
Introduction

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT persuasion. I am concerned with the use of rhetorical devices, both verbal and performative, to convince religious adherents in contemporary charismatic churches of the leader's ability to reify the power of God in the form of miracles and divine provision.

It is also about the globalization of culture. Globalization is a worldwide phenomenon; distinctive cultures around the globe are increasingly interacting with the vast increase of communication in recent decades. However, the most significant manifestation of this has been Americanization, the globalization of American cultural ideas around the world. This has been greatly aided by the vast influence of the Internet, Microsoft, Apple, and satellite and cable television. American influence on worldwide Christianity is an example of this and has affected cultures significantly more resistant than English culture.¹ However, this book specifically notes the importing of American cultural ideas into the UK.

Most significantly, this book is about North American pragmatism. Many people think of pragmatism as being a British attitude, and indeed pragmatism and the closely allied commonsense philosophy have European origins.² However, pragmatism is, as I will argue throughout this book, a distinctively American philosophy and, although pragmatists have always been identifiable in British culture, British theology, on the whole, has been more influenced by the European skepticism and liberalism of Kant and Schleiermacher.³ However, over the last century and particularly

1. See the study of the Swedish charismatic church "Livets Ord" in Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*.

2. See Hamner, *American Pragmatism*.

3. See Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 5.

since the 1960s, American pragmatism has had an increasing influence on English evangelicals, especially over those naturally disposed to this way of thinking.⁴

Contemporary English evangelical revivalist Christians are looking for a religion that works with results that confirm their faith. The embracing of a pragmatic approach to religion by leaders and adherents alike is the interconnecting thread that runs throughout this book. American culture is being beamed into our living rooms and uncritically absorbed by those watching television and surfing the net, but my primary interest is the way Christian praxis is being molded by those who are persuaded by, and enthusiastic about, ideas they have picked up from their contacts with American Christians.

Only a few years ago, at a meeting of Anglican revivalist leaders, I noted with interest that one vicar was happy to admit that his preaching and praxis were influenced significantly by his uncritical viewing of God TV and other American revival channels available on Sky.

This is reminiscent of an earlier study, Stephen Pattison's book *The Faith of the Managers*,⁵ that first awakened my interest in the importing of American cultural ideas. This book, together with his earlier essay "Mystical management" (1991),⁶ are a fascinating attempt to make a theological analysis of modern management. "Mystical Management" sets out Pattison's view that "the new managers are deeply involved in religious activity . . . indeed a religious activity which has close analogies with charismatic evangelical Christianity,"⁷ of which, to a large extent, they are unaware. To him, this is most obvious in the religious language used by managers, e.g., "vision," "mission statements," "doom scenarios," and so on.⁸ He is concerned that managers ought to become aware of the religious nature of management language and ideas and apply to their "faith" some of the critical spirit that theologians have applied to religious belief.⁹

Pattison significantly develops this thesis in his book *The Faith of the Managers*, in which he fleshes out his arguments and, towards the end of the book, applies his thinking to the introduction of managerial theories and practices into the life of the church.

4. See Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*.

5. Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*.

6. Pattison, "Mystical Management."

7. *Ibid.*, 17.

8. *Ibid.*, 23.

9. *Ibid.*, 18, 25.

In the coda at the end of the book entitled *An Essay on Management to Its Religious Admirers*,¹⁰ Pattison refers to a Church of England report,¹¹ which is critical of the “pick and mix” approach of postmodern faith that replaces traditional Christianity with beliefs and practices from all sorts of religious systems. He then comments,

It may seem ironic, therefore, that the churches themselves are apparently unconcerned about importing ideas and practices from management, which can itself be seen as a kind of religion.¹²

The application of management to the church might well concern those who are alerted to what Pattison says appears to be the origin of many of its concepts in fundamentalist North American sectarianism.¹³ In a similar way, and importantly for this book, is the importation of ideas and practices into the English church, through contemporary evangelical revivalism. These ideas and practices, I argue, originate in the nineteenth-century American mind-science cults,¹⁴ and indeed the distinctive cultural environment in which they developed. For the sake of clarity, I understand the term cult in this context in a similar way to Braden who writes:

By the term “cult” I mean nothing derogatory to any group so classified. A cult, as I define it, is any religious group which differs significantly in some one or more respects as to belief or practice, from those religious groups which are regarded as normative expressions of religion in our total culture.¹⁵

Interestingly, the material that is increasingly influencing some leaders in the church in England today is saturated with late capitalist positive American thinking. For example, Peter Brierley’s book *God’s Questions*¹⁶ makes uncritical reference throughout to American self-help and management books and articles.

10. Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*, 157–66.

11. The Church of England Board of Mission, *The Search for Faith and the Witness of the Church*.

12. Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*, 159.

13. *Ibid.*, 35.

14. In using the term mind-science cults I mean particularly “New Thought” originating in the teaching of Phineas P. Quimby, Warren Felt Evans, and others and also Mary Baker Eddy’s “Christian Science.” The use of the term “cult” to refer to these movements has been defended by a number of scholars working in this area, e.g., McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 15–20.

15. Braden, *These Also Believe*, xii.

16. Brierley, *God’s Questions*.

Stimulus for This Study

For fifteen years, I was Vicar of St. Philip & St. James, Chatham, in the Diocese of Rochester in the Church of England.¹⁷ Pip & Jim's, as the church has been affectionately known for many years, has been consciously evangelical since the 1960s; and during the twenty-three-year incumbency of my predecessor, Ken Gardiner, it became one of the leading renewal/revivalist churches in the diocese.¹⁸ For at least the first ten years of my ministry at St. Philip & St. James, I sought to maintain and develop this revivalist emphasis.¹⁹ However, during the 1990s and into the next decade, the long-standing evangelical and renewal ethos of the church attracted a significant number of "refugees" from other local revivalist churches, where there had been disenchantment and even allegations of abuse. I myself became more and more critical of the rhetoric and practices that were widespread in the movement.²⁰ I felt uneasy about allegations of psychological, financial, and even physical abuse towards the refugees from their former leaders.

English revivalist evangelicalism in the early years of the twenty-first century has many disillusioned adherents. This study was stimulated by my pastoral relationship with some of the local "refugees" I encountered. Many of these individuals were attracted by the way their former churches presented themselves, and some were initially very happy and excited by

¹⁷ From May 1994 to November 2009.

¹⁸ My predecessor, Canon Ken Gardiner, led the church into the charismatic movement from the beginning of his ministry at St. Philip & St. James, Chatham, starting in 1970. Ken's experience of "charismatic renewal" as it is known began during his first curacy at Holy Trinity Sydenham (1963–67). Ken's active leadership in the diocesan renewal group and, to an extent, his role as a diocesan advisor on the paranormal made him well known among charismatic evangelical Christians of all denominations, both in the Chatham area and further afield. Ken managed to lead the church in renewal while keeping the church firmly in the Anglican fold. His faithful service in these roles and as the Rural Dean of Rochester was formally recognized by the Bishop of Rochester when he was made an honorary Canon of the Cathedral in 1988.

¹⁹ My own background had been in charismatic renewal, both in my curacy at St. Peter & St. Paul, Tonbridge, and before ordination training at St. Mary's Rushden, Northamptonshire. During my time at St. Philip & St. James, Chatham, I visited the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (January 1996) and regularly attended New Wine, and for two years attended New Frontiers International's Stoneleigh Bible Week.

²⁰ I became increasingly critical of fresh "moves of God" and words from the Lord to keep charismatic Christians "happy." After the Toronto blessing, people were encouraged to go to the Pensacola Revival. Medway churches had a visit from Ed Silviso, a charismatic Argentinean evangelist, and recently people were even attracted by the strange and distinctly neo-Gnostic miracle ministry of Todd Bentley and the Lakeland Revival. I later became aware that this sort of activity might well be stimulated by fear of the rise of secularization. See Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*.

the vision of church presented. However, in time, for most there has been a realization that the rhetoric of their former church leaders and churches did not produce what it had promised.

In churches from what is known as the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Movement (HWPM),²¹ it is common for people to be taught that, if they have enough faith and follow simple steps, or consistently apply specific principles to their lives, they will never be sick or poor but will be healed of all their diseases and will never be in financial want. Of course, many find that certainly, as far as they can see, this does not work. Although they have devoutly and obediently followed their churches' teaching, they have still remained sick or poor.

As well as welcoming people as refugees from these churches, we also had members leave St. Philip & St. James to join Colin Urquhart's Kingdom Faith. It became clear, in conversation with one of these people, that she was seeking a form of charismatic religion that "works" and brings definitive answers to her life questions. She left looking for deeper understanding and knowledge of the principles that, if applied to her life, would bring her a more immediate experience of God's presence and power.

Case Studies

In this book, I intend to consider three representative examples of "faith ministries" that were active in the South East of England during my time at St. Philip and St. James, and which had a significant impact upon members of our church. They are:

Michael Reid

Until 2008, Reid was the leader of Peniel Church, an independent Pentecostal church in Brentwood, Essex, which had a University College (linked to Oral Roberts University), a school, and even a financial advice company offering financial products to its members.²²

My awareness of this church grew out of my pastoral relationship with a man who has been a member at St. Philip & St. James for many years. In 1989,²³ his wife started to go to midweek meetings at Peniel and then Sun-

21 I will use this acronym throughout the book.

22. In 2008, Reid resigned as Pastor of Peniel Church after allegations of an eight-year affair with the choir leader.

23. This incident occurred during my predecessor's incumbency and the information comes from interviews with the couple's son and Canon Ken Gardiner.

day services, attracted by the life of the church and the teaching of Michael Reid. In 1992, she went on holiday with the church. The following year she went on a similar holiday with the church from which she did not return. She and her husband have been separated ever since, and they have recently divorced. Their three sons all moved to Brentwood with her and became involved in the church. All of the sons eventually became disenchanted with the church, and one of them returned (in 2002) to live with his father and attend St. Philip & St. James. It was at his wedding in 2006 that I met a number of disenchanted past and present members of the church. I have attended Peniel since Reid's departure, but most of my information comes from videos of Reid's ministry,²⁴ teaching found in his books and publications, and interviews with key individuals.

Colin Urquhart

Urquhart is the leader of Kingdom Faith, a denomination or group of churches situated across the UK. Kingdom Faith has its own Bible teaching training college, known as Roffey Place,²⁵ and runs its annual Faith Camp, similar in style to New Wine or Spring Harvest.

Most of my information comes from Urquhart's numerous books and his biographies, but also publications, tapes, videos,²⁶ and sermons from the church and Roffey Place.

Some of my information about the ministry comes from informal discussions with two former members of St. Philip & St. James, who have attended the college and ended up working for Kingdom Faith. I have also visited the college and the organization's main church known as The National Revival Centre.

Jerry Savelle

Savelle is an American, closely associated with Kenneth Copeland. Copeland might be considered to be the leading figure of the HWPM worldwide, and Savelle preaches and communicates the ideas he has learned from him. Savelle has an international ministry with UK offices in Monmouthshire, Wales, but has had a significant influence on churches in the South-East of

24. Many of Reid's miracles and key sermons are, at time of writing, available on websites such as YouTube.

25. Roffey Place is the Kingdom Faith training college situated on the Old Crawley Road, Horsham, West Sussex.

26. Videos of Urquhart's ministry are, at time of writing, available from the internet.

England. The main focus of my encounter with Savelle is his influence on the ministry of the pastor of an independent Pentecostal church in Medway. Towards the end of the ministry of this particular pastor, I encountered a number of refugees from the church, some of whom now attend St. Philip & St. James. Others have moved to more mainstream denominational churches in the Medway area. I also visited the Hillsongs church in London, when Savelle was preaching there. My information about the Chatham church, its ministry, and Savelle come from interviews, taped sermons, videos,²⁷ and publications by Savelle.

The main research questions of this book are:

What social and theological construction of reality, and what factors or reasons, make these ministries appealing to people, and what is the true nature of what these ministries offer?

My rhetorical analysis of the case studies raised further questions namely:

Are there certain types of people who are attracted to the claims of Faith teachers such as my case studies?

Can I discover reasons that people are persuaded by these teachers other than they believe them to be biblically correct?

What gives teachers of this sort so much charisma?

Why are some people enchanted but then disenchanted by these ministries, and what sort of ecclesial environment facilitates this?

What can we learn from the nature of the churches involved, and how are they different to mainstream churches?

What accounts for the belief that giving money will result in receiving even more in return?

Why do people continue to believe these ministries when clearly there are people who remain unhealed and still poor?

Are there socio-economic reasons that people are drawn to these churches?

Providing possible answers to the above questions should help the wider church understand why there might be refugees from these ministries, and how and why these ministries continue and grow. I give my answers in the summary at the end of the book.

27. Many videos and other material regarding Savelle's ministry have been downloaded from the internet.

Structure of the Book

This book is in three parts: Part One includes a literature review of other material about the Word of Faith or Health Wealth and Prosperity Movement in chapter 1, and then my initial methodology early in chapter 2. This is followed, in the same chapter, by a historical interpretive theory, which is a general background of American historical cultural theory that examines the concept of American exceptionalism and the distinctiveness of American evangelicalism compared to English evangelicalism. This historical theory continues by examining the national religious heritage, originating from the early Puritan settlers and their Calvinism, and associated “extreme biblicism”²⁸ and electionism. It suggests that this environment, compared to English skepticism, led to a lack of challenge to revivalism and notes the arrival of Scottish commonsense philosophy and the embracing of pragmatism by the early Puritan leaders. It notes, following Weber, that Puritan ascetic culture was ideal for the rise of capitalist attitudes to all life, including religion. Finally, it notes suggestions of neo-Gnostic tendencies among North American Protestants. A religious interpretive theory follows in chapter 3 that examines the roots of Word of Faith in American culture. It plots the rise of positive thinking, American Transcendentalism, New Thought, and the mind-cure, noting the influence of Subjective Idealism, Swedenborgianism, Unitarianism, and Mesmerism. It examines the theology of the likely founder of the mind-cure, Phineas P. Quimby, and other key metaphysical²⁹ teachers leading to the possible link to E. W. Kenyon and to Word of Faith theology.

Part Two is a rhetorical analysis of my three case studies, and as such is a subordinate, supportive, but vital piece of work that not only illustrates the nature of my case studies’ performative rhetoric but reveals the significant pragmatism at work in these ministries.

The rhetorical analysis of part two raises questions about the sort of people who are drawn to these ministries and the charismatic leaders involved. What sort of churches result from the teachings of these leaders? Why do people think that giving money away, especially to leaders, will result in them receiving more back for themselves? Why do people continue to be drawn to ministries of this sort when there are many who are not healed and remain poor? Are there socio-economic reasons that people are drawn to these churches?

28. I understand this term to mean total dependence on a literalist approach to bible texts with no place for theological reason or consideration of the context of biblical statements.

29. See definition of “metaphysics” early in chapter 1.

Part Three is an attempt to answer these questions. This demands further methodology drawing insights from congregational studies, psychology, organizational theory, and Maussian analysis in chapter 7, and then, in chapter 8, looking at the nature of the charisma of my case studies and the concepts of enchantment, disenchantment, and *habitus*. I also briefly consider the theory of cognitive dissonance, the nature of neo-Gnosticism evident in these ministries, and the relationship between attraction to these ministries and social class. I then summarize the thesis before making my final conclusions.

SAMPLE