>. Cf Aitken on the exchange between Millar and Gumbel on Alpha expansion in previous chapter and the obedience deference the then rising star Gumbel paid to Millar.

⁴⁵⁵ John Swinton, Harriet Mowat and Clive Marsh, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2006). 37

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 46

perspective might credit and yet, at least at the level of those church leaders who have been approved to take on HTB branded plants, to still have an inner coherence.⁴⁵⁷

In *Words, Wonder and Power*, Percy develops his contextual theological method trying to uncover what is really going on in the Vineyard. Markham summarises that for Percy ‘the ‘confessed’ theology is less interesting than the ‘lived out’ or ‘practical’ theology – and the latter is often more visible in the places where almost subconsciously the real sentiments and worldviews come out.’⁴⁵⁸ This resonates with the ARCS terminology of ‘normative’, ‘espoused’, ‘operant’, used in this thesis which is clearly seeking to make similar delineations. Where possible then this chapter seeks to look beyond espoused; ‘what we say we do’, to operant; ‘what we actually do’ - while also outlining influences normative; ‘who we claim we listen to,’ where those voices have explanatory power.

TigerTiger Club – an illustrative sketch

One immersive experience of the network stands out as a helpful illustration of the coherence and diversity that is described through this chapter. I attended a gathering of 40 HTB network leaders in November 2019 who had assembled for a pleasant evening out at the top of the ‘TigerTiger’ nightclub – the ‘go to’ Haymarket venue near Piccadilly Circus that narrowly survived the July 2007 London bombings. The key attraction on the billing was an opportunity to listen to and question Sandy Millar, then in his 80th year. The atmosphere was vibrant and family-like as easy connections were made by people used to seeing each other. Many of them have worked on staff teams together. All of them run Alpha. There was an energy in the room. It was not entirely male, but all the church leaders present were. A free bar helped create a conducive atmosphere to relax before the convenor introduces his two warm up acts before the headliner Sandy Millar speaks.

⁴⁵⁷ Millar: “in my experience all our plants have been different because the leadership has been different”, *Interview*, 17 July, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ See Markham, “Contextual Theologian” in Markham and Daniel, *Reasonable Radical?*.

The first speaker was an adult convert to the faith. He had been invited into a relationship with Jesus and was discipled at one of the main church plants of HTB. He described how he had been a sex addict, which he was finally delivered from four years after coming to faith. Through ongoing bible based personal discipleship with two of the local clergy the speaker had made it through the 'two year' drop off point that many network churches have experienced with their Alpha graduates.⁴⁵⁹ Shortly after he found himself working in a highly liberal arts university, and self-identified as an evangelist. His instinct was to major on verses talking about the love of God, but through a dramatic dream this changed. He describes his dream as a vision of hell, and his new approach through his online presence and creative media was to bring to people's attention verses such as Romans 3:23 'All have sinned...' that would have been a staple diet for Whitefield. It was powerful, moving and backed with empirical evidence of fruit – exponential growth in Instagram followers wanting to hear more of his message, many from no faith background and some who had being baptised in their local context in response to his message.

The second speaker also had a story to tell of exponential growth of influence. This time as a YouTube star on a channel dubbed into South Korean where his good looks and winsome personality were making him a hit among the church and de-churched young adults. Without directly challenging the evangelist who had just spoken, he made a point of emphasising that his was a warm, positive, non-judgemental message. He had reached 50 million YouTube views through his winsome, gracious approach. His message was 'successful', 'warm', 'positive', and 'non-judgemental' – saving his challenges for a strong critique on how the church does ongoing discipleship formation among young adults.

This diverse warm up was the prequel to Sandy Millar. He was immediately disarming, delightful and self-effacing and yet very much in control of the room from the moment he stepped up to the microphone. He began with a trademark opening: 'I can't imagine for the life of me why you invited me here dear boy,' and continued with a humorous but

⁴⁵⁹ This 'two-year itch' was highlighted in a discussion on a private Facebook group and then confirmed by several interviewees in follow up meetings.

harmonising address which reminded me of a comment made to me by one larger church leader:

Sandy has a gift. He will listen to you intently and make you feel like you are the most important person in the room. He will agree with you on all sorts of things, and you will come out of the meeting feeling loved, cared for, and liked. But he will not have budged a single inch on anything he had already decided to do.⁴⁶⁰

In between re-affirmations of Alpha (as the ‘one thing that all denominations could turn to for hope’), Sandy produced from the archives of his mind a tasteful anecdote on judgement that reoriented the question back to his hearers, away from generalised concerns of universal judgement for the lost and back to each of our own personal standing when faced with that Day. In the anecdote a man imagines himself standing in front of Jesus and experiencing the emotions he will feel when his Saviour lovingly looks him in the eye and simply says “Well?” The man considers that he would rather experience the flickers of the ‘fires of hell’ than see disappointment in the face of the One asking him to account for what he has done with his life through the simple question.

From this story Sandy then proceeded to reorientate the room back to the ‘positive’ characteristics of God – love, compassion, grace, kindness, which he himself seemed so clearly to exemplify. It would not be a stretch to say that there were few in the room who would want to look in the face of that loving, compassionate, gracious, kind man, who was still (in some non-defined way) their key father-figure, and see disappointment if they had let him down.

Initial Interviews: Making Sense of a Movement

My initial round of interviews in 2015 focused on the motivations for ministry of the six planters. My intention was to consider what models of ministry were advocated and practiced and how duplicable this model may be from these ‘flagship church plants’. I was particularly keen to spot any motivational ‘drivers’ for sustained ministry in the planters and

⁴⁶⁰ Pers comm with leader from another network.

found myself naturally comparing these to those of Wesley and Whitefield whom I had been intermittently studying since my undergraduate dissertation in 1998-99. William Law's rule '*seek for eternal happiness by doing the will of God,*'⁴⁶¹ had helped mobilise the early Methodists and resonated for me with the scripture verse, 'For the joy set before Him Christ endured the cross' [Hebrews 12:12].⁴⁶² So, I was naturally interested both in both eschatological motivators and whether the resulting 'telos' of the HTB planters accorded with the early Methodist priorities in producing a holy people for a holy God.

I discovered that their initial motivations for church planting were mixed. Alongside clearly articulated senses of calling and seizing opportunities, half reported also feeling compelled to plant as younger 'star' clergy or ordinands had been appointed to HTB and now had the attention and limelight. Others had had a desire to plant but could have happily stayed on and served in the main church if there had been space for them. Most were happy to propagate what had been learnt at HTB, but each interviewee was bright, articulate, driven and also wanting to make their own mark, for a medley of contextual, theological and personal reasons. One partly wanted to plant to outwork their own (affectionate) critique of HTB that:

While it was wonderful seeing thousands of people come to faith and exploring charismatic spirituality in an Anglican context, we didn't do the discipleship thing very well and it wasn't always clear that we were equipping people for discipleship.
[CLD]

With this in mind, three of the initial questions became particularly important in formulating the ongoing wider study.⁴⁶³

Diagram Five: Extract from Semi-Structured Interview Questions (see Appendix)

⁴⁶¹ '[the first rule was] to fix it deep in my mind that I have one business upon my hands – to seek for eternal happiness by doing the will of God' William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, xiii (1729).

⁴⁶² Interestingly this verse from Hebrews 12 featured on the values page for HTB as explaining their fifth value 'tenacity' <https://www.htb.org/our-story> [accessed 25.1.21].

⁴⁶³ See Appendix for the full question list.

5. What did / do you most want to see happen through the church plant in terms of: a) vision for individuals; b) vision for the surrounding community?

6. Who or what do you turn to for inspiration? – in terms of models of ministry, bible resources etc...

7. How would you define success in church planting?
a) To what extent has success galvanised your work?
b) When (if) you have had to how do you cope with failure?

There were five key findings that informed the ongoing research:

Firstly, while vision for individuals was typically framed in very active language:

I would send them out to church plant... the vision is to get them to the point where they want to do likewise elsewhere. [CLE]

A disciple who is still growing, hopefully on solid food, who can disciple others. [CLD]

Grow in discipleship... and being rooted in the local church – that was how God was going to change the world. [CLA]

There was also evidence of a very different approach:

I would want to give some the classic discipleship answers, but one that I am often saying these days (this is frightfully woolly and liberal/touchy feely) is to grow in self awareness... that is the key to personal growth.⁴⁶⁴ [CLB]

CLB referenced Willow Creek, and an 'inner healing course' as key to this, which aimed to integrate a person 'on the inside and outside'. When pushed on holiness he talked about vulnerability as being a sign of real transformation and interpersonal relationships as the real thermometer of holiness. He then noted that this was passion for God and compassion for other people. This was outworked through practical things like a 'healthy clash of ideas', 'sharing weaknesses'.

Secondly, initial vision for the community was remarkably different between the generations. As suggested in Chapter Two this seems to correlate with the idea that TTB

⁴⁶⁴ cf Simon Walker *The Undefended Leader*. (United Kingdom: Piquant Editions, 2010), 150, Walker makes a critique of defensive, power-based leadership arguing that, 'The only proper goal of leadership is...to enable people to take responsibility.'

released a new concern for community and social outreach.⁴⁶⁵ This was not only seen in church planters priorities but also in national youth initiatives like *Message 2000* and *Soul in the City* which HTB underwrote in partnership with Soul Survivor and the Message Trust. Whereas CLA believed his church could have been located anywhere he could draw a crowd, the later plants had a high reflexivity about context and a strong sense of calling to local community. This counterbalances the McDonaldisation thesis explored in Chapter Three, and resonates with Millar's assertion that 'all of our church plants have been different as they have been led by different people.'⁴⁶⁶ However with regards to social action within the network it is worth noting that there have been various centralisation processes at work through the William Wilberforce Trust, Prison Alpha and most recently the Love Your Neighbour campaign organised by CRT. So a certain sort of social action engagement has become part of the network church brand. But the shift to more direct concern for community after TTB correlated with a significant theological development towards a 'Kingdom Come' narrative explored later in the chapter.

Thirdly, the models for inspiration show an evolution over time from John Stott and John Wimber as key influences, towards a decidedly eclectic range. These shifts are amplified in the follow on interviews, particularly among younger planters, and this is also described more fully later.

Fourthly, my original investigation into motivations for ministry highlighted the significance of success and (avoiding) failure as possible influences on theology in the network. The high level of reflexivity in the respondents showed how powerful a dynamic this could be – the more so as each of these initial six had achieved very tangible successes in the McGavan/Wenger 'ABC' terms of 'attendance, buildings, cash'. This led to the reflections on success as a motivator already outlined in Chapter Three.

⁴⁶⁵ See Michael Wilkinson and Stephen Studebaker (eds.) *A Liberating Spirit: Pentecostals and Social Action in North America*. (United Kingdom: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010) for discussion on impact of what they call 'progressive Pentecostalism' in North America and how worldwide one Pentecostal response to the Spirit has been engagement with social issues. A 1996 Methodist Church report in UK saw 'hints of developments in social outreach' due to TTB <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2072/fo-statement-the-toronto-blessing-1996> which can be partly explained as a unifying sense in the movement was 'sharing the Father's blessing'.

⁴⁶⁶ Millar, *Interview*, 17 July, 2015.

Fifthly, this left me musing to what degree their motivations were in fact eschatological / eternal ('for the joy set before him...') versus temporal and measurable in the here and now. This became a key focus of a 2015 seminar and follow on questionnaire that I was able to conduct with HTB network church staff team members. It helped develop the idea that there may be a gap between what might be considered as a normative theology for the network and the operant theology that might be discerned in interactions with the network and the espoused theological teaching. This then informed my second round of interviews with these six planters, and wider interviews with 14 further church planters/leaders.

Action Research

This 2015 seminar involved an 'action research' methodology designed to test the dominant evangelical voice participants preferred to give/receive in a pastoral situation.⁴⁶⁷ In sets of six, one played the role of someone with a presenting pastoral issue and four were given a brief to respond respectively in 1) a classic evangelical voice; 2) an attractional/pragmatic evangelical voice; 3) an inclusive/progressive post-evangelical voice; 4) a hyper-charismatic voice (with the highly realised eschatological perspective that believers can have all the benefits of heaven on earth)); The sixth was an observer. The tone of each 'voice' was agreed in advance using caricatures and examples, but in every scenario the role play was ad lib from participants. They each offered a single piece of advice in turn and then the other two members gave feedback on what it was like to receive that advice and how a detached observer felt about it. Scenarios ranged from concerns about health, afterlife, deliberate sin and human sexuality. Reactions of the 63 people in the room varied, but the dominant approach was a 'come and see' attractional voice (exemplified by 'Try Alpha'), but most commonly expressed in vocabulary closest to an affirming 'progressive' voice if there was any controversial issue on the agenda. This in part seemed to reflect the Alpha course methodology of not challenging participants ('all opinions are welcome here') and a genuine desire to be as loving, kind and as non-confrontational as possible. Many found formulating classic evangelical responses in roleplay a 'harsh' or uncomfortable experience – even for those who acknowledged that they held the position themselves. There was some split in the room as to how 'realised an eschatology' they were comfortable advocating/receiving in

⁴⁶⁷ See Andrew Townsend, *Action Research: The Challenges of Understanding and Changing Practice* (United Kingdom: Open University Press, 2012) for discussion of Action Research methodology.

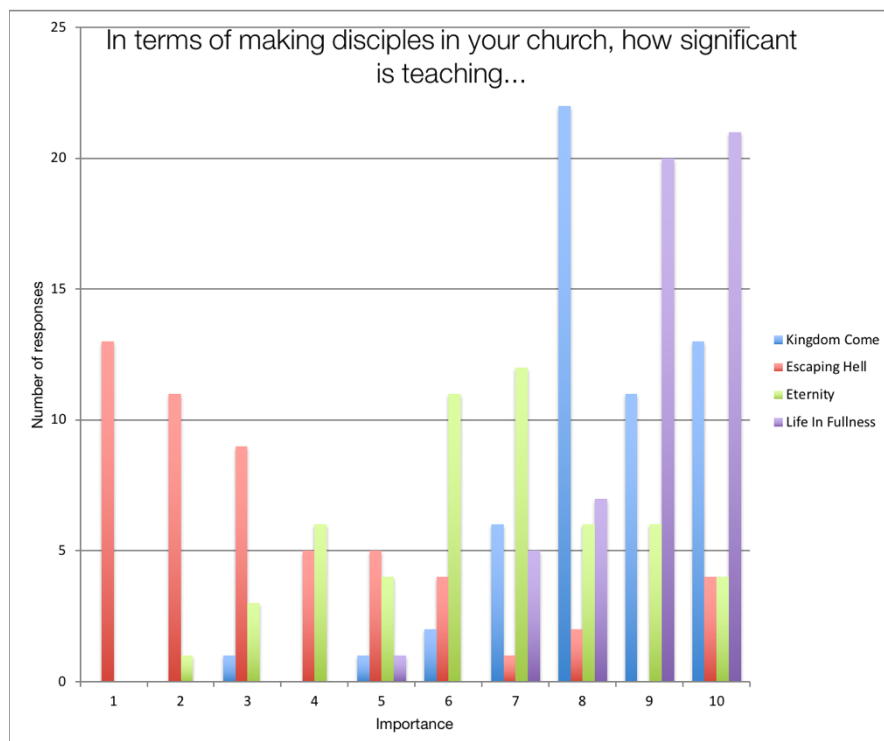
pastoral situations (especially with regards to health). But note that this seminar predated the 2016 visit to the HTB Focus Holiday of a principle exponent of the ‘heaven on earth’ charismatic position, Bill Johnson (Bethel Church, in Redding, California), who was the main speaker at the summer event that year.

This section of the seminar was impressionistic but fascinating to observe.⁴⁶⁸ The seminar finished with gathering more quantifiable data via a survey which 55 of the 63 completed. The results for each question are shown in both bar charts and scatter graphs below:

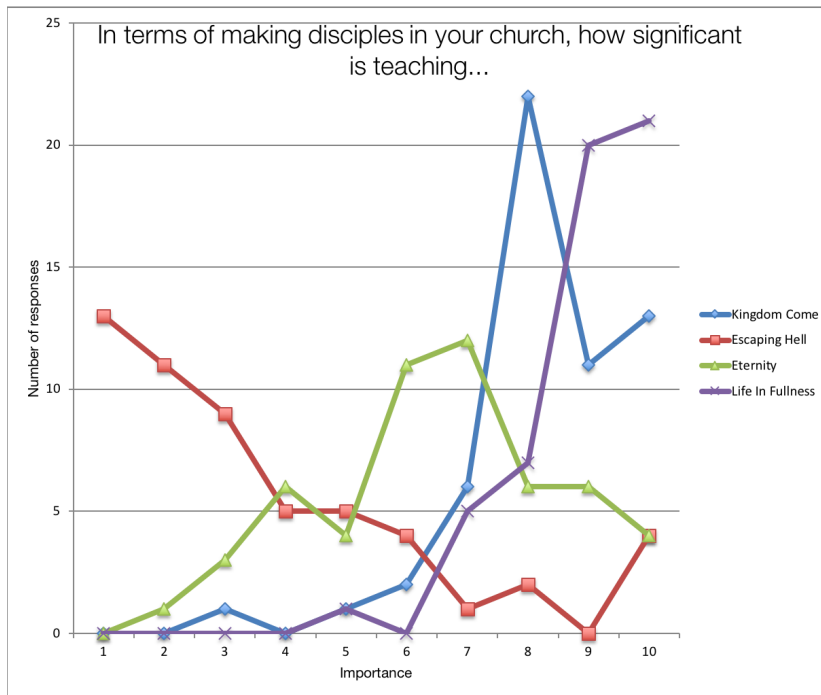
The first set of four questions asked respondents

A) In terms of making disciples in your church how significant is: (where 10 is highest)

- a) seeing the Kingdom come on earth as in heaven 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- b) fleeing the wrath to come/escaping hell 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c) preparing people for heaven/eternity 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- d) enabling life in all its fullness now 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



⁴⁶⁸ I repeated the exercise as training for 40 student workers from the Fusion Network in November 2016, (which included many HTB affiliated churches), and found I had very similar outcomes and resulting discussions.



Very few thought that fleeing wrath and hell was a significant motivating factor and eternity generally was only of middling importance. There was a significant number of participants (44) who scored Kingdom Come 8 and above, but the biggest concentration of those (22) scored it 8. By contrast 48 participants scored Life in all its fulness 8 and above, but 41 of these scored it 9+ and the highest category scored was for life in all its fulness was 10 out of 10.

Kingdom Theology has obvious links to Wimber, but as I explored the responses with participants it became clear that 'Kingdom Come' also reflects two diverse more recent influences. The one is realised eschatology of Bill Johnson and Bethel Church with their strapline 'On Earth as in Heaven'.⁴⁶⁹ This influence has been mediated both through Bill Johnson's teaching which a few network churches have directly promoted, but also indirectly through Bethel Music whose hymnody is sung throughout the network.⁴⁷⁰ The second is the influence on the network of NT Wright's theology of a new creation which counters a shift from the 'materiality of creedal Christian hope'.⁴⁷¹ A clear example of how

⁴⁶⁹ See Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*. (United States: Treasure House, 2003).

⁴⁷⁰ See Tim Hughes interview Brian and Jenn Johnson from Bethel on Prophetic Worship at the 2013 HTB based Worship Central Conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pyVOA3cl5g>

⁴⁷¹ For Wright see Tom Wright. *Simply Christian*. (United Kingdom: SPCK, 2011); Tom Wright. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. (United Kingdom: SPCK, 2012). For how his teaching is mediated to congregations see N. T Wright, *Surprised by Hope Participant's Guide*. (United States: Zondervan, 2010). For an overview: Stephen Kuhrt, *Tom Wright for Everyone: Putting the Theology of N.T. Wright into Practice in the Local Church*. (United

this has been mediated into the network is through Pete Hughes, who addressed this in his key note address at the leader's gathering the seminar was based at. In his 2020 book *All Things New* (which has a commendation by Nicky Gumbel) he argues that:

The epic ending to the biblical story puts to rest the idea the ultimate goal of the Christian life is to leave one's body behind and ascend to the divine realm to enjoy disembodied bliss....[this has] everything to do with Greek philosophy..... it somehow infiltrated Christian teaching and robbed people of the spectacular ending of our narrative.

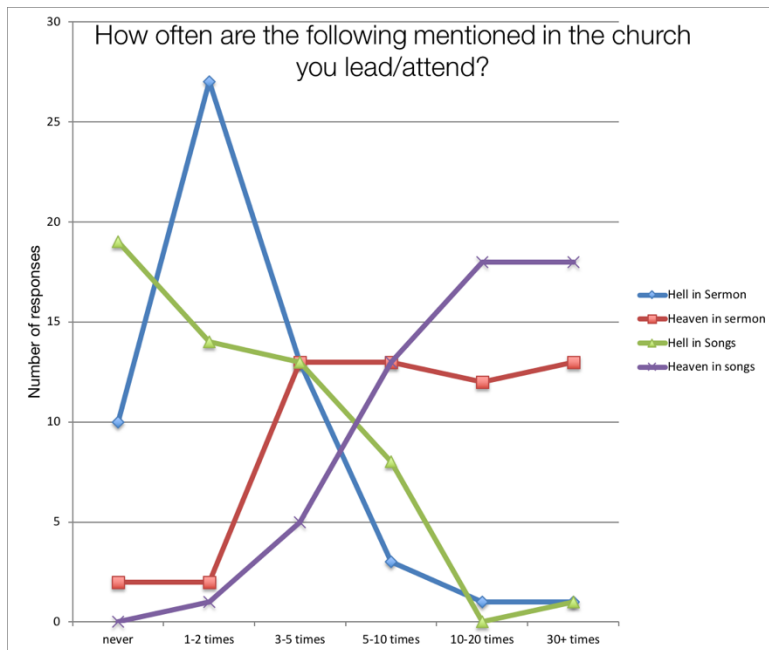
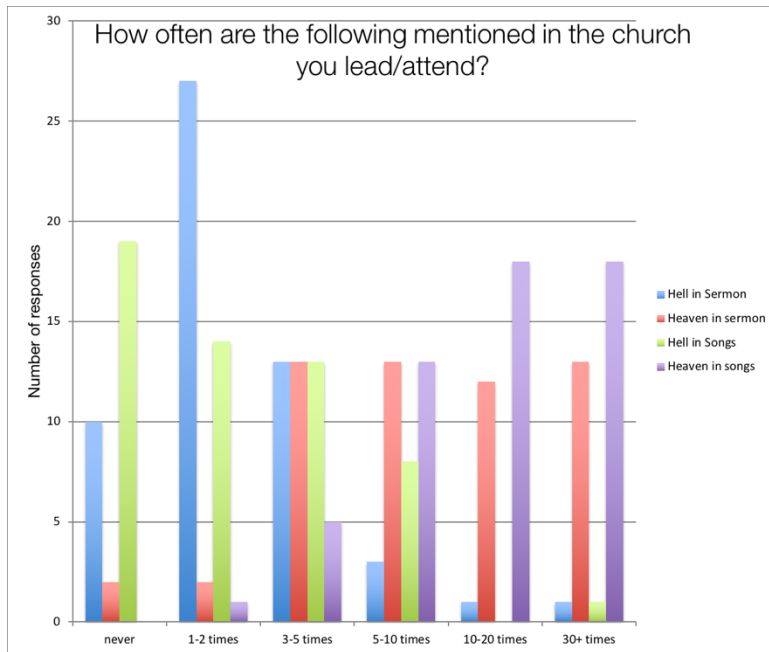
He continues that he finds it tragic that some many people inside and outside the church:

Believe the Christian story can be distilled down to God making a way for those with correct beliefs, or immaculate behaviour to escape this present world in order to enjoy a blissful one in the next.

Rather than escaping to where God is, the narrative for Hughes, following Wright, is of God descending to us and making all things new.

In a follow up question only five felt that hell had been mentioned more than 5 times in the past year, and a majority believed that heaven had been mentioned less than 10 times in that same time period. 13 out of 55 thought that the hope of heaven had been mentioned more than 20 times, but in a 52-week year with often several worship services per week 20 mentions is not a very high result.

Kingdom: SPCK, 2012). For how the evangelical church has shifted from a 'materiality of credal hope' see Glenn Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come*, 90.



The hymnody is also interesting. The question asked specifically, “*what percentage of worship songs have mentioned hell (less likely) or judgement*” (possible more likely). Given that one of the most sung songs of the year was still Stuart Townend’s *In Christ Alone*, with its famously controversial line ‘the wrath of God was satisfied’, you might not expect this to draw a complete blank. A large majority of respondents (33/55) however thought that a reference to judgement came in less than 5% of the songs sung (a simple contrast could be

made with the Psalter where 70 of 150 songs are laments, and others invoke and appeal against judgement).⁴⁷²

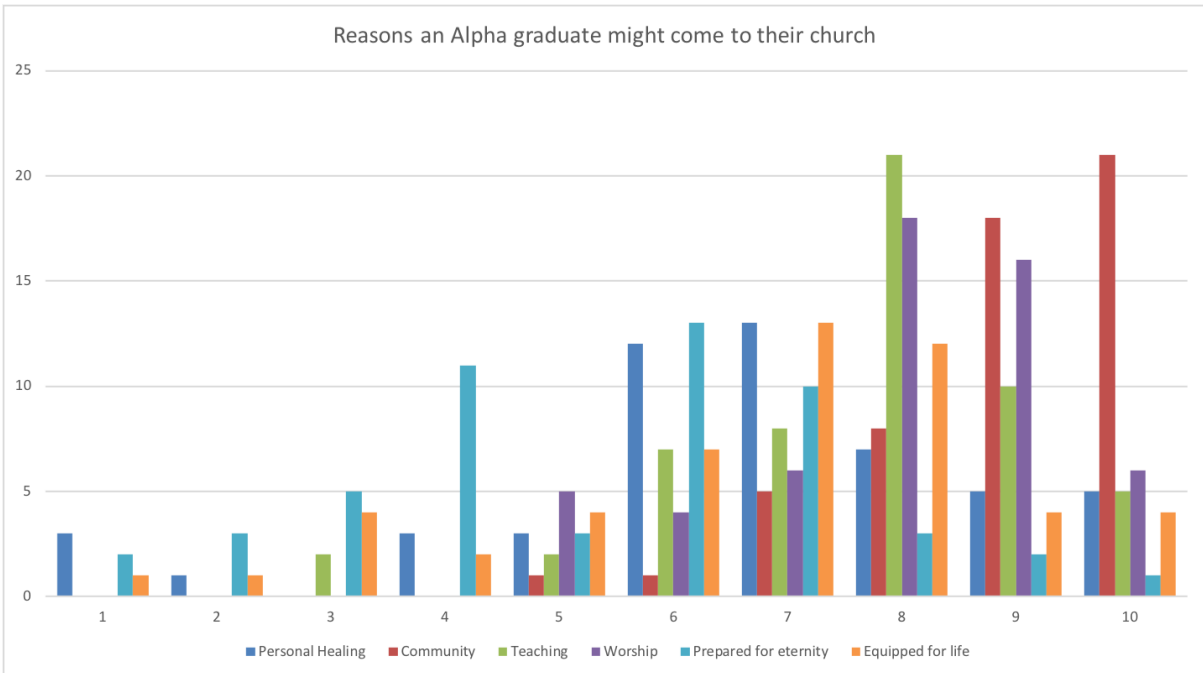
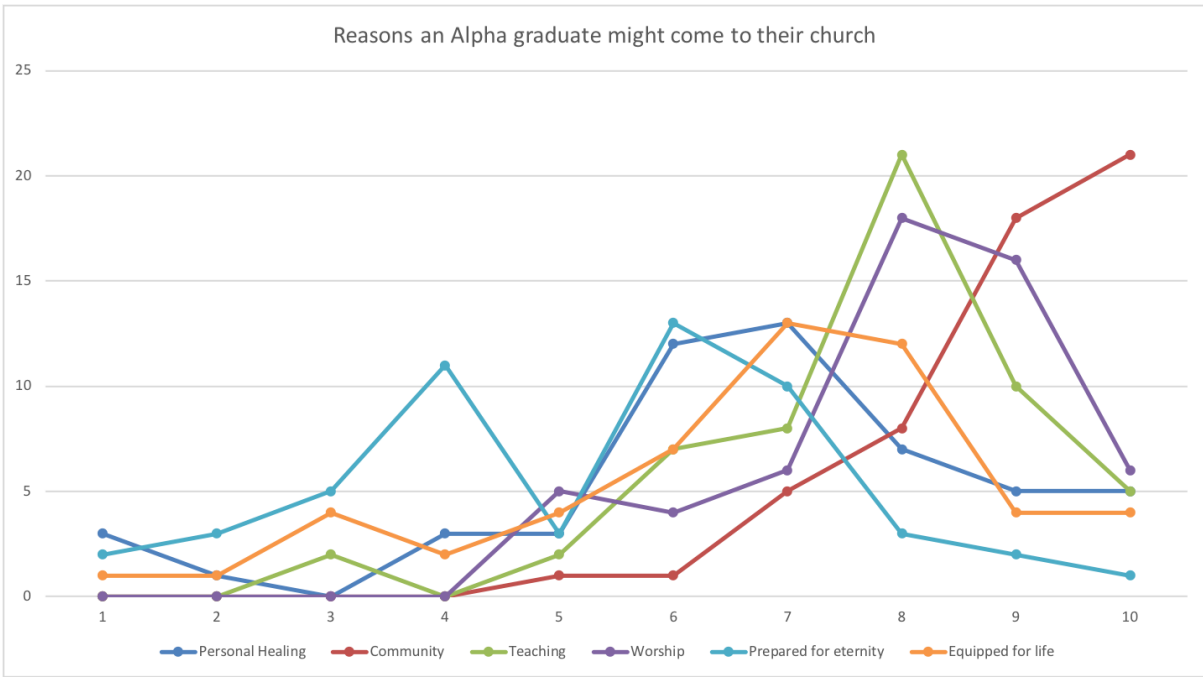
Heaven featured significantly more prominently in the songs than in the sermons. 36 participants thought heaven featured in 20%+ of songs, with half of those thinking it was in 30%+. So, given an average playlist of at least 5 songs per service we could infer that heaven is likely to be mentioned in sung worship once in a majority of HTB network churches on most weeks, although not in the formal teaching. Most of the network churches feature informal services with little or no liturgy outside of the 'Worship-Teaching-Ministry' paradigm and one short bible passage to be preached on, so an analysis of song lyrics and teaching content is very informative about the overall public spiritual diet on offer.⁴⁷³

The third body of questions was also informative. They were asked why would an Alpha graduate come to your church? (scale 1-10 where 10 is the highest motive)

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| a. For personal healing (emotional/physical)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| b. For meaningful community? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| c. For inspiring teaching? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| d. To encounter God in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| e. To be prepared for eternity? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| f. To be equipped for life & evangelism? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

⁴⁷² see Worship Central's Nick Drake for an attempt to ground and critique the notion of intimacy with God within charismatic worship by drawing on Calvin's Union with Christ. Drake, *Constructing a Theology*.

⁴⁷³ See again Hughes, *All Things New*, (introduction) where he questions the benefits of: 'inspirational teaching' that has no sense of biblically rooted trajectory, activist motivation that leads towards 'spiritual exhaustion and apathy' and importing 'alternative language from the culture such as 'human flourishing,' 'the common good,' and 'the transformation of society,' without qualifying these terms on biblical grounds, so that the surrounding culture begins to redefine how the church understands the kingdom'. cf Packiam (above) who, like Drake, is an insider worship leader/pastor/theologian who 'has come to see worship as a theologically catechetical practice', such that songs 'must be evaluated for their content and impact.' Packiam, *and the World to Come*, 7.



Meaningful community (47/55) and Worship (40/55) both scored high numbers of 8+ out of 10, with community scoring almost 4 times as many 10/10 ratings as any other category (21/55 scored 10/10). Teaching came in third with 36/55 rating it 8+ as a reason that an Alpha graduate would come to their church. But interestingly they were less confident that the teaching would be considered to equip the graduates for life and evangelism (only 20/55 scoring 8+) and even less so to prepare for eternity (6/55). About half the

respondents saw personal healing as a fairly strong reason to come to their services, but less significant than community and worship.

The final section sought to tease out espoused and operant theologies

Complete these sentences in 50 words or less:

If someone came to our church for five years I would like them to....

When someone in our church is on their deathbed I would like them to...

While the first set of answers were quite activist in response: 'be serving on a team', 'be sharing their faith', 'inviting people to Alpha', the deathbed version of the question elicited more reflective theology with typical answers including 'be assured of their faith', 'to know that they have been forgiven', 'to look back and have no regrets'. But the most striking thing about all the answers to each version of the question is how person-centred the responses were.

Developing the proposal: Second interviews

The original semi-structured interviews and this seminar then led me to develop the main research proposal further. The interview questions (see Appendix) were reconfigured to keep the initial focus on telling their story, establishing their vision for individuals and community, and importantly exploring success, motivation and inspirations. But there was also now a clear aim to try and see any theological patterns in how the planters would articulate goals for church members. It included the 'complete the sentences' as above, and then asked how they were shaping their ministry to achieve that. Two questions focused in on whether the operant theology of eternity (both sung and taught) was in fact limited particularly with regards to speaking about judgement and exploring the motivations behind any under-emphases.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. Packiam helpfully summarises NT Wright on this, showing that, for Wright, judgement is a corollary to Christian hope not a contradiction of it, despite his discomfort with how espoused theologies of judgement have often been a 'distortion of the traditional view'. p.82

The final three questions included two direct questions on the eternal issue, and a theological one to clarify preferred language with regards to sin and grace.

8. In a previous survey of HTB network staff/clergy I found that teaching on 'life in all its fullness' or 'kingdom come' was far more common than on eternity: Why do you think we are speaking less about heaven/hell?

9. What do you think we lose by not speaking about hell? Is this a pragmatic or a theological decision for you?

10. And finally: How do you understand sin, and how do you understand grace?

The original six were re-interviewed with a focus on the additional questions, and 14 other planters/ HTB network church leaders are also surveyed.⁴⁷⁵ I also asked the same questions of the three most recent vicars of HTB – Sandy Millar, Nicky Gumbel and John Collins. Thus 23 respondents provided a broader data sample from within the network.

The original six and the three most recent vicars:

- Spanned the classic – pragmatic evangelical age categories.⁴⁷⁶
- Had all worked at HTB as clergy in key roles.
- Had led Anglican churches (including HTB) of 500-5000 people.
- Had all continued in long ministries, most often in the same one or two churches.
- Two had gone on to take up senior positions in Dioceses.
- All were white and male.
- Almost all came from a boarding school/'upper-middle class' background.

Out of the additional 14 interviewees:

⁴⁷⁵ Some of the 14 were interviewed remotely by video call for practical purposes - particularly COVID-19.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf Webber's Classic, Pragmatic and Younger Evangelicals scheme in Robert Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 2002.

- 12 would be in the ‘younger evangelical’ age category.
- 11 had worked at HTB itself at some point prior to planting/revitalising a church of their own.
- 8 were leading a church/plant with more than 200 people,
- 4 were leading ‘larger’ evangelical/charismatic Anglican churches.⁴⁷⁷
- 5 had finished their first ‘solo’ ministry more prematurely than planned.⁴⁷⁸
- One had left the network entirely.
- 13 of the 14 were white.
- 13 were male.⁴⁷⁹
- The British class system is hard to assess but most were broadly middle-class, although the group was more varied than the ‘upper-middle class’ senior clergy at HTB.⁴⁸⁰

One respondent spent most of a 75-minute interview processing their own pain relating to their work and only got through 4 out of 11 questions, but the others gave comprehensive answers.

This sample include the only non-white and only non-male overall church leaders within the network at the time of interviews. It is worth noting, as in the footnotes below, that if this research had been conducted even five years later a more diverse pool would have been available to sample.

⁴⁷⁷ Defined by CPAS as having a Usual Sunday Attendance of 350+

⁴⁷⁸ This number crept up from 3 to 5 during my write up.

⁴⁷⁹ In 2015 I released a blog entitled “*Men Only? A charismatic crisis in New Wine / HTB leadership*” <https://yournameislikehoney.com/2015/12/05/men-only-a-charismatic-crisis-in-new-wine-htb-leadership/>, this led to direct conversations with Nicky Gumbel and Mark Elson Dew who were by then looking to shift their recruitment strategies. The network is now training many more women and more recently also training more ethnically diverse cohorts through the highly innovative ‘Peter Stream’ (see next footnote).

⁴⁸⁰ Many senior leaders in the HTB network are public school and Oxbridge graduates - including several old Etonians such as Millar and Gumbel (as well as Justin Welby). But note the recent attempt at culture shift at HTB and rapidly increasing diversity in leadership development not least via the 2019 ‘Peter Stream’ for those exploring ordination at their theological college: ‘The Peter Stream seeks to see the Church benefit from a range of women and men who have sensed a call to ordained church leadership but have felt themselves excluded. The scheme aims to raise leaders from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly in relation to educational, social or minority ethnic categories.’ See <https://stmellitus.ac.uk/study/routes/peter-stream> [accessed 21 February, 2023].

Having already considered responses regarding vision, motivation and success/failure the focus here is on inspirations (what may be perceived as normative theologies), operant and espoused theologies regarding discipleship goals, and what can be deduced regarding underlying theologies concerning eternity, judgement, kingdom come, sin and grace. A wide range of responses will be seen suggesting a diffuse movement with competing trajectories underneath a culturally homogenous veneer.

The network is not defined by a doctrinal position or theological statement but rather held together by:

- 1) Shared background and allegiances. Most of the network have had a personal connection to HTB, although the pace of planting out from church plants means that this will not be the case for long.⁴⁸¹
- 2) Five commitments:
 - a. use of Alpha and Alpha related products,
 - b. attending leaders' retreats,
 - c. staff team attendance at HTB network gatherings,
 - d. attending the leadership conference,
 - e. coming as a church to the Focus Holiday Week.
- 3) A shared vision of evangelising the nation, revitalising the church and transforming society.
- 4) Common values aligned with HTB. HTB's values are currently listed as 'audacity, unity, generosity, humility, tenacity'.⁴⁸²
- 5) An experience of the Spirit.⁴⁸³

This is partly explained by Ward's 'Branded Church' concept explored in Chapter Three that shows how hard it is for prominent megachurches to take defined theological positions. But it also leaves something of a theological vacuum and thus it will be seen that it is often

⁴⁸¹ CLH noted that many younger people in his church have no idea why he keeps referring to Sandy Millar.

⁴⁸² <https://www.htb.org/our-story> [accessed 25.1.21]

⁴⁸³ Being 'led by the Spirit' is one of the very few theological statements on the CRT website, along with 'see the Kingdom grow'. <https://crtrust.org/about> [accessed 10 June, 2021].

involvement in other networks or churches that has had a dominant theological influence on those surveyed, with those, for example, who have spent time in churches that have focused more on expositional bible teaching much more likely to hold a classical evangelical position.

The Quest for a Normative Theology

Key influences

In a network that is publicly shy of stating a theological position it is very helpful to consider which theological voices and church practitioners have most influence on those in leadership.

Older interviewees repeatedly referred to John Stott and John Wimber, as might be expected from Chapters One and Two. Gumbel himself referred to a wide variety of influences, many of which could be seen on the bookshelves behind him. These included Stott and Wimber as well as David Watson. He also highlighted missiologist Lesslie Newbigin and Fr (now Cardinal) Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher to the papal household. As a charismatic Roman Catholic Cantalamessa has clearly had a profound personal impact in Gumbel's ecumenical journey.⁴⁸⁴ Gumbel had read *Come Holy Spirit* four times since meeting 'Raniero' in 1991, appreciating his 'anointing, scholarship, unbelievable humility, piety and ecumenism.' He also noted that, 'Sandy personally for me has been a huge influence and John Collins before him.'

Other respondents also noted the central people at HTB. Collins, Millar, Gumbel were almost universally credited as were Archie Coates and Ric Thorpe by those who had planted more recently. Pragmatic mega-church leaders Bill Hybels and Rick Warren got several mentions. Tom Wright was the most mentioned professional theologian (twice), although Andrew Walker was also referenced. Bill Johnson from Bethel Church, Larry Crabb, Peter Sczaro, and Tim Keller were among the other American influences. Some pointed to 'leadership gurus' such as PJ Smyth the leader of the Advance network of churches, and more generally to the ARK network of church planters. Christian novelist Francine Rivers

⁴⁸⁴ See Chapter Three for those Gumbel names as key influences on BIOY.

was described as an inspiration. One mentioned the desert fathers and St Francis, another mentioned Angus Ritchie who is a prominent London clergyman from a Catholic tradition doing community mapping and church planting. Conversely one of them mentioned the 'Proc Trust' ('proclamation trust' – a conservative evangelical grouping). Perhaps most surprisingly two respondents mentioned they had been trying to learn stylistically from prosperity preacher Joel Osteen and that he had been required reading/viewing for the HTB preaching team.

Most of the influences listed were activist or pragmatic influences. There was a clear activist tendency to look to those who had provided models that could in some way be copied. However, several had clearly been on a spiritual quest sometimes due to life crises that took them deep into church history or into personal spiritual exercises commonly associated with the Catholic tradition. The charismatic tradition's openness to spiritual influences beyond evangelicalism and the ecumenical outworking and aspirations of Alpha helped facilitate this mix, while the Anglican formation that each minister undertook meant an increasingly broad 'Generous Orthodoxy' diet as St Mellitus became the dominant influence on emerging ministers.⁴⁸⁵ However the desire for 'mission-focused and Spirit-inspired' activism apparent in the responses and the eclectic set of influences suggest that there is an increasing void of deep theological roots for the network and in the midst of pragmatic activism where theological unity is easily reduced to 'conferences, courses and choruses', (see Andrew Wilson in Chapter One) and the *reductio ad absurdum* that seems to be the fruit of 'Generous Orthodoxy' some clarity about normative theology would help.

Operant Discipleship Goals:

Millar's aim has been to change the 'model' not the 'message' because the 'market is distancing itself from us'.⁴⁸⁶ To try and evaluate whether it is possible to change the model

⁴⁸⁵ Prior to the rise of St Mellitus the more decidedly evangelical Wycliffe Hall had been college of choice for a majority, the shift meaning emerging charismatic ordinands in the HTB network are now more likely to be taught by and with open evangelical/centrist/liberal Anglican students and tutors than their predecessors who inhabited a charismatic/conservative evangelical mix at Wycliffe Hall. St Mellitus' stated goal is to train students across the breadth of the Church of England in a 'mission focused and Spirit-inspired way' <https://www.stmellitus.ac.uk/about-us/generous-orthodoxy> contra <https://www.wycliffe.ox.ac.uk/vision> 'the evangelical college in the heart of Oxford' with its clearer emphasis on bible centred teaching.

⁴⁸⁶ Furlong, *CofE*, 274

without (even subconsciously) changing the message, this section considers the responses to the two central questions and how the ministers were framing their ministry to achieve this.

- a) If someone came to our church for five years I would like them to....
- b) When someone in our church is on their deathbed, I would like them to...

One typical set of responses was framed in terms of activities and assurance:

- a) Be saved! Be serving and involved. Be involved in prayer at the church. Be giving. Know their gifts and be using them for God's glory. Be a disciple who makes disciples
- b) Be saved! Know that they are going to heaven because of their faith in Christ. Have an opportunity to repent of anything that might be outstanding. Have the peace of Jesus. Have the right medical care and be free of pain [CLO]

The language of 'having a purpose' was common. Financial giving and bringing others to church were two key markers mentioned. Another mentioned filling in a legacy form(!) to b) alongside being mourned for their fruitful service [CLP]. Several simply reduced both responses down to 'know that God loves them.' [eg CLF/CLK].

I want this to be head and heart... want them to believe it, but I would love them to experience it. I meet some very broken people, who have had a terrible life, one of them died last year... I want them to know God as their heavenly Father... [CLK]

A common theme was the importance of an encounter with the Spirit in knowing that love.

- a) *Know they're loved, God loves them, he has a plan for their life, there is a purpose for which they were created – expressed through church and the place that God has placed them. I want it all really... to be a passionate worshiper – in spirit and truth, biblically literate – have an understanding of the grand narrative of the bible.*
- b) *I'd want to say, "this is just the dawning of the day, the life we know I believe is just a small taste of what is to come in terms of eternal life". I feel, well, I believe, that we*

can have a foretaste of heaven when we encounter the Holy Spirit, and know something of the future Kingdom of God within us now when we encounter the Spirit – obviously that’s something that I believe but that I wrestle with this myself everyday, and I think actually it is so important that we encounter the Holy Spirit now so that he enlivens what is to come. “This is just the beginning: see you in heaven”.

[CLL]

[CLL] is touching on why the worship ‘event’ is so important in HTB. Three times he repeats the phrase ‘encounter the Holy Spirit’, which progressively ‘gives us a foretaste of heaven’, ‘know something of the Kingdom’ and ‘enlivens what is to come’. Asked what he would like for someone on their deathbed to know he finds himself honestly articulating his own doubts (‘I wrestle with this everyday’) whilst also reaching for these ‘encounters’ or experiences of the Spirit as the place on which to put his and their confidence. These encounters are what he sees as a ‘small taste’ or ‘a foretaste’ of eternity. It is the experience of the Spirit encountered in the worship event that was the reason for the confidence that he had. It is obviously important not to over-read a proto-creedal statement into a spontaneous answer in an interview, but it is at least interesting to note that these encounters with the Spirit, rather than a historical reference to Jesus, the empty tomb of the resurrection, or even a doctrine of assurance, were what he reached for.

Where for CLL the experience seems to fuel the belief, for CLK the experience serves to confirm the belief. This may be personality driven, but it may actually also be a very different way of doing theology. This is one of the outcomes of HTB demanding a high level of conformity on its marketable aspects such as brand Alpha or how you speak of leadership, but avoiding doing the same for its theology.

One of the prominent leaders among the interviewees leads a church which has deliberately recast the Gospel message away from biblical language into terms that resonate with the culture. He answered:

a) I want them to be free... that’s about it really. Freedom means providing an environment to teach and understand what Jesus has done for them, to live with a sense of purpose and destiny in a light-hearted way..

b) *To die well, die free... without regret and without guilt.* [CLE]

His church has four values 'that set our behaviours'. These are each equivalent to the 'audacity, generosity, unity, and humility' values at HTB, but more simply summarised with the phrases: '*Aim High, Give It Away, Enjoy It Together, Bow the Knee*'. The aspiration he explains, is that if people are gripped by God's love in worship and spiritual encounter, they will become who they need to be without too much cajoling from the leadership. They will be free. Another high-profile church planter [CLF] makes it even simpler: 'We only have one value, "love."'

Despite the language differences there was a high degree of commonality between the responses. Within the network there is a clear picture of what an Alpha graduate can and should be. Measurable behaviours stem from these values. Loving is seen through active service, attendance and giving, all beginning and fuelled with a love that has come from an experience of the Holy Spirit. The Instagram feeds and websites of each church have photos which give a clear operant theology of expected discipleship – typically a paradigm of youthful, smiling, content-looking, obviously-loving people. Nevertheless, image driven 'branded' church and soundbite aspirations like 'be free' 'know you're loved' are open to interpretation and misinterpretation. For one of the classic evangelicals, who had a much clearer sense of his own normative theology stemming from his evangelical heritage, this can go too far. He explained:

'I sometimes feel more at home in the [conservative evangelical non-denominational] church over the road than I do in the local HTB resource church as I do not always recognise the gospel in what is taught there' [CLA]

This then begs the question if there is sufficient reflexivity on whether 'changing the model' runs the risk of 'changing the message'? One planter had a vision for 'health' for his congregation, by which he meant they should be 'free, secure and have a purpose'. But seeker-friendly attractational terminology like this differs markedly from older language of discipleship, obedience, and death to self. Can it really mean the same thing? Does it intend to? However, perhaps even more interesting is how eclectic the responses were to these

questions, suggesting that answers are much less scripted in HTB circles than in some other evangelical movements. In a movement where what MacGavan called 'discipleship' (but is more commonly thought of as conversion) is entirely choreographed, scripted and packaged through the Alpha video film series, what MacGavan calls 'perfecting' is left far more open to choice/chance and disparate choices are evidently being made within the network as to what such deeper discipleship could/should look like (if it should be aimed at at all). As one planter put it:

'I don't like telling people what to do and so I think our danger is that we're a bit wooly.' [CLF]

Prioritising 'conversion' over 'perfecting' reflects the prominence of Alpha and the priority of a church network led by an evangelist. It would be applauded by MacGavan as an effective prioritisation of church growth principles,⁴⁸⁷ but does it also suggest the network may have lost sight of some of the longer-term discipleship priorities still evident when Gumbel wrote *Challenge Lifestyles?*

With a category like 'freedom' the obvious question is free from what? In the planter's response it is clear that freedom from guilt and regret are crucial, clearly, but what about deeper theological categories like freedom from sin (original or otherwise), flesh, the world and the devil? In Chapter Five we will consider John Wesley and George Whitefield's discipleship goals and motivations and discover that one of the driving motivations for these potential 'spiritual ancestors' of the HTB network was a fundamental aim of rescuing people from hell. So, following on from the Action Research already discussed we consider now if that 'eternal issue' is still key for HTB network.

Espoused Theology: Eternal Issues

The findings of the Action Research exercise and survey discussed above were readily acknowledged and corroborated by most of the interviewees in response to question 9:

⁴⁸⁷ See Chapter 3 for more.

In a previous survey of HTB network staff/clergy I found that teaching on 'life in all its fullness' or 'kingdom come' was far more common than on eternity: Why do you think we are speaking less about heaven/hell?

When focused in on talking about hell interviewees were almost unanimously at their least fluent. A default mode of preaching the positives quickly came out 'I was always taught to preach good news,' [CLH] and this was explained in various ways both from the minister's intentions 'because we're trying to engage in what can feel like hopeless society we want to preach hope' [CLL], and from what was perceived of the general public's receptivity, 'People don't believe in hell... church perhaps used to come across as fire and brimstone caricature but we want to be seen as a place welcoming, loving, fun, building community, helping people...'

This was followed by question 10:

'What do you think we lose by not speaking about hell? Is this a pragmatic or a theological decision for you?'

This seemed to evoke the greatest reflexivity from participants, with several interviewees seeming to go on an intellectual or emotional journey in their response. For example:

I speak quite a lot about heaven. Less so about Hell but I do talk about it. I think we have got a little caught up on life now rather than the life to come. I think as a church we are always over balancing in one direction or another and we now need to tip back a bit towards the life to come. I think we lose a lot. I think we are a bit afraid to talk about it. The discussions with Steve Chalke, Andrew Wilson, Rob Bell over the last decade shaped that somewhat. Maybe more people are closet universalists than they would admit? Also, along with the word sin, hell has become a dirty word and we need to recapture it. [CLU]

Another, who had begun with the 'I preach the positives' line, then began to reflect that his wife had been converted when she had felt convicted of sin, 'and, come to think of it, so had

I.’ He finished the interview saying that he might preach about hell next Sunday. [CPH] This was one of the early indications I had that simply articulating these sort of questions in the network had some potential to change the findings I was trying to elucidate.⁴⁸⁸

Others however had a much clearer espoused theology of eternity. CPM responded: ‘For me it is for both theological and pragmatic reasons that I so speak about hell and judgement’ which he went on to illustrate with reference to his latest sermon on Daniel 5 (he was teaching an expositional series through the book). He had strong alliances with conservative evangelical friends and was in a preaching group with them. While at HTB he had tried, with some success, to shift the culture back to a more expositional sermon series approach, rather than the more ad hoc week by week worship experience approach noted in the previous chapter.

Another noted:

We do talk about hell but not very much and that is partly because most of our teaching is to Christians for whom the teaching on hell is not as relevant as for the non-Christian-but for sure the lack of awareness of hell undermines evangelism or the need for it. [CLQ].

Underlying Theologies: Sin/Grace/Kingdom Come

The need for strong application in teaching was at the forefront of most interviewees’ thinking. As seen in Chapter Two John Collins, following Stott, had trained ministers to attend to three things in preaching 1) careful, biblical exposition, 2) practical illustrations and 3) praying for the unction to bring it alive. In interviews he expressed regret that more young ministers now don’t preach ‘for conversion’ as modelled by Stott. Many interviewees felt that their role was to place the emphasis on felt needs of people trying to work out how to live now - to be now-orientated rather than future-orientated as that is what people ‘feel they need.’ Several of these circled back to saying that when you get your eschatology / view of the future right that’s what ‘makes sense of the now,’. But there was a clear sense

⁴⁸⁸ E.g. my “*Charismatics in Crisis*” blog previously mentioned.

that a more gentle invitation to 'try Alpha' replaced a push for a crisis of conversion moment.

One recent staffer at HTB expressed a frustration about the focus on felt needs:

At HTB I heard 'fullness of life' a lot. It frustrated me, sometimes we sell the honey of the earth, rather than the requirement of salt to know Christ. We can be seeker friendly so much that we're not necessarily developing sacrificial understanding. It's easy to have a lack of fear of God/awesomeness of God. We're not [supposed to be] surrounded by a nice bubble, but by a love that helps us endure. If we set the bar really low to gather as many as we can, if we attract by being different [to expectations], but oversell too much, we lose our identity in consumerism. We don't have to bend always to culture. [CLJ].

As discussed above many of those focusing on present needs hoped that they were promoting a 'Kingdom Come' theology rather than simply spiritual consumerism. For some it corresponded to a Bethel Church type of realised eschatology and for others a theological system derived from NT Wright.⁴⁸⁹ Pete Hughes has been a key exponent of this over decade of talks and podcasts recently summarised in *All Things New* (2020).⁴⁹⁰ It's reflected in the HTB vision for the 'transformation of society' and talks of a re-creation of the earth that we get to join in with now in the power of the Spirit.

However, one of the questions the book throws up is how that transformation takes place. Can society simply be helped into the Kingdom, or does a radical new birth need to take place in individuals to make that possible. To put it another way, how dire are the straights that humans find themselves in?

⁴⁸⁹ NT Wright's influence on Anglican theology and the HTB network generally should not be underestimated mediated through various sources including Mike Lloyd, one time lecturer at St Paul's Theological Centre and St Mellitus College, before taking up the role of Principal of Wycliffe Hall Oxford. His key book *Café Theology* was published by Alpha in 2005, with commendations from both Nicky Gumbel and NT Wright on the back and a foreword by Sandy Millar.

⁴⁹⁰ Pete Hughes. *All Things New: Joining God's Story of Re-Creation*. (United Kingdom: David C Cook, 2020), 17-18. Note John Hughes, father to Pete and Tim Hughes, was at the 1963 'Night of Prayer' with John Collins in Gillingham.

All Things New deliberately walks through each stage of the biblical story and hence faces the issues of de-creation, distortion of the image of God in humanity, and slavery to sin head on. Hughes' paints a vivid description of 'disastrous consequences of sin', which he calls 'de-creation and the distortion of the image.'⁴⁹¹ Hughes' book is careful to set the cross of Christ as the turning point that enables 're-creation' through both 'reversing disorder and restoration of right order.'⁴⁹² 'The cross is both the place of judgement and the perfect act of worship that reverses the disobedience and idolatry of sinful humanity.'⁴⁹³ So sin is a massive problem, despite the positive vision in *All Things New*. Hughes also has a profound eschatology, considering the necessity of judgement, hell (as total destruction of evil after judgement) 'throwing the serpent out of the garden city' and the 'marriage of heaven and earth.'

But where Hughes has tried to be systematic in owning this framework, others have been most focused on helping people into an entry level understanding of the gospel that does not necessarily fully identify the predicament their normative theologies would say human beings find ourselves in.

So is the concept of sin in HTB/Alpha circles under-espoused and under-developed?

One of the conservative critiques of Alpha is that although the talk 'Why did Jesus die?' refers to our sins 33 times, it does not deal with Sin as a fundamental state that we need to be saved and rescued from. So, I was particularly interested in responses regarding sin/grace that confirmed or challenged this diagnostic.

I had a particularly useful response from Nicky Gumbel with regards to this question. When asked, "What is the essence of the need people have and how do you see/describe sin and grace". His immediate answer was orientated to the individuals he so clearly has a concern for:

⁴⁹¹ Hughes, *All Things New*, 59-65

⁴⁹² Ibid. 173

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

I think we make a mess of our lives without Jesus. We are intended to live a life in relationship with Him. When we drift away we make a mess of our lives and other people's lives. People desperately need to know that. I see that at the gym where I play squash..."

I pushed the answer with a follow-on question as to whether the nature of sin is it mainly about the things 'I do or don't do' or a 'core identity' I need saving from? His reply fit with classic evangelicalism but shows how much the pragmatic has been a filter for his mode of communication:

Theologically it is the latter. But you need to work out theology and then how connect. You can have perfect theology but no way of connecting.

When I pushed further, and repeated the conservative challenge to the Alpha talk, his response was a clearer still reemphasis of the classic position:

I would say the theology is in here – the essence of sin is a rebellion against God with the result we are cut off from him, ignoring God – far from Him and our lives in a mess. Full consequences are the pollution, the power, the penalty, the partition... [headings from the talk]. That's the theology of sin.

But his central point was about connection. Recalling John Collins' sermon tutelage, the filter he said is, 'you have to ask whether it is good news?' While he was happy to reassert that 'you need a theologically accurate description of sin – not about individual acts etc' it has to be connected with their understanding of what that means in practice. 'You have to convey that message and not just be theologically accurate – through concepts they relate to in their own lives, in language they can understand.' If it's not good news, it's not the Gospel.

As I continued the research however, it is not hard to see how the packaging can become the main thing. One planter, when asked about sin, said that "the ultra-conservative

position just makes me feel bad” [CLH]. For him sin was individual acts of rebellion against God, but he preferred to talk about grace as it “gets under his skin”. Another planter confessed, “I’ve just got a pretty immature view of sin I imagine: S-I-N ‘I at the centre’”. [CLL]. CLH mused that he would like to hear what Sandy and Nicky had to say on this, wondering if it was part of a pendulum swing through history, and suggested a swing from an emphasis on a transcendent God to immanent God was part of a shift away from talking about judgement, eternity and sin. He noted that he didn’t talk much about judgement (or sexuality) because it was culturally ‘very explosive’.

CLQ, who had one of the most charismatic theologies, highlighted that ‘sins flow out of the sinful nature.’ He noted that ‘we are impacted by the materialistic worldview that focuses on getting all you want from life now and has no awareness of eternity and heaven or hell. This waters down our willingness to suffer or resist the attraction of the pleasures of the world and seriously undermines our understanding of God as judge.’

Several interviewees echoed the comments of CLD (in the introduction) that the experience of the Spirit was at the heart of conversion for them and others, and that the Spirit would convict of sin where necessary, so they didn’t need to teach the sort of legalism they, or others, may have grown up with. The overall sense was that in terms of espoused theology though sin should be mentioned (in terms similar to Gumbel above), it was most important to get people into that encounter of love with the Spirit that ultimately alone could change people.

Conclusion

This prioritising an encounter of love with the Spirit reminds us of how central ‘Life in the Spirit’ becomes to the HTB network’s theology. This is partly because that experience of the Spirit is seen as the clearest answer to immediate felt needs, and partly because of a void of systematic or expositional theological teaching. Much of the above can be helpfully contrasted with Hughes’ more systematic consideration of the biblical story. However, Hughes’ short bible overview, while both more accessible and more anchored in biblical theology and church history than much else that has been considered in this chapter cannot claim to hold the weight of a normative theology for the network. At this stage a

conversation partner is needed to hold up a mirror to the contemporary charismatic Christianity seen at HTB and its network and help examine its discipleship goals.

Chapter Five: Wesley and Whitefield: A Mirror

Historical Perspective

This chapter introduces John Wesley and George Whitefield as interrelated but distinct normative theological voices for the HTB network. These are voices from the beginning of the evangelical era defined by Bebbington,⁴⁹⁴ and provide context for the twentieth century normative theological voices explored in Chapters One and Two.⁴⁹⁵ Drawing from recent comparative studies of Wesley and Whitefield the aim is to show the discipleship goals they held in common and the underlying theology that spurred them on. It explains how both Wesley and Whitefield as Anglican ordained practitioners in the Evangelical Revival [ER] have been seen by the network as exemplars of Spirit-filled ministers. It also examines other comparisons and continuities between their era and the HTB network, not least their evangelical roots, revivalist experiences of the Spirit and orientation towards success including innovative marketing techniques, and how personal experience of the Holy Spirit can shape theology.

Conversation Partners for HTB

As both Wesley and Whitefield have in various ways been seen or assumed to be 'normative' models for Iwerne, Stott, Collins, HTB, Wimber, Toronto etc., the contrast between the discipleship goals they held in common and the findings so far regarding the HTB network will help evaluate further if the HTB network has been successful over the past 40 years in 'changing the model not the message'.

⁴⁹⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*. See also: Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals*; Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*; Atherstone and Maiden, (eds.), *Evangelicalism*.

⁴⁹⁵ Those voices being John Stott as influenced by EM Nash and Iwerne Camps and John Wimber.

It shows how Wesley and Whitefield men worked from their own theological positions, combined with their experiences of the Spirit, to steadfastly aim for a God-orientated discipleship goal that will be summarised as ‘a holy people for a holy God.’ Their stated discipleship aim of holiness was described by Wesley as ‘the chief reason’ that the ‘people called Methodists were raised up’,⁴⁹⁶ and their motivation was framed in a Godward direction, viz, the glory of God. It shows how they shared their core discipleship goals despite their respective Arminian and Calvinist theological schemes. Included in their theological schemes are soteriologies which will be shown to emphasise both the absolute need of salvation to overcome the issue of original sin and the eschatological eternal consequences of being ‘born again’ which each impact the goals they are aiming for in discipleship.

Recent research highlights one theological continuity with the HTB network. John Maiden argues that the recent highly acclaimed study by Bruce Hindmarsh may indicate that certain ‘spirited’ aspects of eighteenth-century evangelicalism deserve greater emphasis than has been commonly given in studies of Wesley and Whitefield.⁴⁹⁷ Hindmarsh’s study *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism* (2018) culminates in his contention that if you asked Charles Wesley what was the spirit of early evangelicalism, he would have a ready answer: it was the Holy Spirit... that led to a response of “wonder, love and praise.”⁴⁹⁸ Laurence Wood’s on John Fletcher as John Wesley’s successor also goes some way to rehabilitate a sense that John Wesley’s thinking on the Spirit was carried on (rather than distorted) by Fletcher, who is himself often seen as an antecedent of modern Pentecostalism.⁴⁹⁹ Hindmarsh’s study leads Maiden to argue that what he calls ‘Pneumatism’ has been a consistent key ingredient of evangelicalism and potentially a fifth supplement to Bebbington’s quadrilateral, an idea that we will return to in Chapter Six: Synthesis.

⁴⁹⁶ Wesley, *Works*, Vol 2, pp.490-49

⁴⁹⁷ See John Maiden, Quadrilaterals in Waco: reflections on the ‘Evangelicals and the Bible’ symposium <https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=944> [accessed 12..12.23].

⁴⁹⁸ Bruce. D Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018; See also Thomas Kidd ‘Bruce Hindmarsh on the Spirit of Early Evangelicalism’ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/bruce-hindmarsh-spirit-early-evangelicalism/> (March 6, 2018) accessed 12.12.23.

⁴⁹⁹ Laurence W. Wood *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as John Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor*. United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press, 2002.

Key Questions for HTB Network from the Eighteenth-Century Review

In the light of the findings of this thesis there are five questions regarding the HTB network to keep in mind as we review the eighteenth century. These enable us to consider the degree to which these evangelical ordained Anglican evangelists and revivalists, who clearly inspired John Collins et al in the 1980s HTB, still provide a normative theology for the network in the 2020s.

1. Whether their normative theology telos of 'lived out holiness' remains integral to the HTB network in the operant or espoused voices.
2. Whether original sin, and 'Sin' generally is a problem for which the network is seeking a solution.
3. Whether the eschatological breadth of their theological scheme (from original sin to eternity), remains within the network teaching, or whether the emphasis on a 'life worth living' leads to a truncated scheme focused on the here and now.
4. Building on this, whether the end-goal of discipleship within the network is orientated towards human flourishing (now) rather than the glory of God (for all eternity).
5. Perhaps most controversially, whether what Wesley and Whitefield meant by 'conversion' is synonymous with the network's invitation into 'a relationship with Jesus Christ?' Or is the contemporary invitation more limited than the eighteenth-century challenge to be 'born again' which had resonated so well with the twentieth-century evangelicals studied in Chapter One?⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ Stout and Dein suggested that the core methodology of the Alpha course is 'embodying the Holy Spirit and developing a personal relationship with Christ.' Anna Stout & Simon Dein (2013) "Alpha and evangelical conversion", *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 34:2, 256-261, DOI: 10.1080/13617672.2013.808032. See also Gooren who argues that all researchers of evangelical/charismatic conversion need to recognise the importance of subjective religious experience in the conversion process. Gooren, H. 2010. "Conversion Narratives." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Droogers, Anderson, Bergunder, and van der Laan, Theories and Methods. (United States: University of California Press, 2010). 93–112..

The overall contention is that early Methodism had a clear, compelling discipleship goal of a 'holy people for a holy God,'⁵⁰¹ that can be helpfully held up as a mirror to the espoused and operant goals evident in the HTB network. Birthed in the spiritual furnace of the Oxford Holy Club, this focus on sanctification had for them a compelling theological rationale and was a clear focus of teaching and espoused theology. In his 1783 sermon, *The General Spread of the Gospel*, John Wesley recounted the whole purpose of his life's work as:

'Between fifty and sixty years ago, God raised up a few young men, in the University of Oxford, to testify those grand truths: That without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that this holiness is the work of God... that this holiness was the mind that is in Christ.'⁵⁰²

Whitefield likewise, despite his Calvinist stance and aversion to perfectionism, also maintained the goal of holiness. Holiness is rooted for both men in their theological scheme that begins with original sin and ends with eschatology and eternity. As indicated in the questions above, the scope of this theological scheme will be shown to be one of the key points of divergence with the dominant operant theologies in the HTB network.

Points of Comparison with HTB

To describe both Methodism and the HTB network as renewal movements within the Anglican church is both disingenuous and yet true at once. Both were certainly birthed in Anglicanism, but both have expanded beyond the fold. Both have created a series of renewal meetings (class meetings/Alpha), but the scope and purpose of those meetings have been different. Both have established something of a denomination within a denomination, although unlike Methodism the HTB network seems very unlikely to break away from the mothership.

Both movements have been accused of 'enthusiasm'. This term had a more pejorative meaning for Wesley and Whitefield's opponents than today when any enthusiasm that

⁵⁰¹ For Wesley it is a necessary corollary that a Holy God produces a holy people (and deserves a holy people)... see e.g. Wesley, *J Christian Perfection*, 26-27, where he links 'Christ in me' and 'I live not' together to show how Christ's holy life within us is to replace sin for the glory of God.

⁵⁰² John Wesley, *Works*, Vol 2, 490-491.

might lead to church growth is more likely to be prized.⁵⁰³ But the charge particularly relates to how each recognise and promote an experience of the empowering Spirit. For Guest it is precisely by 'fostering an embodied experience of the Holy Spirit' alongside a plain and propositional presentation of Christian truth that Alpha has managed a tension that is the key to its success.⁵⁰⁴ As Millar states it simultaneously appeals to head, heart and will.⁵⁰⁵

Both have a style that has been honed for maximum impact. Whitefield was more skilled in this than Wesley. He broke ecclesiastical boundaries with his crowd drawing, dramatic preaching focused almost entirely on the individual experience of the New Birth. He relied on William Seward to stoke the highly efficient publicity machine as expertly as Tricia Neill was later to organise and market the Alpha Course in Kensington.⁵⁰⁶ His innovative style as much as his substance seems to many biographers to be the key to his impact. Where his style (sometimes literally) embodied his message in his dramatic delivery,⁵⁰⁷ the HTB network style embodies the message in a more multi-layered mixture of carefully controlled community, multimedia presentations, and attractive, winsome, 'reasonable enthusiasts' presenting the message, or curating the worship experience, to the predefined time allocation given, counting down on the large clock facing them.⁵⁰⁸ Core teaching material is honed not just to the minute but to an exact word count.⁵⁰⁹ But HTB in other ways stands more in the tradition of Wesley. Snow and Machalek assert that, 'George Whitefield was content merely to preach and hope for the best. Wesley, however, declined to preach

⁵⁰³ Rack labels Wesley as *A Reasonable Enthusiast* meaning someone who was rational ('reasonable') as well as emotional ('enthusiast').

⁵⁰⁴ Matthew Guest, 2007, p.47. Hence he argues it traverses the modern/post-modern divide.

⁵⁰⁵ in Gordon Kurht, (ed.) 1995, pp.146-147

⁵⁰⁶ Harry Stout, *The divine dramatist: George Whitefield and the rise of modern evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pp.89-90; cf Neill, *Vision to Action*, 7 and Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 17.

⁵⁰⁷ Preaching technique included graphic re-enactments of gospel passages, including Mary in child-birth!

⁵⁰⁸ See Justin Welby commenting on the countdown clock in this address <https://www.htb.org/sunday-talks-archive/2018/7/15/who-runs-our-lives?rq=welby>. (Worship services tend to be most carefully curated at HTB and flagship events such as Leaders Conference. In more local network churches structure is more varied).

Historically David Watson who relocated to HTB briefly in 1982 before settling at St Michael's Chester Square, emphasised John Wesley's 'reasonable enthusiast' desire to keep 'warm hearts' and 'cool heads', an attitude that helped shape the many emerging renewal services he inspired. David Watson *You Are My God*, 197

⁵⁰⁹ e.g. Nicky Gumbel edits his *Bible in One Year* commentary to an optimum 1500 words per day.

where it seemed impossible to consolidate his evangelical efforts.⁵¹⁰ This desire to structure for long-term impact lies behind the more recent push towards planting resource churches.

Celebrity leaders have been central to the development of both movements. Whitefield was adored throughout North America, an anti-institutional icon of the colonies, 'articulating increasingly a Whiggish Republicanism' that enamoured him to them even more. He was an 'A' list celebrity that crowds would flock to see. Stout sees him as at best a 'spirit-filled minister' who 'directed his work first at the soul and second at charity and never one without the other,'⁵¹¹ but at worst he labels Whitefield as a 'modern promoter' with a 'shameless ego'.⁵¹² A legacy on the development of the church in America and beyond can be drawn from this promotional ability. Walker credits Whitefield with instigating a personality driven preaching style that metamorphosed into an 'almost "show-biz" obsession with the big-name charismatic stars, and its reliance on management and commercial techniques' in the contemporary Christian church.⁵¹³

At HTB the key clergy have been largely understated and known for upper-middle class British charm, but the success of Alpha and his prominence in the published video and print material has afforded Nicky Gumbel his own celebrity status. A recent Times article describes Gumbel as turning Alpha into a 'global phenomenon', and being 'arguably the most influential Christian in Britain today.'⁵¹⁴ For a brief comparison consider Heard, drawing on Awamleh and Gardener's framework in his extended critique of Alpha, who describes Gumbel as 'embodying many of the characteristics of a Weberian charismatic leader'... which enables the belief that he, like other such leaders in, is 'particularly attuned to God', and able to build 'sufficient prestige through his self-confident manner.'⁵¹⁵ He quotes a National Director of Alpha USA describing Gumbel as an apostle Paul for this generation, as Billy Graham was for the last. Gumbel, an introvert, is a different personality

⁵¹⁰ David Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Convert as Social Type" in R Collins (ed) *Sociological Theory*. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1984), 259-89, 263; Whitefield assented to this view himself towards the end of his life cf Doughty, 1955, 57.

⁵¹¹ Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, 287

⁵¹² Ibid., 287

⁵¹³ Andrew Walker, *Notes from a Wayward Son: A Miscellany*. Second, Expanded Edition. (United States: Cascade Books, 2019), 243.

⁵¹⁴ Damian Arnold, "Why Generation Z is reinvigorating the Alpha Course", *The Times*, 7.3.20

⁵¹⁵ Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 18-19.

to Whitefield whose 'public self was his private self',⁵¹⁶ and yet the charismatic legacy in both is clear. Expressed over a series of evenings and a weekend retreat Gumbel offers his viewers an individualised divine encounter described not so much as 'new birth' but 'an encounter with the Holy Spirit', with individual results reported in Alpha News as dramatic as those recorded in Whitefield's publicity.

Both have been adept at marketing, although using very different principles when it comes to courting (or avoiding) controversy. Frank Lambert dedicates a whole chapter of his revisionist biography of Whitefield examining his, 'adaptation of commercial strategies.'⁵¹⁷ Pete Ward similarly uses HTB and Alpha as a case study in his work on the 'McDonaldisation of religion,' which Booker and Ireland see as linked to George Ritzer notion of rationalization.⁵¹⁸ Alpha International's Annual Report to the Charity Commissioners shows a consistent £1million plus expenditure on media and publicaitons and savvy use of the celebrity status of key Alpha graduates and TV personalities, such as Bear Grylls:

Bear Grylls has 1.6 billion viewers and is in the unique position of having 6 new shows being released globally in 2015. His global recognition and influence as a respected spokesman has never been stronger. Alpha has already filmed with Bear for this campaign and will translate this into a global media pack over the course of 2015, allowing countries to maximize impact.⁵¹⁹

But where Lambert uses loaded phrases such as 'Whitefield as good business', 'exploiting the intercolonial print network' and 'creating an intercolonial revival' to promote his thesis that Whitefield was a 'pedlar in divinity'⁵²⁰, and Stout points to the role of William Seward, who travelled ahead of Whitefield writing hundreds of letters to promote him, there is a key difference between their respective modus operandi. In Stout's account Seward's letters

⁵¹⁶ Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, 287.

⁵¹⁷ Frank Lambert, "*Pedlar in Divinity*": *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770*. (United States: Princeton University Press, 2018), 52-94.

⁵¹⁸ Booker & Ireland, *Evangelism*, 21.

⁵¹⁹ 31/12/2014 annual report

http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends79/0001086179_AC_20141231_E_C.PDF [accessed 31.3.2020].

⁵²⁰ The phrase is drawn from an anonymous critic of Whitefield in the Boston Weekly Newspaper April 22, 1742. See Lambert, *Pedlar*, 93.

were often designed to incite a galvanising opposition and controversy was used to procure crowds. He recalls one occasion of Whitefield ‘gloating’:

...little do my enemies think what service they do me. If they did one would think, out of spite they would even desist from opposing me.⁵²¹

Yet the strategy of Nicky Gumbel, and his publicity officer in chief Mark Elson Dew, with regards to controversy has been the polar opposite. Gumbel tweeted on 17 September 2019, ‘sometimes the best response to criticism is keeping a dignified silence,’ and on 7 February 2018, ‘Never waste too much time explaining yourself. Your critics probably won’t believe it and your friends don’t need it.’ On 15 March 2016, again he asserted: ‘Be slow to criticise. And fast to appreciate.’ Chapter Three evidenced how Gumbel and Elson Dew studiously avoid courting controversy, to the point of self-editing material that might be considered polemical. This non-engagement with polemics is often critiqued by those inside and outside the network as ‘bait and switch’ methodology.⁵²² This is where rather than being upfront about beliefs, which Wesley and Whitefield were willing to do to a fault, a gentle osmosis of worldview is expected to happen over time, once (unsuspecting) participants have ‘bought in’ to a loving community.⁵²³ So in Gumbel’s marketing bad press is bad press.

A further dissimilarity concerns the degree of alignment each movement has sought and gained with the ecclesiastical powers of the Church of England. For a large part this reflects the temperament of their key leaders and their relation to power. In this the HTB network has been essentially governed by the stance of Sandy Millar (building on other influences

⁵²¹ Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, 103. He argues that controversy helps make Whitefield a ‘cause célèbre’ which helps account for his crowds.

⁵²² Cf the alleged experience of anonymous blogger: “*My Alpha experience – why I consider the course to be cynical and dishonest*” <https://recoveringagnostic.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/my-alpha-experience-why-i-consider-the-course-to-be-cynical-and-dishonest/> [accessed 4 March, 2020]. “I think the course is dishonest in its advertising and its arguments, sometimes manipulative, and always cynical. Finding out quickly moves into being taught, and then into emotional exploitation in unfamiliar group settings, all step by step, like a frog being boiled alive.”

⁵²³ Although see Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, 191, for a sense (contra Lambert) that Whitefield matured beyond such a polemical stage between his second and third visits to America, citing apologies he makes in 1745 including to Harvard College: “...I have no intention of stirring people against their pastors”.

including John Stott and John Collins) that the Church of England is as good a ship to fish from as any other, and that he had as much right to fish from it as any other ordained minister. With the 'effortless ease' of the upper/upper-middle classes, HTB's Etonian and Oxbridge dominated leadership has found it relatively easy to imagine and act itself into a place of power, despite years of intransigent opposition from many who would have loved to thwart its more expansionist tendencies. They were aided in this especially by a strong relationship with the Lord Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, himself from a line of Irish Gentry, of Huguenot origin.⁵²⁴ Prince Charles has been among the many celebrity guests at HTB events. By contrast Wesley, and especially Whitefield, were very much from the poorer end of the aspirant lower middle-classes and had to work much harder for patronage with episcopal and aristocratic influencers alike. They spoke more easily to the new urban poor than to the young urban professionals who have been HTB's target audience.

Finally, there is a savvy use of technology. Lambert makes a convincing case for how the consumer revolution and new cheap printing material contributed to the Awakening.⁵²⁵ Whitefield and associates 'developed a pervasive publicity campaign featuring endorsements, testimonials, and controversy in newspapers magazines and pamphlets and they exploited the demand among evangelicals for his revival publications through such merchandising devices as quantity discounts, prepayment incentives, serial publication, convenience packing, and home delivery.'⁵²⁶ In a similar way HTB have been adept at using new technology, ranging from audio and video cassette, to the current Alpha Film series, live streaming, and social media, as well as harnessing their own inhouse print media to promote their core product – Alpha, through *Alpha News*, paperbacks and other published works. Tricia Neill speaks of the benefits of professionalisation at HTB concluding 'we have definitely reaped positive benefits from applying business principles in a Christian way,'⁵²⁷ although writing in 2006, notes a reluctance to take on technology that has not been

⁵²⁴ Burke's Irish Family Records, 5th edition, ed. Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, Burke's Peerage Ltd, 1976, p. 225

⁵²⁵ Lambert notes that Stout modified his view on this between 1977 and 1991, coming eventually to accept the role of print. Lambert, *Pedlar*, 7

⁵²⁶ Lambert, *Pedlar*, 9

⁵²⁷ Neill, *Vision to Action*, 13.

proven, will be hard to maintain or makes the main leader seem more remote to the congregation.⁵²⁸

So for their Anglicanism, their impact, their offer of an experience of the Spirit, their savvy use of technology, their leadership and their birthing of a movement, despite being separated by 250 years of history Wesley and Whitefield make very interesting conversation partners for our review of the contemporary charismatic church exemplified in the HTB network.

Wesley and Whitefield's shared theological schemes

Bringing together Wesley and Whitefield's voices as a unified conversation partner for the network is not without its complexities. Many studies of Wesley and Whitefield (rightly) point to the differences that existed between the two men.⁵²⁹ Maddock is foundational to this study in also showing the continuity that has often been overlooked by more polarised accounts of Wesley and Whitefield who he sees as the *Men of One Book*. He notes the 'surprising but regrettable' lacuna that they are 'not paired or compared often enough in print...given the way their lives illuminated one another'.⁵³⁰

Indeed, when their theological scheme is contrasted with the espoused theology in parts of the contemporary charismatic church the similarities between the two seem clearer than

⁵²⁸ Ibid. 53.

⁵²⁹ Ian Maddock, *Men of One Book: A Comparison of Two Methodist Preachers, John Wesley and George Whitefield*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 2, describes Wesley and Whitefield studies as 'polarised and partisan' with biographers asserting the moral acumen as well as theological superiority of their man against the other.

⁵³⁰ Ian Maddock, *Wesley and Whitefield? Wesley Versus Whitefield?*. (United Kingdom: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 3.

when pitted against each other. For example, at a headline level, the core doctrines of Wesley have been helpfully summarised as follows:⁵³¹

- i. scripture as '*the only standard of truth*'⁵³²;
- ii. salvation by faith as '*the standing topic*'⁵³³;
- iii. sin as '*loathsome leprosy*'⁵³⁴;
- iv. the regeneration through the Spirit by which we may be '*properly said to live*'⁵³⁵;
- v. assurance as '*an inward impression on the soul*'⁵³⁶;
- vi. holiness, '*the grand depositum*'⁵³⁷;
- vii. a desire to '*flee from the wrath to come*' as the 'one condition' required of those wanting admission to the societies.⁵³⁸

In an alternative scheme Outler picks just three: i) original sin, ii) justification by faith alone and iii) holiness of heart in those who have been born again.⁵³⁹ At a similar headline level Whitefield's focus was very close to Wesley, focusing on 'the big truths of the Book of

⁵³¹ Skevington Wood, *Burning Heart, Burning Heart*, 209-279.

⁵³² *Works* II: 367

⁵³³ *Works* 8:349

⁵³⁴ *Sermons* 1:323

⁵³⁵ *Sermons* 2:234; Skevington Wood, 240: 'Wesleyanism is sometimes classed with Arminianism, but it essentially differs from it in the central place it gives to the work of the Spirit in regeneration.' (Orr, J 1897, 300) cf. Herbert McGonigle *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*. (United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 2001), 8 who elaborates on this theme.

⁵³⁶ *Sermons* I: 208

⁵³⁷ *Letters* 8: 238

⁵³⁸ *Works* 8: 270. Skevington Ward notes Strawson on the dangers of isolating or exaggerating this doctrine, before (rightly) attacking Rattenbury, Lyles and Wilson for under-representing Wesley's appeal to '*the terrors of the Lord*'. Skevington Ward points to numerous Journal articles and the unpublished PhD research of Cyril Downes (1960) *Eschatological Doctrines in the Writings of John and Charles Wesley*. Edinburgh. As Wesley wrote to William Law "Can you conceive of the Most High dressing up as a scarecrow, as we do to fright children." *Letters Vol III*, 370. He argues that if there is no hell then the Scripture is not trustworthy so there is also 'no heaven, no revelation.'

⁵³⁹ Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. (United States: Tidings, 1975), 69. cf Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 178

Truth.’⁵⁴⁰ These have been summarised neatly by Maddock as ‘original sin, justification by faith and the new birth’ (although he notes the ‘subtle but highly significant theological differences’ and hence pastoral applications, that flow from Wesley and Whitefield’s varying usage of identical terms).⁵⁴¹

A shared theological anthropology drove their missional focus. Emphasising his common ground with Whitefield in his funeral sermon Wesley asserted ‘it is not enough to say all men are sick of sin. No, we are all dead in sin and trespasses’⁵⁴². Similarly, they shared an eschatology that produced a compelling imperative for discipleship: ‘every sinner is under the sentence of hell-fire’ until he turned to Christ’⁵⁴³. This led both preachers to argue that the ‘pursuit of inward and outward holiness ought to categorise the regenerate life’⁵⁴⁴. They called ‘dead’ sinners, into a regenerate life pursuing holiness - albeit with varied views on the extent that holiness could be outworked in this life.

Maddock notes that both preachers:

Agreed that experiencing spiritual regeneration was necessary, that justification must precede sanctification, that regeneration marks the threshold of sanctification, that the new birth entails victory over the dominion and power of sin, and the pursuit of inward and outward holiness ought to categorise the regenerate life.⁵⁴⁵

They differed as to how to define sin, how far sin can be eradicated, and dramatically over their perception of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection. For Wesley this was a dynamic, relational possibility, drawing from a combination of his experiences of the Moravians, his

⁵⁴⁰ Conrad, 66

⁵⁴¹ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 176 cf especially debate about ‘prevenient grace’ vs ‘total depravity’ and the impact each has on the doctrine of election.

⁵⁴² Outler *Works* 2:342 cf Sermon: *Original Sin* in Outler *Works* 2:173. Although it is possible his desire to emphasise their common ground on this grand occasion may have led him to overstate his point.

⁵⁴³ *Sermons*, Vol I, 157; Sermon VII

⁵⁴⁴ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 241

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

‘conversion’ and High Church readings.⁵⁴⁶ The experience of ‘Perfect’ Love was something he thought every Anglican prayed for in the Collect for Purity,⁵⁴⁷ and, contending that what we might be perfected from was simply a ‘voluntary transgression of a known law’, his experiences and readings led him to believe that this was possible and indeed that obtaining holiness was the key thing that needed to be preached to people.

McGonigle has made an important contribution to doctrinal studies of Wesley. He argues carefully that Wesley’s arminianism was a new kind of evangelicalism: ‘his rejection of Calvinistic predestination went along with an undiluted emphasis on original sin, atonement in the death of Christ, salvation by faith alone and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. It was undeniable that Wesley was an Arminian, but he was a new-style Arminian; his Arminianism was unashamedly orthodox and, beyond even Arminius himself, it had caught the fire of the Holy Spirit and burned with evangelistic fervour.’⁵⁴⁸

Antinomianism was a consistent concern for Wesley and it begs many questions of what he would think of today’s consumer churches. Following on from his 1762 publication *Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ*, later that year he penned *A Blow at the Root, or Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends*.⁵⁴⁹

None shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth; none that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter; none can see the Kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God live in him below. Whosoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth.

⁵⁴⁶ see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 103-04. Contra this Witherington who sees Rack’s understanding of Christian Perfection as one of his weaknesses, arguing that a careful use of the works of L. Keefer and T. Campbell on Wesley and Christian antiquity would have enhanced this study considerably. This is discussed further below.

⁵⁴⁷ Wesley culminates his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* with a rhetorical reference to this prayer, stating simply that he expected God could/would answer it. Shepherd 2016, 131 cites an occasion Wesley used this prayer to defend himself of the charge of theological novelty by his Anglican superiors; cf Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life*: (United States, Crossway 2013), 217; Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England* (Oxford: OUP 1987), 27 argues that Wesley is calling his interlocutors’ bluff by finishing with this prayer – effectively asking what do you think it means ‘to perfectly love him’ if by it you do not mean perfect love?

⁵⁴⁸ McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 8.

⁵⁴⁹ Wesley, *Works*, Vol. 10, 364-369

None of honest heathen efforts, Roman Catholic penance, petition, and priests, nor public participation in Protestantism can achieve this. Instead, using a favoured image from Phil 2.5 'the mind that was in Christ' (which McGonigle argues was increasingly Wesley's definition of scriptural holiness⁵⁵⁰), and cross-referencing it with the definition of the Kingdom of God as 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' in Romans 14:17, Wesley argues that true holiness is the Kingdom of God in the heart and the mind of Christ in the believer. All this is possible after justification by faith. But those who preach 'inherent holiness' imputed to sinners, and thereby excusing them from 'hungering and thirsting after righteousness' he compares to Simon Magus of Acts 8, the psuedo-Christian who does more harm than good.⁵⁵¹

McGonigle summarises the remains of Wesley's argument that washed, sanctified and justified, as they are, true believers are made righteous. They are really changed not merely accounted righteous. They are free from the law and works of sin, not the law and works of God! Christ is a 'Saviour from sin' not a 'saviour in sin'. This should lead Methodists to love soul-searching sermons and not rest in any false confidence arising from imputed holiness while their hearts remain impure. They must cleave to Christ till his blood has cleansed them of all sin. They must love God, keep his commands, exalt Christ, imitate Christ and walk in his ways until he creates in them a new heart and renews a right spirit within them.⁵⁵²

Maddock is very helpful here in noting the significance of the new birth for both Wesley and Whitefield. Like Smith he contends that neither man 'altered his basic stance on the primacy of the experience of the new birth.'⁵⁵³ Both 'stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Christ, assuring them of forgiveness, and, by his presence thereafter in their hearts, nurturing them in the love and holiness that pleases God.'⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 227.

⁵⁵¹ Wesley, J, *Works*, Vol. 10, 366-367

⁵⁵² McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*.

⁵⁵³ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 211, cf. John T. Smith, *Methodism and Education, 1849-1902: J.H. Rigg, Romanism, and Wesleyan Schools*. (United Kingdom: Clarendon Press, 1998). 7

⁵⁵⁴ Smith, *Methodism and Education*, 13; Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 212

James Schwenk agrees, stating that “common devotion to the doctrine of regeneration bound them together.”⁵⁵⁵ Bebbington also helps narrow the Calvinist/Arminian gap by noting that (contrary to Wesley’s many critiques) Evangelical Calvinists were moderate in their views of God’s control of destiny, following Edwards *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and the notion of ‘duty faith’, as William Goode put it: “it is the duty of all men to believe.”⁵⁵⁶

Although sharp points of disagreement can be found between Wesley and Whitefield’s soteriology it is helpful, for comparison with the contemporary charismatic church, to stand back and see the similarities. Maddock’s comparison of their sermons finds that three non-negotiable doctrines are at the heart of the gospel for both men.⁵⁵⁷

- 1) They both proclaimed the doctrine of original sin and the Bible's depiction of the fallen human condition. They insisted that according to the Scriptures, apart from divine intervention, every person, without exception, is deserving of God's just condemnation.
- 2) God's response to this dire diagnosis, is the good news of God's unmerited kingdom towards undeserving sinners. They insisted that by God's grace, individuals can have their sins forgiven and stand justified in God's sight, only through faith in the merits of Jesus's substitutionary sacrifice.
- 3) The necessity of spiritual regeneration, and that this experience of the “new birth” marked the entry point to a life of expectant progressive sanctification.⁵⁵⁸

We have already noted Skevington Wood’s⁵⁵⁹ seven point and Outler’s three point⁵⁶⁰ summaries of Wesley’s core doctrines. Maddock’s summary⁵⁶¹ of Whitefield’s is repeated in

⁵⁵⁵ Schwenk, 2008, 35.

⁵⁵⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 64

⁵⁵⁷ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 237-8

⁵⁵⁸ He argues that Whitfield takes the terms “original sin”, “justification” and the “new birth” to describe his major themes of Scripture, but that Wesley comes at the same doctrines from the vocabulary of human response. That is, ‘Wesley typically identified repentance as the response God demands of those born in a state of original sin, faith is the response God requires of individuals in order to be justified, and the life-long pursuit of holiness is the habitual response God requires those who have experienced spiritual regeneration.’
Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Skevington Wood, 1969, 209-279.

⁵⁶⁰ Outler, *Theology*, 69. cf Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 178.

⁵⁶¹ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 176.

the above. Drawing these together beyond Maddock's initial points of similarity we can elaborate:

- 4) Both men are clear that scripture is the book of truth,⁵⁶² the only standard of truth.
- 5) Their doctrine of sin and theological anthropology that 'we are all dead in sin and trespasses'⁵⁶³, has eternal consequences. For both, humanity needs rescuing from original sin. Sin is a loathsome leprosy, not easy to shake off, and not simply a sickness to recover from. As we have seen both share an eschatology that compels their discipleship goals. They are clear that there is a judgment to come, and a desire to flee the wrath to come is necessary for those who seek new birth. Wesley puts the doctrine of hell bluntly when he asserts to William Law: 'Can you conceive of the Most High dressing up as a scarecrow, as we do to fright children', if there is no hell, then Scripture, he argues, is not trustworthy, and 'there is also no heaven, no revelation.'⁵⁶⁴ 'every sinner is under the sentence of hell-fire' until he turned to Christ'.⁵⁶⁵

Their shared conviction regarding humanity's plight aside from the new birth - due to original sin and eternal judgement - stands in significant contrast to many operant and espoused theologies in the contemporary charismatic church. It also gives context to the significance of "new birth" or justification by faith. It carries the sense of being saved from something disastrous into something brand new. This conviction drives their discipleship goals and pursuit of holiness.

Wesley and Whitefield's Doctrinal Differences

Maddock makes an equally concise summary of Wesley and Whitefield's doctrinal differences. These broadly relate to their Calvinism/Arminianism which he sees as varyingly overplayed and underestimated by both men. Whitefield saw Wesley as semi-Pelagian, and

⁵⁶² *Works* II: 367, see also Conrad, 66.

⁵⁶³ Wesley in Whitefield's funeral sermon. Outler, *Works* 2:342 cf Sermon: *Original Sin* in Outler *Works* 2:173. A significant sermon for our study as Wesley was keen to emphasise their common ground.

⁵⁶⁴ *Letters Vol III*, 370.

⁵⁶⁵ *Sermons*, Vol I, 157; Sermon VII

Wesley caricatured Whitefield's Calvinism as a system 'that promoted mechanical fatalism and hindered the pursuit of holy living.'⁵⁶⁶

There are differences also regarding justification. They agreed on the essence, that no-one can contribute anything to their salvation, which is all on the merit of Christ alone, received through faith, they differ on the particulars of scope and nature. For Wesley the scope was limited to past sins forgiven, for Whitefield it covered the past, present and future. For Whitefield, Christ's righteousness is imputed to repentant sinners, for Wesley this righteousness has to be worked out through sanctification.

Maddocks' final point refers to whether indwelling sin can be eradicated in this lifetime. He notes that, firstly, Wesley's definition of sin 'a voluntary transgression of a known law' was far more limited than Whitefield's (which encompassed known and unknown, voluntary and involuntary transgressions), and secondly Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection ('a dynamic, relational reality') was likewise different from Whitefield's perception of that understanding ('a static state of being unable to sin').⁵⁶⁷ However Maddock still concludes that each believed the 'pursuit of inward and outward holiness ought to categorise the regenerate life'⁵⁶⁸.

Holiness as a Discipleship Goal - Wesley

A survey of Wesley's espoused theology of holiness shows some considerable fluidity of terminology and emphases as he seeks to clarify and defend aspects of his teaching, particularly with regards to 'Perfect Love'. Maddock notes that he freely used the terms holiness, sanctification, entire sanctification, and Christian Perfection interchangeably.⁵⁶⁹

Wesley's teaching certainly develops in at least three clear stages:

⁵⁶⁶ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 241.

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 186. See also David McEwan, *Wesley as a Pastoral Theologian* (United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2011). chp.6.

- i) 1725-1732, before his Sermon of 1 Jan 1733 '*Circumcision of the Heart*' was given before the University of Oxford.⁵⁷⁰
- ii) 1732-1738 leading up to his evangelical conversion
- iii) 1738-1741 as he outworked his experiences.

From 1741 his doctrine is fundamentally consistent, despite firstly, being expressed polemically or apologetically in different ways at different times, and secondly, showing a maturing towards a re-focus on perfect love. Indeed, Outler sees the publication of Wesley's main work on 'Perfect Love' *A Plain Account*, as 'a mildly truculent reaction to the charge that he had changed his teaching on the topic of holiness in the course of the Revival.'⁵⁷¹

Similarly, he has varying stages of self-disclosure regarding his normative theology. There is widespread debate about the scope of his claim to be '*homo unius libri*'.⁵⁷² Steven Harper surveyed the doctrinal works Wesley read predating his 1738 evangelical conversion,⁵⁷³ which he discovers gives credence to James Joy's apt reference to Wesley as a 'Man of a thousand books, and a book.'⁵⁷⁴ Wesley 'read voluminously and encouraged his preachers to do likewise.'⁵⁷⁵ Mark Olson has published a thesis considering how to interpret the various narratives regarding Wesley 'evangelical conversion' at Aldersgate on 24 May 1738.⁵⁷⁶ What is certain is that whether his quest for perfection had been derived from early church fathers, the counterreformation, William Law, puritans or scripture, it had been dragging him down into what seemed a futile and unrewarding introspection. From 1738 however the experience he had at Aldersgate drove his continuing advocacy of the

⁵⁷⁰ See Olson, M for analysis of the soteriology in the sermon and the fourfold emphasis on humility, faith, hope and love. Humility requires a 'right judgement of ourselves' as sinful and in need of salvation; faith relates to the need for new birth and deliverance from sin; hope speaks of assurance that enables growth in personal holiness; and love refers to perfect love enabling union 'with him that made them'.

⁵⁷¹ Outler, *John Wesley*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 251.

⁵⁷² Works 1:104-5.

⁵⁷³ Stephen Harper, "*The Devotional Life of John Wesley*" 1703-38, (PhD diss., Duke University, 1981), 324-335.

⁵⁷⁴ In Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 3... who notes similarly Weeter, 118 and Outler who sees it as 'hermeneutical principle that Scripture would be his court of first and last resort in faith and morals' rather than a claim to restrict his reading and influences.

⁵⁷⁵ Weeter, 155

⁵⁷⁶ Published as Mark Olson, *Wesley and Aldersgate: Interpreting Conversion Narratives*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.

discipleship goal of holiness. He began to see within himself what the mystics had advocated and he himself had dutifully preached in *Circumcision of the Heart* in Jan 1733. Wesley was able to interpret his dramatic encounter with the Spirit in the light of the desire for holiness that was already well developed within him.⁵⁷⁷

From Aldersgate onwards, there is a different tone and feel to Wesley's diaries, with other highlights to follow. On Christmas Eve 1744 he had an encounter where:

I saw every thought, as well as every word or action, just as it was rising from my heart; and whether it was right with God or tinted with pride or selfishness I never knew before (I mean not as this time) what it was to be "still before God".

On the 25th he continues:

I walked by the grace of God in the same spirit and about eight being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt much awe and the tender sense of the presence of God as greatly confirmed in me therein: so that God was before me all day long. I sought and found him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, "now I have lived a day."⁵⁷⁸

The operant theology of Methodism was impacted by these Holy Spirit encounters every bit as much as the eclectic normative theologies upon which Wesley drew. Whereas previously he was continually left with the feeling that he had never quite arrived,⁵⁷⁹ after May 1738, and Christmas 1744 the possibility of perfection (in the limited way that he defined it), became a real and tangible goal once again to him. This all resonated deeply with John Collins who had a similar experience in 1963, 17 years before he took up his pivotal role as the first charismatic vicar of HTB.

⁵⁷⁷ The same tendency in John Collins accounted for his harsh break with Dick Lucas, Michael Baughan and John Stott.

⁵⁷⁸ See Flew 323 for discussion (contra Curtis) of whether this amounted to Christian Perfection.

⁵⁷⁹ Harper, 262

Holiness as a Discipleship Goal - Whitefield

Whitefield began with a similar operant system to Wesley but reached crisis point before his older contemporary. He had engaged in such ascetism at the Holy Club in Oxford that it had nearly killed him. In lent 1735 he lost all sense of balance and suffered a seven-week illness and spiritual ordeal that led to his evangelical conversion three years before Wesley.⁵⁸⁰

He counselled others to ‘aspire after the utmost degrees of inward purity,’⁵⁸¹ and initially shared a language of degrees of holiness. Schwanda helpfully points out Whitefield’s autobiographical claim: “I am a thirst for holiness myself”.⁵⁸² Yet Schwanda also, with Timothy Smith sees Whitefield backing away from a public emphasis on a holy life after 1741. Maddock puts this down to a growing conviction in Calvinism and ‘reticence to embrace Wesley’s insistence on Christian perfection,’⁵⁸³ but also footnotes that Jonathan Edwards’ Calvinism did not preclude Edwards from continuing to stress ‘thirsting’ after holiness.⁵⁸⁴ Edwards was a key friend and influence to Whitefield since the Englishman’s dramatic preaching tour reached his home on 17 October 1740. He is also a historic figure still considered ‘normative’ by many in the contemporary Charismatic Church,⁵⁸⁵ and for both these reasons may be very helpful in explaining Whitefield’s ongoing attachment to the pursuit of holiness despite wanting to distance himself from some of what seemed excesses in Wesley’s interpretation. Indeed, Edwards’ public stance is likely for that reason to be closer to Whitefield’s personal convictions than Whitefield himself felt he could be. Like Whitefield in Oxford, Edwards had lived a deeply disciplined religious life at Yale. But when he dropped his MA studies in 1722 to preach, he reported that over 18 months:

⁵⁸⁰ See Dallimore, Arnold A.. *George Whitefield, the Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-century Revival*. United States: Cornerstone Books, 1979, 64f for a full account.

⁵⁸¹ Gillies ed., Works, 1:339, 345-46, 350, 356

⁵⁸² In Maddock [ed.], 187; Gillies,, ed., Works, 1:345, compare Smith, *Methodism and Education*, 122

⁵⁸³ Op cit.

⁵⁸⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 382, 104.

⁵⁸⁵ Edwards was extensively cited in the debates surrounding the Toronto Blessing: see particularly the two substantive chapters in Guy Chevreau’s apologetic: *Catch the Fire* (1994) entitled ‘Expanding our Operative Theologies’, and ‘A Well Trod Path’ pp.33-144, which both seek to link Toronto Blessing to Edwards as a normative theology.

‘My longing after God and holiness very much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heavenly Christianity appeared exceedingly amiable to me.’⁵⁸⁶

As one of his biographers puts it holiness and God were inseparably linked in Edward's mind. To experience the one, you needed to possess the other. Holiness is not a ‘burdensome duty’ but the ‘beautiful condition of the soul in communion with God.’

As Edwards himself puts it:

Holiness... Appeared to me of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature; which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness and ravishing to the soul. In other words, that it made the soul like a field or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers; pleasant, delightful, and undisturbed; enjoying the sweet calm, and the gentle vivifying beams of the sun.... There was nothing that I so earnestly longed for. My heart panted after this – to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and God might be all.’⁵⁸⁷

In Murray’s summary Edwards endeavours after holiness were from this awakening onwards ‘no more the self-conscious strivings of the moralist’: rather they are the ‘response of love to the God who had made him a new creature in Jesus Christ’. Sanctification was now a labour of love ‘flowing from communion with God and fellowship with Christ.’⁵⁸⁸

Whitefield remained as committed to holiness as Edwards, despite his wariness of Wesley’s free use of the term and more controversial ‘Christian perfection’. In his journals he affirms the necessity of holiness.⁵⁸⁹ Schwanda quotes a 1763 letter of Whitefield including a personal prayer longing for ‘heart-holiness’, to enable him to ‘ripen for full enjoyment of thyself in heaven’.⁵⁹⁰ He also helpfully maps other terminology Whitefield consistently uses,

⁵⁸⁶ Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, 286, see Vaughan, 2000

⁵⁸⁷ Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, 287-288

⁵⁸⁸ Murray, 1987, 44

⁵⁸⁹ Whitefield, *Journals*, 576-77

⁵⁹⁰ Interestingly in full the prayer is: ‘if not in public usefulness, let it be in heart holiness...’ showing Whitefield’s activist spirit still at work. Schwanda, in Ian Maddocks [ed.] *Wesley and Whitefield? Wesley Versus Whitefield?*. (United Kingdom: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018) 188, quoting from Gillies ed., Works, 3:293

capturing ‘the biblical principle of dying to self and mortification’, when not specifically using the words ‘holiness and sanctification.’⁵⁹¹ For Whitefield then, despite all the controversy surrounding ‘holiness’ after 1741, holiness as an experienced, real and living inner transformation in converts was a key discipleship goal.

Means of Grace – how to live out a holy life.

Means of Grace were the systemic way by which an espoused theology of holiness could become a lived, operant theology of holiness. From Oxford days onwards Wesley pursued increasingly developed means of grace – rigorous methods by which he hoped (at first) to attain righteousness.

Rack delineates how from 1732 Wesley drew up ‘ever elaborate’ General Rules for self-examination. Rack sees these as being both personal to Wesley, but also related to ‘in a kind of complicated counterpoint’ to the corporate rules introduced to his Oxford Holy Club.⁵⁹² These rules developed independent of Wesley, but his force of personality was considerable and ‘he was inclined to impose parts of his private disciplines... such as early rising and communion’ even on those who had not yet signed up to his Holy Club.⁵⁹³

Through the Holy Club Wesley developed a ‘lifelong love of supervising and guiding other people’s spiritual progress,’ (closer to EM Nash than any contemporary character at HTB).⁵⁹⁴ This had a profound impact on Whitefield who adopted the practice of fasting to extremities⁵⁹⁵ nearly killing himself in the process. Nevertheless, for the most part Rack maintains that it was Wesley himself whose own personal discipline exceeded the rest of the club. His General Questions dates from 1730, revised regularly with increasing austerity, and designed to check the purity of intent for activities and prayers of the day completed. The intensity of self-examination continued to rise with Rack describing ‘almost neurotic’

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 88

⁵⁹³ Ibid. These resolutions owe much of their intensity to the influence of William Law’s *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Law’s thesis was that, ‘it seems to be the greatest necessity that all actions be constantly observed and brought to accounts, lest by negligence we load ourselves with the guilt of unrepentant sins.’

⁵⁹⁴ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 95

⁵⁹⁵ See Dallimore, *George Whitefield vol.1*, 65 for full account.

self-interrogation, whereby he ranked his 'temper of devotion' during each hour of the day on a scale of 1 to 9, and recorded all resolutions kept or broken.

By way of illustration one of his General Questions was: "Have I after every pleasure and every command, given thanks?" Harper records that in July 1732 Wesley felt he had failed to live up to that question alone 73 times! This was a failure-inducing system leaving Harper to argue that the unfortunate fact was 'that his devotional life centered in a futile quest of perfection based on performance. He was continually left with the feeling that he had never quite arrived.'⁵⁹⁶

However, the discipline of these years of striving were for Wesley a 'religious ideal which he never lost despite later modifications.'⁵⁹⁷ The front page of his third Oxford Diaries outline a simple pattern of life inspired by William Law.

- 1) To reflect at 9,12,5,9 by considering the day hour-by-hour.
- 2) To read questions immediately after dinner.
- 3) Last Wednesday or Friday in every month, collect diary, examine, consider, confess.
- 4) Begin examination in the evening with ejaculations: kneeling.
- 5) Every morning review the omissions of the last day.⁵⁹⁸

This pattern of producing lists of meaningful activities, and questions for discipleship and review become embedded in his pastoral practice even when he has had the 1738 evangelical conversion and 'strangely warmed' heart. Maddock notes that he 'developed greater pastoral sensitivity' particularly with regards to fasting (possibly in the light of Whitefield's near death),⁵⁹⁹ but he continues to outline means of grace for discipleship.

Whitefield was also deeply formed in the Holy Club despite his near catastrophic attempt at 'extreme ascetism' in 1735. According to Gordon, Whitefield was always 'relentlessly taking

⁵⁹⁶ Harper, *Devotional Life*, 262.

⁵⁹⁷ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 105-106.

⁵⁹⁸ Oxford diaries III, p.iii see Harper, *Devotional Life*, 262.

⁵⁹⁹ Maddock, *Wesley and Whitefield?* 201.

his spiritual temperature',⁶⁰⁰ or as Schwanda puts it 'gauging his love for Christ by his persistent activism.'⁶⁰¹ Although Schwanda notes that he 'used the language more sparingly than Wesley',⁶⁰² he continues to elaborate means of grace as a way of developing disciples. In his 'Walking with God' sermon, for example, he affirmed 'means of grace' as a way in which a person could walk with God more intimately.⁶⁰³ Seven practices are outlined (not including fasting!): ejaculatory prayers, frequent meditation, reading Scripture, observing God's providential dealings, watching the motions of the Spirit, making full use of God's ordinances and keeping Christian company.

However, there is a well noted difference between Wesley and Whitefield regarding the degree of intentionality with which they imposed or implemented these means of grace. Heard argues that, 'while Wesley's meetings included crisis conversions, his doctrine of entire sanctification, despite being controversial, gave a strong *teleological* sense to conversion.' He notes Webber's convincing assessment that 'from the outset Wesley realized the comparative futility of merely preaching to a miscellaneous crowd of people and leaving the matter there.'⁶⁰⁴ As Doughty put it 'Wesley realized that individuals needed to be befriended, shepherded, constructed and encouraged, and hence arose the societies which became the nuclei of the Methodist Church'. Snow and Machalek contrast this approach with Whitefield's who they accuse of 'being content to preach and hope for the best.'⁶⁰⁵

Whitefield ultimately affirmed 'his brother Wesley's strategy' for pursuing these means of grace more rigorously through the classes: 'My brother Wesley acted wisely. Souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruit of his labour. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.'⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁰ Gordon, *Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield*, 58.

⁶⁰¹ Schwanda, in Maddocks *Wesley and Whitefield?* 188

⁶⁰² Ibid. Schwanda offers a full discussion on Means of Grace in his very helpful chapter: "Cultivating True religion: The Nature and Dynamics of Means of Grace".

⁶⁰³ Gillies ed, works, 5:21-37

⁶⁰⁴ Doughty, 1955, 57 in Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 29.

⁶⁰⁵ Snow and Machalek, 1983, 263 in Heard, *Inside Alpha*, 29.

⁶⁰⁶ Doughty, 1955, 57.

Like Wesley, after 1738, he was clear that there is no profit in engaging in these means without the succor of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰⁷ And yet his lasting reflection then that discipleship goals could not be achieved simply by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit through a charismatic ministry without putting in place substantive means of grace by which the Holy Spirit might be at work through. Whitfield was keen to remind his listeners that spiritual practices cannot inevitably produce an experience of God. For him, the spiritual disciplines 'are means; but they are only means; they are part, but not the whole of religion.' Pointing out that the Pharisees would have been the most religious [i.e. holy] of all people if the means were automatic, he nevertheless concluded that the 'powerful operations of the Holy Spirit' enlivening the means of grace was the way to produce the 'fruit of the spirit'.⁶⁰⁸

So despite the doctrinal meanders and differences between Wesley and Whitefield examined above, both Wesley and Whitefield, from their days at the Oxford Holy Club to their final discourses, were clear that they were calling people out of one reality into another.⁶⁰⁹ Their experiences of conversion and the Holy Spirit spurred on a quest for holiness rather than sating it.

[The legacy of holiness teaching](#)

This holiness teaching has had a long history of reception and non-reception in the church. Key for the contemporary charismatic church are two things: Firstly, as seen in Chapter One, the teaching John Wesley believed 'the Methodists were raised up for' became enshrined and perhaps calcified in the Keswick Convention teaching that EM Nash of the Bash camps would point his young converts to. It became an austere and ultimately for many unattractive and unobtainable form of works based holiness. Secondly in the 'second-blessing' theology in Pentecostalism which became the antecedent of each of the 'charismatic waves' that directly impacted HTB.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 1:382

⁶⁰⁸ Gillies, ed., Works, 6.266, see also 5:138. This is developed more fully in Schwanda, op.cit.

⁶⁰⁹ see Hindmarsh, 1999, 910-929 and Heitzenrater, 1990, 49-61 for further examinations of Wesley's developing concept of his conversion, and 'changing self-interpretation'.

⁶¹⁰ Rack, 1989, 553; McGrath 193, 629 summarises this (with George Croft Cell) as a synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace and the Catholic ethic of holiness.

Rack notes that for 'later Methodism [perfectionism] was often an embarrassment', and an 'ambiguous' legacy,⁶¹¹ but the path from Wesleyan sanctification teaching to the 1870s Keswick Higher Life conference via various revivalist movements is very significant.⁶¹² Keswick tempered the teaching on entire sanctification by shifting the emphasis firstly to an empowerment for service rather than individual personal holiness, and secondly downgrading its effectiveness against sin from total eradication to a counteraction that allowed for a joyful and victorious Christian life.⁶¹³

This apparent downgrade is important for our reflections, as is the legacy of emphasis on holiness. It was often marked more by enforced abstinence from external markers deemed to be sinful (dancing, make-up, theatre, ornamentation) than by such joy and victory.⁶¹⁴ Many Anglican evangelicals touched by renewal in the 1960s onwards had lived with a legacy of this teaching on holiness and were keen to avoid anything that seemed like a return to legalism after their own personal charismatic encounters. In the interviews a key HTB insider described what he saw as a common HTB metaphor for this change, as quoted in Chapter One:

Imagine carrying a backpack called Law for many years, then taking it off, eating the heavy food inside it and finding that what had been a burden on your back sustains you when eaten inside you.⁶¹⁵

As he describes it this led HTB increasingly to believe that it was the Spirit who changed behaviour, and gradually led to less ethical teaching about specific types of prohibited behaviour:

It became clear that we saw the Holy Spirit working in people's lives to change people from the inside rather than say 'you've got to live like this'. And so, there's been a subtle shift over time where [HTB] will still say 'this is the way to

⁶¹¹ Rack, 1989, 553

⁶¹² see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 153-55, 171-74

⁶¹³ McAlpine, 2008, 28

⁶¹⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 214.

⁶¹⁵ CLD, interviews, 1.4.2015

live' but there won't be that 'stop doing this, stop doing that'. Just much more 'follow the Spirit and let Him convict you'.⁶¹⁶

But the second blessing theology of Pentecostalism evolved into an antidote to this. If it was a 'dry' version of a telos of holiness that led many at HTB to abandon conservative roots and formulaic 'means of grace' when they were impacted by charismatic renewal, it was Wesley's sanctification teaching itself that opened up the possibility of tangible impartations of God's power in a second blessing, which in turn was a contributory factor to each of the 'waves' of charismatic renewal already described. Writers from Donald Dayton describing the emergence of 'the baptism of the Spirit' in Pentecostalism to contemporary charismatic 'historians' like Eddie Hyatt make the connections.⁶¹⁷ Hyatt maintains that 'Wesley's chief contribution to succeeding generations was his emphasis on an experience that Christians should seek subsequent to the new birth experience.'⁶¹⁸ Note the journey from the costly language of perfectionism ('being done with sin') to Baptism in the Spirit (where baptism represents 'dying to one life and rising to another'), to an experience that does not necessarily require any price at all.

Wesley's experiential theology left him expectant and longing for more and greater works of God in his life. The impact of this on Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement makes Wesley an important conversation partner in any analysis of charismatic renewal today, but the downgrading of his terminology with each subsequent 'wave of the Spirit' diluted his ideals. For some it has continued to be life-changing, for others just another in a medley of post-modern experiences. But, for John Collins, who kept a bust of John Wesley on his desk alongside that of George Whitefield, his 1963 post-conversion experience described in Chapter Two, as he waited to speak at Tyndale Hall to ordinands in Cambridge, was life-defining. His Wesleyan moment left him truly believing that he was 'done with sin'.⁶¹⁹ Speaking of holiness, in a chapter entitled 'A Vision for Life', he asks: 'Is it possible to live a

⁶¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ For further details see, Donald W Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Grand Rapids, 1987; Donald W Dayton, 'The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: its emergence and significance' in *Wesley Theological Journal*, Vol. 13, Spring 1978, pp. 114-126.

⁶¹⁸ Eddie L. Hyatt *2000 years of Charismatic Christianity*, Charisma House, Florida, 2002, 104-105.

⁶¹⁹ see further John Collins *A Diagram of God's Love*, 2013, 35-70

holy life, a useful life, pleasing to God? Yes, it is. It will not be easy; nonetheless it is possible.⁶²⁰ His vision echoed that of Wesley and Whitefield remarkably, calling a holy people to a full surrender to a holy God. Could this be a lost 'normative theology for HTB' as its operant and espoused theology have focused elsewhere?

Conclusion

This historical perspective invites us to consider the differences between the theological voices evident in Wesley and Whitefield and those of the HTB network. In particular questions have been raised by holding up this historical mirror regarding the place of 'lived out holiness' teaching and the need for 'means of grace', whether Sin (and hell) is a fundamental problem we need resucing from, whether focusing on felt-needs now truncates theology cutting out both 'fall' and 'eschatology', whether the motivation for ministry is human flourishing or 'the glory of God' and whether the 'born again' experience of the eighteenth-century is in fact a more demanding conversion (involving dying to self/the cross) than simply beginning a 'relationship with Jesus' through an encounter with the Spirit. It is noteworthy that there is a much more profound continuity of discipleship goals between the eighteenth-century revivalists and the twentieth-century evangelicals outlined in Chapter One (Nash/Stott/Collins), and even between the eighteenth-century revivalists and the 1980s HTB/Vineyard churches under John Collins and John Wimber in Chapter Two, than between the eighteenth-century revivalists and the mid-1990s to twenty-first century HTB network as described in Chapters Three and Four. Seen with the advantage of this historical interlocuter the shift in discipleship goals and praxis in the network is highly evident, as is the sense of theological distance from Wesley and Whitefield and a historic evangelicalism that Collins et al would have assumed to be a key part of their normative theological inheritance as Anglican Evangelicals filled with the Spirit.

CHAPTER SIX: SYNTHESIS

⁶²⁰ Collins, *Diagram*, 201

Bridging the Eras? Issues so far.

A key integrative voice emerging from this thesis is that of John Collins (1925-2022).

Nurtured in a deep prayerbook tradition, home-schooled by his 'last of the Victorian vicars' father,⁶²¹ converted and disciplined through the Iwerne tradition, inspired by Whitefield and Wesley, mentored by John Stott and impacted by each 'wave of the Holy Spirit' described above, he remained a loyal enthusiast and advocate for all of those he has worked with, from All Souls to HTB, John Stott to Nicky Gumbel. An instinctive loyalist, but with a passion for truth, John Collins created a culture of loyalty in each church setting he worked in and was hurt if that loyalty was ever broken. Part of his legacy at HTB was 'ecclesial leadership as friendship',⁶²² where leaders of unusual talent serve and support each other, as exemplified by his humble job swap with the rising star, once in a generation talent, that is Sandy Millar, but is also lived out in many other people's lives at the core of the staff team and culture.⁶²³

While that legacy clearly lives on, the question posed at the end of the last chapter is whether the theological part of Collins' legacy has begun to be lost? Whereas Collins integrated the insights he discovered in 1960s renewal, Wimber and even TTB onto the 'solid rock' of biblical theology that he imbibed from Stott, and was careful to articulate and live out all of this, the argument has been that in later years a gap has emerged in the HTB network between what might still be presumed to be the normative theology and the publicly espoused and clearly discernible operant theologies. This gap has often been subconscious and therefore unwitting and unrealised. Where that gap has been named in my dialogues within the network, it has usually been immediately recognised, and has often either come as a surprise or has helped to put into words an unease felt by many in the network regarding theological drift.

⁶²¹ John Collins, Interview. 6 November, 2017.. His Cornish father was 50 when his youngest John was born. He home-schooled him in classics, theology and music each morning before taking him on pastoral rounds later in the day. John was later sent to Haileybury School.

⁶²² Cf Lynch, 2022;

⁶²³ see also France-Williams assessment of the operant values at HTB as 'loyalty, love and hard work' France-Williams, *Ghostship*, 167, although these are officially described as 'audacity, unity, generosity, humility, tenacity'. <https://www.htb.org/our-story> [accessed 25.1.21]. Loyalty is both implied and expected within the staff culture. The challenge I heard regularly in interviews is when there was a gap between loyalty being inspired and simply expected.

To explore this emerging gap and articulate the reasons behind it the thesis has plotted the evangelical heritage of HTB, the three major waves of the Spirit that to increasing extents disrupted that and considered how maintaining success whilst also in the limelight has impacted theology. An account has been developed of a network that has a high value on facilitating encounters with the Spirit and has propagated that both through the experiential focused Alpha course and charismatic worship services which continue to prize 'intimacy' in worship. It has shown how the felt need to achieve and maintain success creates pressure on church leaders. This can be seen through espoused theology orientated towards 'consumer' needs, and operant practices that eschew controversy. It has showed how this can lead to a tendency to focus on 'a life worth living now' rather than explore the whole framework of Christian faith. A radical comparison was then made in Chapter Five between the HTB network and another revivalist movement at the beginning of Evangelical Anglicanism. This additionally highlighted the pursuit of holiness as a fundamental discipleship goal for Wesley and Whitefield and their longer theological timeframe (spanning from creation/fall to judgement/eternity) which meant that their orientated more towards what a holy God might deserve or require than satisfying individuals felt needs. This was summed up as discipleship goal of a 'holy people for a holy God'.

Key questions that emerge from this study relate to success culture and a corresponding tendency to institutionalisation, the impact of emphasising 'life in the Spirit' and a corresponding deemphasis of other historical evangelical norms, and crucially, whether it would be helpful for the network to rediscover a normative theology that it could aim to articulate and live by.

[Thesis overview](#)

The opening chapter deliberately took the story back past the explosive growth of HTB in the 1980s to its deeper origins in evangelical Anglicanism typified by All Souls Langham Place, the Eclectics and the Iwerne movement. It established that the differences between the churches pre-Wimber were mainly stylistic rather than theological, despite the young charismatics emerging at HTB around Sandy Millar. There was still a substantive crossover

between the two types of churches and young men like Nicky Gumbel were attending the Iwerne camps and being mentored by the likes of Jonathan Fletcher.

It then proceeded to show that while the 1960s/1970s 'wave of the Spirit' was containable within that wineskin, the Wimber wave was more of a tsunami sweeping away many of the old conceptions of church and indeed loyalties. Wimber was shown to be a thoroughly orthodox disruptor; orthodox in terms of his values and core theology, but a disruptor in terms of his emphasis on Kingdom Theology exemplified in 'power evangelism' and healing theology with its praxis of releasing ordinary people to 'do the stuff' (miracles) that Jesus did. This was a seismic shift in the tectonic plates underlying the Anglican Evangelical establishment. As was seen in the response from Philip Jensen in Sydney Diocese conservative evangelicalism could no longer contain this 'loaded gun', and a separation ensued.

Combined with this theological shakeup, which was also resisted by many central and liberal voices as summarised later by Martyn Percy in his doctorate thesis, came a change in liturgical praxis that arguably had the most profound long-term impact on HTB of all. The worship-teaching-ministry format gradually, and then entirely, replaced existing service structures. Into the liturgical bomb-fire went the Book of Common Prayer, three Scripture reading, collects, confessions, absolutions etc. Even the Alternative Service Book (1980), which had few admirers anyway, did not last long as the new and immediate was prioritised over the old. Common Worship when instigated in 2000 introduced a 'service of the word' which required little more than an opening, ending and some scripture and preaching. What was left was a grouping together of choruses, initially aimed at achieving 'intimacy' with God, a sole passage read and then expanded on at length interspersed with encouraging stories and examples of change in needy lives. This was climaxed with 'ministry time' where the lessons of the head were brought to a heart level through the laying on of hands for wholeness and healing. For those with a deep grounding in Anglican Evangelicalism this was often an experiential liberation on top of firm foundations. For those without those foundations in subsequent generations the experiential liberation was all there was.

The thesis showed how that transformation happened faster in the Vineyard churches in the USA. Whilst HTB remained to a certain degree anchored in Anglican Evangelical tradition, Vineyard was a new collective of Christians with less clear normative theological heritage to draw on. At HTB this was evident in e.g. a Book of Common Prayer communion service that persisted throughout Sandy Millar's time as Vicar, and ordinands being made to study at approved Anglican Colleges where staff were often keen on re-educating charismatics who seemed too adrift from their heritage. Yet this anchor is now less evident in the network. Liturgically, few church plants have any substantive engagement with historic Anglican liturgy and the arrival of context-based learning at St Mellitus College in 2007 meant ordinands could continue in their HTB network sending church, through college, into curacy and even a staff position. It also removed them from interactions with students from a conservative evangelical background who rarely attended St Mellitus, preferring residential training routes, and instead mixed them with a much broader cohort of centrist/liberal Anglicans who also preferred studying locally. Without a clear evangelical heritage, the college appointed a wide range of tutors, including an influential New Testament lead who described himself as a 'hopevist' i.e. someone who hoped that universalism was true,⁶²⁴ a position echoed in a few of the semi-structured interviews conducted.

The rise of St Mellitus was the culmination of a number of pragmatic decisions within HTB some of which owe much to Wimber. The Vineyard was keen on training their own leaders, so St Mellitus fit with that. Vineyard did its 'pastors conferences' in style. Alpha bought in to that. Vineyard was keen to not be boxed into a single location. Church planting helped with that. But other pragmatic decisions were culturally British. HTB under Collins and Millar managed to build a reputation of being alongside the Diocesan hierarchies and had a natural affinity with power. Gradually the hierarchies were won over which accelerated Church Planting opportunities and eventually led to the appointment of Ric Thorpe as a 'Bishop for Church Planting' and left them well placed to seize all the opportunities that emerged from former HTB member and advocate Justin Welby becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013.

⁶²⁴ Chris Tilling *Universalism - a brief note on my position* (5 August, 2006) <http://blog.christilling.de/search?q=universalist> [accessed 21 March, 2019].

Wimber's visits created the conditions for the growth of first HTB and then Alpha on a national and then international stage. Hosting Wimber raised HTB's profile a church of national significance beyond its own denomination. Then Alpha's explosion was fuelled by the expectation created in late 1980s of a 'coming world revival'. This was prophesied by those close to Wimber and 'validated' by Wimber, Millar and many other key leaders. When this failed to materialise as expected the stage was set for the mid-1990s Toronto Blessing [TTB] where much of that hype and expectation resurfaced. TTB originated in the Airport Vineyard church in Toronto and reached HTB through Vineyard leader Elie Mumford.⁶²⁵ It needed a mechanism for release and the launch of Alpha as a national course with an emphasis on being filled with the Spirit coincided with that. Sometimes described as an 'outpouring of the Father's heart', TTB had a number of side effects associated with consciously receiving that experience of love. One was a general increase in doing good deeds through social action to bless others. A second consequence of prioritising that experience was a less conscious reorientation of the gospel towards meeting felt-needs. We saw how Luhrmann mapped the change that occurred in Vineyard churches after TTB from missional to therapeutic communities, and noted in the research findings a similar tendency more slowly emerging at HTB.

An overlapping feature explored was the church growth movement. While Sandy Millar liked to steer the church as close to Wimber's values as possible, particularly in aiming for 'intimacy' in worship, others were keen to import further praxis from the USA and exploring the Seeker Sensitive and Purpose Driven methodologies that had helped develop several megachurches in the States. There was a rise in managerialism, efficiencies and product protection.

Chapter Three explored the side-effects of that success. It showed how a fear of failure could be a motivator and the potential that a success-orientated church has to distort truth if that truth it is not palatable or marketable. This harked back to the snapshot survey of teaching at the end of Chapter One that compared All Souls Langham Place and HTB in the

⁶²⁵ See Atherstone, *Repackaging Christianity*, 49-56 for further details.

pandemic and concluded that by 2020 they were preaching very different things in a very different manner. The interview process outlined in Chapters Three and Four evidenced that impact. In particular, the well-used phrase of Sandy Millar's that we do not intend to 'change the message but the method' proved to belie underlying consequences. The method change was responsive to 'market forces' and so changes to liturgy and training style, preaching the positives and focusing on the felt-need of an application for me right now, among other factors accrued over time into a drastically altered espoused theology. This espoused theology in turn impacted operant behaviours and created a further divorce from the assumed normative theologies of the classic evangelical generation. Furthermore, because the established training routes had now been deferred to an Anglican medley of liberal, centrist, catholic and open evangelical tutors within a broadly charismatic framework, there was no clear way to reinforce the normative theologies during theological education and so for much of the network they began to die away. That in turn sparked a widening array of espoused theologies, between those who embraced this and those who reacted against it. The embracers, like the one in the sketch at the beginning of Chapter Three, saw themselves as liberated to preach a gospel of love, the reactionaries began to wonder what had happened to earlier categories of sin and repentance in their teaching and began to reinstate that. As cultural crises hit the church around human sexuality they began to see that they might not all fall on the same side of the argument and became further paralysed as a network in articulating anything discordant with the majority cultural consensus, to protect their brand (Alpha), their unity, and their Archbishop.

In practical theology insight is often gained by the interaction with another discipline. In Chapter Five the discipline utilised was Church History. By investigating the shared theologies and praxis of two normative practitioners from the beginning of the Evangelical movement it was possible to hold up a mirror to the twenty-first century HTB network. John Wesley and George Whitefield, despite their well-known differences, were seen to have a common focus on producing a holy people for a holy God, through 'means of grace' including conversion, scripture training and spiritual disciplines. Their theological schemes ran from original sin to eternal consequences. For all the similarities noted with the HTB network such as harnessing the technology of the day, the theological gap between their shared convictions and those emerging in the research were substantial. Whereas Nash

would pray for 'another Wesley', Collins had busts of Whitefield and Wesley on his desk and Gumbel would quote them both as examples of revival, the espoused HTB model of 'preaching the positives' and a 'life worth living' right now meant that much of the HTB teaching emerging had little in common with those revivalists' priorities.

Towards a rediscovered Normative Theology: Questions emerging:

Three key questions for the network emerge from this research.

- 1) What might be an appropriate normative theology or theologies for the network to use as a 'plumbline' by which to evaluate its current operant and espoused theologies? For example, is there merit in HTB as a network still seeing itself as inheritors of the Evangelical Tradition, in line with Bebbington's 'biblical, crucicentric, activist, and conversionist' framework or has it already moved away from this framework?
- 2) Is there a limitation to a theology-model-practice that suggests the key discipleship goal is an experience of the Spirit, and considering questions already raised in this thesis, is the network satisfied that the 'experience of the Spirit' on offer is fully presented as the 'Holy Spirit' and has not been domesticated for a consumer audience.
- 3) How does HTB avoid an institutionalisation whereby the need to maintain the success of the brand prevents both innovation and a prophetic call to deeper discipleship, even if that might upset consumers and funders?

Evangelical: Reclaiming the Quadrilateral

Under both Millar and Gumbel HTB moved away from the descriptor 'evangelical'. Six reasons for this are worth rehearsing:

Firstly, there was a reaction against tightly defined evangelical legalism that many had experienced in Iwerne. We have seen how even Stott reacted against this in the 1970s, and that many those who were filled with the Spirit felt that they had been liberated from a 'rucksack' filled with heavy rules.

Secondly, an annoyance with criticism. Whilst much of the 1960s and 70s renewal movement could be contained within broader Evangelical Anglican circles like Eclectics, Wimber posed more of a substantive threat and was criticised acutely as we have seen by some like Philip Jensen. Whilst some of Collins' generation who had a deep prior commitment to both the evangelical system and some of the key voices within it, a new generation who related to Wimber far more than Stott. They felt liberated by Wimber to 'do the stuff' and had no intention of being kept in an evangelical box.

Thirdly, a desire for ecumenism. The moves of the Spirit in the 1960s and 80s both had an ecumenical dimension and it became easier to identify with those who shared 'choruses, conferences and courses' than those who may have had more fundamental normative theology in common.

Fourthly, adoption of market-oriented terminology. Where possible Alpha products and network churches have used language designed to make it accessible to those that they are trying to attract, i.e. seekers currently outside the church. Hence any ecclesial language is avoided.

Fifthly, expansion of Alpha. Alpha quickly bridged church 'streams' and denominations well beyond the evangelical constituency and wanted to be as inclusive as possible for its expanding market.

Sixthly, avoidance of controversy. Both nationally and internationally evangelicalism is often known for what it is against as much as what it is for. As seen in Chapter Three Gumbel and Millar have been studious to protect HTB and Alpha from ethical and other arguments that might harm the brand.

There is also a more fundamental question as to the degree to which the HTB network currently meets Bebbington's definition of evangelical. As noted in the introduction even scholars less comfortable with Bebbington's definition have 'tended to defer to it', but it can be critiqued, among other things, for understating revivalism (which may be seen in activism), sinfulness (which is implied in conversionist), and the sovereignty of God. John Maiden has made the case at a symposium to honour Bebbington that 'Pneumatism' could be a (missing) fifth characteristic of the Quadrilateral.⁶²⁶ He sees this as particularly evident in the post-1945 era and in the Global South. In Maiden's understanding Pneumatism can be defined as an 'emphasis on the Spirit's post-conversion work and empowering presence, and the reality of a supernatural 'alive world.' He draws on Bruce Hindmarsh to suggest that this dynamic was present in the eighteenth century as well and thus deserves greater emphasis.

Pneumatism is certainly very evident in the HTB methodology as will be explored in the next section. But what is less evident is how the network's operant and espoused theology fits with three of the other four characteristics of the quadrilateral. It is certainly activist as can be seen both in the interviews and in the more historical chapters above, and 'revivalist' can be seen as a subset of 'activist'. But there are issues to consider as to whether it is still 'biblicist', 'conversionist' and 'crucicentric'. And if it is not the question for the network is whether these may be heritages worth rediscovering.

With regards to 'biblicist' a church network that has inspired 3 million people to download a daily bible app might be assumed to take the Scripture very seriously. Indeed, any attempt at a summary of almost any member of the network's normative theology would include a very high regard for Scripture. But we have seen the positivity prism through which the BIOY commentary is filtered, sermon series that seem to pick and choose scripture to fit the message, and a theological college whose self-descriptor does not include reference to the Bible.⁶²⁷ Some of those interviewed were evidently deeply grounded in person bible

⁶²⁶ See John Maiden, *Quadrilaterals in Waco: reflections on the 'Evangelicals and the Bible' symposium* <https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=944> [accessed 12..12.23]. See also John Maiden, *Age of the Spirit*, 234 and Timothy Larsen, 'Defining and locating evangelicalism' in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to evangelical theology* (Cambridge: CUP 2012), 1-13.

⁶²⁷ <https://www.stmellitus.ac.uk/about-us> [accessed 10 June, 2021].

reading, some saw a key part of their responsibility as teaching the whole counsel of God. But others clearly saw facilitating an encounter with the Spirit as the crux of their ministry, and it was interesting to see how learning communication skills from a prosperity teacher like Joel Osteen might be prized over deeper biblical study. Whereas in Chapter Five we saw Outler's claim that 'Scripture would be [Wesley's] court of first and last resort in faith and morals', it is questionable if this remains true throughout the HTB network.

However, there are encouragements. Not least is Pete Hughes' book, which is a grounded adventure through Scripture urging readers to 'feed on this daily bread' and then 'speak and perform with consistency and innovation' at a time of 'deep spiritual longing'.⁶²⁸ It is a call to find a way to deeply engage with and articulate the age old story to a people who do not know it but are 'desperately looking for an alternative story.'⁶²⁹ Pete remains a sought after speaker across the network despite co-founding his own rival conference to both HTB Focus and New Wine. 'Wildfires' is a conference where some of his generational key leaders have found opportunity to share their passion for revival 'wildfires' unencumbered by the agendas of the larger organisations.

A similar question applies to 'crucicentric'. It is not at all apparent that the cross is at the centre of the Christian faith within the network. I am much more persuaded that the epicentre of faith has become pneumatological encounters, exemplified by the simple prayer 'Come, Holy Spirit.' This is repeated in every worship service, often numerous times, and a strong argument can be made from structure and experience that it is the core of the Alpha Course as well. As Millar put it, 'many people date their conversion from their experience with the Spirit on the Alpha Course. However much we tell them it's from when they prayed the prayer for Jesus to come into their life, it's the experience they have on the Holy Spirit Day or Weekend that they always refer to.'⁶³⁰ Whilst the course is fully Trinitarian the process holds participants on an emotional journey towards an encounter with the Spirit on that weekend. The cross is taught, and clearly, but it is not by any means a climatic centre of the course.

⁶²⁸ Hughes. *All Things New*, 324-27

⁶²⁹ Ibid. 325

⁶³⁰ Millar, Interview, 10 October, 2019.

Finally, 'conversionist'. Without having explored Wesley and Whitefield in the previous chapter I might be derided for questioning if the HTB network are conversionist. If 'recruitment-ist' was substituted for 'conversionist' there could be no argument. One of the key aims of the network is to expand. A key goal for someone going on Alpha is get them to bring their friends to the next event and for them to integrate into the church family. It is highly 'recruitmentist'. But is it conversionist? Wesley and Whitefield had varying definitions of conversion but one common thread was that it drove them on in pursuit of holiness.⁶³¹ A key question in understanding conversion is 'from what, to what'.⁶³² If, as in Chapter Five, Stout and Dein are correct that Alpha's methodology is 'embodying the Holy Spirit and developing a personal relationship with Christ', is that an add on, or a conversion from something? Can it be equated with Whitefield's preaching of the 'New Birth'. Does it demand like Wesley and Whitefield both did 'victory over the dominion and power of sin, and the pursuit of inward and outward holiness'?⁶³³ In other words, is becoming a 'friend of Jesus' through a warm 'encounter with the Spirit' a conversion in the historical sense of the word, or still a wonderful and positive, but less secure and potentially less lasting, experience that will need much deeper grounding (and repentance) before it is a real conversion? If it is the later, it may explain the drop off rates network churches talk about among Alpha graduates. When a relationship with Jesus has been tried and found difficult someone who has 'tasted the Spirit' but not been truly converted may still walk away.

Whether due to 'marketing the message' or prioritising a 'dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit'; 'preaching the positives' or 'reducing barriers to entry to Alpha'; a rejection of the 'excesses of the past', or the 'need to succeed', or a variety of other factors discussed above the HTB network's espoused and operant theologies have certainly moved markedly away from their evangelical roots. This has happened roughly in sync with their conscious rejection of the label evangelical in a largely unexamined and unreflective way. The advantage of a formal theological investigation like this is to gain perspective to map this

⁶³¹ see Hindmarsh (1999) 910-929 and Heitzenrater, 1990, 49-61 for further examinations of Wesley's developing concept of his conversion, and 'changing self-interpretation'.

⁶³² See Stout & Dein (2013) *Alpha and evangelical conversion*.

⁶³³ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 241.

out clearly, and even the act of doing the research as an insider-outsider has already impacted some within the network, at the very least enhancing reflexivity and sometimes provoking a recovery of confidence in a historical faith. One hope would be that to holding up this mirror to the network helps many have a recovery of confidence in their roots. A network leader reading this analysis might want to reaffirm their place within the evangelicalism outlined in Bebbington's quadrilateral. They might want to (re)explore their foundations in Stott's theology, or Wimber's, or even to draw deeper from the wells of the Evangelical Revival and think how to proclaim that message afresh for a new generation. There are normative theologies available to the network. Rediscovering them will be crucial in developing discipleship goals beyond a 'life worth living' now and in creating a new normative theology for now.

Charismatic: Life in the Spirit

It is impossible to separate the growth of HTB and Alpha from the waves of the Spirit explored in this thesis. The key question however is whether there is a limitation to a theology-model-practice that suggests the key discipleship goal is an experience of the Spirit? The follow on question is whether the 'experience of the Spirit' on offer is fully presented as the 'Holy Spirit' and has not been domesticated for a consumer audience.

This goes to the heart of unpicking what might be good, bad and indifferent about the Wimber-TTB years for HTB. However impactful Wimber's ministry or TTB may have been to members of the network personally and however much explanatory power each may have for the growth of the network there remain well-rehearsed theological concerns about each of these waves. While these concerns have often been articulated most clearly by what can seem like hostile outsiders, nevertheless, there has been sufficient evidence accumulated in Chapters Two and Four to show that the ongoing fruit of each of these waves has not been universally positive and needs reflection on. There is substantive evidence presented, for example, of a shift in Wimber's own Vineyard churches from a very dynamic body with a high buy in and deep discipleship, to a passive community, described by Wimber himself as 'an audience' indulging in a therapeutic model of church.

Is it possible that these experiences of the Spirit have become a spiritual commodity that we as charismatics hawk or sell? Is there enough evidence of what Wesley called the 'regeneration through the Spirit by which we may be *properly said to live*.'⁶³⁴ *Alpha News* and various editions of *The God Who Changes Lives* have of course been filled for years with good news stories where this has clearly been the case, but is enough credence given to the need for conversion that 'entails victory over the dominion and power of sin?'⁶³⁵ or is the encounter with the Spirit commonly on offer disassociated from a conviction of sin and corresponding drive towards a holiness that matches the 'Holy' Spirit's name? Nevertheless, attention needs to be paid as well to how the charismatic movement has been a dynamic force for rejuvenation within the contemporary church. It would be inconceivable to write a new normative theology for HTB without referring to life in the Spirit. That is why in addition to the evangelical foundation inherited from Wesley and Whitefield et al, through the likes of John Stott there is a supplementary charismatic 'good soil' that owes much to Collins, Wimber and Millar for effectively stewarding. So, the second key to a new normative theology for HTB network is not simply 'old treasures' but distilling what is good in the new.

Positive and Self-propagating

Our third question introduces another part of the scaffolding for a HTB normative theology. It is the question of how it might avoid an institutionalisation whereby the need to maintain the success of the brand prevents both innovation and a prophetic call to deeper discipleship, even if that might upset consumers and funders. This very question however also highlights its success and may provide part of the answer. Success has become so integral to HTB that it could be considered to be part of its normative theology, with one its deep held truths being 'healthy things grow'. Seen positively this is a counterpoint to some of what I have already said. Two quotes illustrate this:

The one disadvantage of working at HTB is you get the impression that God owes you a full church... we're not called to succeed we're called to be faithful, but

⁶³⁴ *Sermons* 2:234

⁶³⁵ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 241

Wimber used to say 'If you're going fishing, you're wise to go where there are fish.

[Sandy Millar]

Pruning can seem cruel; branches are left jagged and exposed to face the harsh winter. But the purpose of pruning is to give way to newness of life. When spring and summer come, there is an abundance of fruit. The sharp pruning knife will, in the end, bring fruitfulness and blessing. [Nicky Gumbel, BIOY]

Against all the cultural norms and ecclesiastical expectations HTB has produced a movement in the past 40 years that has had a fundamental theological expectation of success and numerical fruitfulness. It is worth pausing to credit the hundreds and thousands of staff and tens of thousands of volunteers who have helped grow and sustain the HTB network. HTB, the HTB Network Churches, Alpha International, Churches Revitalisation Trust, Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication, Worship Central and St Mellitus College are broadly speaking a well-oiled machine that have come a long way since the 'fat man trying to get to heaven' visited in 1981.

Nevertheless, an expectation of ongoing success may produce unrealistic burdens if the leadership do not allow for pruning seasons. The journey within organisations towards 'institutional calcification' has been explained by various voices as the journey from Man-Movement-Machine-Monument,⁶³⁶ Heard suggested in 2012 that 'whether Alpha continues to grow depends upon its willingness to embrace risk, creativity and innovation' suggesting that a thorough revision of the course would be necessary.⁶³⁷ The Alpha Film Series has perhaps mitigated, at least for the moment, a need for a thorough revision to tune the course's concerns to those of a generation 30 years on from when the course was first adjusted by Gumbel. But what might the next generation of leaders need to do with the HTB

⁶³⁶ See Joseph Hellerman, *Why We Need the Church to Become More Like Jesus: Reflections about Community, Spiritual Formation, and the Story of Scripture*. (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017), 51; also John Feister and Richard Rohr, *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety*. United States: (Franciscan Media, 2002), and also attributed to Vance Hanver e.g. by Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary Vol. 2*. (United States: David C. Cook, 1989). 576.

⁶³⁷ Heard *Inside Alpha*, 235.

network and associated churches and charities as Gumbel retires? Is it possible not to sacrifice future success by wasting energy defending yesteryear's vision?

Whether the movement is worth self-propagating may depend on whether it can reform a normative theology. But while merely 'preaching the positives' carries with it a grave theological danger to the wider church's health, there is a 'gift to the church' in optimistic hope that the Kingdom will come, churches will be planted and new people will find a relationship with Jesus that oftentimes eclipses the shadow side of success. A movement that has a vision for 'evangelisation of the nation, revitalisation of the church and transformation of society' shows rare ambition and hope within a national church whose own mantra 'simpler, humbler, bolder' sounds like an acknowledgment of inevitable decline. Their values of 'audacity, unity, generosity, humility, tenacity' speak of an optimistic future and realisable hope. Hence HTB both brings and is itself a gift to the wider church. In a time of substantive gloom it remains worth integrating their general optimism about potential Kingdom growth into an enduring normative theology. It is an optimism that echoes Wesley, Whitefield, Nash, Stott and Wimber and comes partly from experience of success.

Further Research

One of the advantages of this piece of research has been the level of access afforded by being an insider-outsider to the network. Since I have begun to share findings other ministers from both conservative and liberal Anglican backgrounds, and free-church charismatic have expressed an interest in seeing a similar piece of 'critical-friend ethnography' conducted in their sections of the church. The four voices project from ARCS seems to have an impressive explanatory power in differentiating between what we claim to believe, say we believe and how we act. This seems a good basis for further 'formal' theology to pursue, particularly in a post-modern era when truth can seem relative or vary with context.

There is definitely further work that can be done pursuing the impact of success culture on church leaders and church planters. Particularly in denominations where large amounts of funding have gone into creating new churches a regular qualitative analysis of impact on

church leaders' wellbeing and theology should accompany that of quantitative assessments of work. Does it hold true that 'whoever pays the piper calls the tune?' or are planters able to offset those voices with their prior theological commitments?

A longer-term project would be to assess the impact of restating older evangelical norms, including holiness teaching, in a context that might be considered to have gone a therapeutic self-help route. A case study approach over several years investigating the impact of a ministers either i) beginning to teach on these themes in their existing context, or ii) bringing them to a context new to them could be highly illuminating. There are signs within the wider charismatic networks that the 'pendulum' may be beginning to shift that way again, notably at the most recent New Wine Leadership Conference when plenary speaker John McGingley put out an unashamed call for holiness.⁶³⁸ This may be an early sign of a split in charismatic Anglican circles between those who continue to emphasise immediacy and experience in the most positive of terms and those who refocus on 'means of grace' and discipleship, calling people to a more challenging faith. Some interesting ethnographic studies could be devised within the New Wine churches, for example, to monitor this.

Conclusion

The HTB network remains one of the most dynamic and exciting movements within the UK church over the past 50 years. It has deep heritages in evangelicalism, Scripture and has been the beneficiary of three twentieth-century waves of the Holy Spirit. While these waves have rocked the evangelical boat at times and left it in danger of being without anchor, there are strong indications that its heritage will not be cast aside on an altar of simply perpetuating success or consumerism.

However, it is hard not to turn a movement into a monument and radical leadership will be needed for those just beginning to take on the reins of the HTB network from the ever-present benign oversight of patrician Sandy Millar and growth driver Nicky Gumbel. It may be that the most radical step of all will be to ensure that where they have come from is not

⁶³⁸ See Richard Moy "*Meetings of Significance: The Lion Roars*", (3 March, 2023) <https://yournameislikehoney.com/2023/03/03/meetings-of-significance/>

lost as they pursue where they are going and to ensure that future discipleship goals set by the network are worthy of that heritage.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Discipleship in the 21st Century: Seminar Questionnaire

Disclaimer: This Questionnaire may be used as part of my doctoral thesis accredited by Durham University. It explores the social and theological links and differences between the HTB/Alpha network and the Methodist Revival in the 18th Century. In filling in this form you are agreeing to your answers being analysed as part of this work. If you would like further information on this please tick the box at the bottom of the form and add in your email address.

A) In terms of making disciples in your church how significant is: (where 10 is highest)

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| e) seeing the Kingdom come on earth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| f) fleeing the wrath to come / escaping hell | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| g) preparing people for heaven / eternity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| h) enabling life in all its fullness now | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

B) In your perception of the church you lead/go to over the past year ...

1. how often has **hell** featured in a **sermon**:
 - a) never
 - b) 1-2 times
 - c) 3-5 times
 - d) 5-10 times
 - e) 10-20 times
 - f) 20+ times
2. how often has **heaven** featured in a **sermon**
 - a. Never
 - b. 1-2 times
 - c. 3-5 times
 - d. 5-10 times
 - e. 10-20 times
 - f. 20+ times
3. what percentage of **worship songs** have mentioned **hell/judgement**?
 - a. 0-1%
 - b. 2-4%
 - c. 5-9%
 - d. 10-20%
 - e. 21-30%
 - f. 30+%
4. What percentage of **worship songs** have mentioned **heaven**?
 - a. 0-1%
 - b. 2-4%
 - c. 5-9%
 - d. 10-20%
 - e. 21-30%
 - f. 30+%

C) Why would an Alpha graduate come to your church? (scale 1-10 where 10 is the highest motive)

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| g. For personal healing (emotional/physical)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| h. For meaningful community? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| i. For inspiring teaching? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| j. To encounter God in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

- k. To be prepared for eternity? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 l. To be equipped for life & evangelism? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

D) Complete the sentence in 50 words or less:
 If someone came to our church for five years I would like them to....

E) Complete the sentence in 50 words or less:
 When someone in our church is on their deathbed I would like them to...

Name:

Church:

Leadership Position:

Email address / contact details if you'd like further information.

Appendix Two: Semi-Structured Interviews (First Stage)⁶³⁹

1. Can you briefly summarise the story of the first seven years of the church plant?

- a) what were your highlights
- b) what were your low lights?

2.. How might those on your staff team describe your main gifts for ministry?

(a) Are these different to when you began the plant?

3. What were the main factors that caused you to start the church plant?

- a) circumstantial opportunities – push/pull factors (e.g. invitation / encouragement, missional need)...
- b) personal motivations

4. Who or what kept you going in the initial stages?

5. What did / do you most want to see happen through the church plant in terms of: a) vision for individuals; b) vision for the surrounding community?

6. Who or what do you turn to for inspiration? – in terms of models of ministry, bible resources etc...

7. How would you define success in church planting?

- a) To what extent has success galvanised your work?
- b) When (if) you have had to how do you cope with failure?

8. If you had the chance to rewind the clock and begin again would you?

9. If so what would you do differently?

⁶³⁹ The questions used in the first round of questions with the initial six interviewees.

Semi-Structured Interviews (Second Stage)⁶⁴⁰

1. Can you briefly summarise the story of your church plant so far?
what were your highlights; what were your low lights?
2. Who or what kept you going in the initial stages?
3. What did / do you most want to see happen in terms of: a) vision for individuals; b) vision for the surrounding community?
4. Who or what do you turn to for inspiration? – in terms of models of ministry, bible resources etc...
5. How would you define success in church planting?
 - a) To what extent has success galvanised your work?
 - b) When (if) you have had to how do you cope with failure?
6. Complete the sentence:
 - a) If someone came to your church for five years I would like them to....
7. Complete the sentence:
 - a) When someone in our church is on their deathbed I would like them to...
8. How are you shaping your ministry to achieve that?
9. In a previous survey of HTB network staff/clergy I found that teaching on 'life in all its fullness' or 'kingdom come' was far more common than on eternity: Why do you think we are speaking less about heaven/hell?
10. What do you think we lose by not speaking about hell? Is this a pragmatic or a theological decision for you?
11. And finally: How do you understand sin, and how do you understand grace?

[Questions 6-11 would also be the supplementary questions for the original 2015 interviews].

⁶⁴⁰ The questions used with the additional 14 interviewees and the three Vicars of HTB. Questions 6-11 were also used as supplementary questions in follow on interviews with the original six church leaders.

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