Living With Tension:
Towards A Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic

Andy Wier

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to articulate a theological response to some of the tensions that UK charismatic-evangelical churches experience when engaging with socially and economically disadvantaged urban areas. The working title of this model is *a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic*. Developed by a practical theologian in response to the findings of a recent qualitative study, this model tries to root charismatic-evangelical urban practice in a wider social ethic which is both consistent with evangelical convictions and open to insights from other Christian traditions.

The proposed practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic consists of six conceptual components. Each of these responds to a tension that has been encountered and observed within contemporary charismatic-evangelical urban practice. The article outlines each conceptual component in turn and then goes on to assess the evangelical credentials of this model. It is acknowledged that the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented here does not provide a finalised or definitive model. Instead, it is shared as an outline sketch intended to provoke further evangelical reflection on the subject of living with tension.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, UK charismatic-evangelical churches have worshipped mainly in suburban areas and been predominantly middle class.[1] The past two decades, however, have witnessed a growing charismatic-evangelical engagement with socially and economically deprived urban neighbourhoods. One manifestation of this is the growing number of charismatic-evangelical Christians relocating to inner city areas as part of a movement "[o]ut of the ghetto and into the city" (Dixon 1995).[2] Another is the increasing number of charismatic-evangelical congregations running social action projects such as food banks and debt advice centres.

Within a wider historical and international context, such developments can be understood as one example of the significant shifts in evangelical attitudes to social action that have occurred over the past hundred years. These shifts are associated with the twentieth century "loss and recovery of the evangelical social conscience" (Smith 2009, 263) and evangelical attempts to overcome the "perennial dichotomy" (Bosch 1991, 407) between evangelism and social involvement. Evangelical social engagement is therefore not restricted or confined to churches of a charismatic-evangelical tradition.[3] In a UK context, however, it appears that charismatic-evangelical Christians have often been at the forefront of

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1   In conceiving charismatic-evangelicalism as a subset of Evangelicalism, this article draws on the work of Rob Warner who identifies "Charismatic experientialism" as one of seven sectors or micro-paradigms within contemporary English evangelicalism (Warner 2007, 247).

2   See, for example, the work of the Eden Network - http://eden-network.org/.

3   For descriptions of social involvement among UK Reformed evangelicals (as oppose to charismatic-evangelicals), see the work of Tim Chester and Steve Timmis (Chester and Timmis 2007, 67-82).

the emergence of new forms of evangelical social action over the past two decades (Kuhrt 2010, 14). Furthermore, international research has highlighted the significance of charismatic and Pentecostal forms of social action as part of "the new face of Christian social engagement" (Miller and Yamamori 2007).[4]

These developments have received relatively little academic attention, either within empirical studies of faith-based social action or more explicitly theological work. While historical evangelical debates about the relative priority of evangelism and social action are relatively well-documented (Chester 1993, Smith 1998), much less is understood about their relationship within contemporary ecclesial practice.[5] There have also been relatively few theological resources to enable evangelical practitioners to reflect on their experiences of urban ministry. In response to these gaps, this article describes one attempt to sketch out a theological model that directly responds to issues encountered and observed within contemporary evangelical urban practice. Targeted primarily at a charismatic-evangelical constituency, but with a wider evangelical audience also in mind, the working title of this model is *a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic*. This attempts to root charismatic-evangelical

urban practice in a wider social ethic which is simultaneously consistent with evangelical convictions and open to insights from other Christian traditions (Wier 2013a, 100).

The practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented in this article makes no claim to provide a finalised or definitive model. Rather, it is an outline sketch developed by a practical theologian as a conceptual response to issues that arise from contemporary ecclesial practice. In this sense, it may be seen as an attempt to explore the implications of the "ethnographic turn" (Phillips 2012, 95) for evangelical social ethics. As such, the model still stands in need of further conceptual refinement and is shared here with the intention of provoking further reflection and discussion. With this in mind, the article proceeds in three sections. The first section briefly describes the origins of the proposed theological model. The second section introduces and describes six constituent elements of a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. The third section then begins to assess this model and consider priorities for its further development.

ORIGINS

The theological ethic presented in this article has been developed in response to the outcomes of a recently completed qualitative study of UK charismatic-evangelical urban churches (Wier 2013a). This study used two main research methods to explore the motivation and practice of charismatic-evangelical urban churches within one particular English city. Firstly, an in-depth ethnographic study was conducted within an independent charismatic-evangelical urban church. This revolved around a nine-month period of participant-observation. Secondly, seven focus groups were conducted with leaders

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4   Miller and Yamamori include 'charismatic' churches within their umbrella term 'Pentecostalism' (Miller and Yamamori 2007, 2). In this article, however, charismatic-evangelical churches are conceived as distinct from (although nevertheless related to) Pentecostalism. This is informed by Cartledge's distinction between the classical Pentecostalism of the early twentieth century and the subsequent charismatic movement (Cartledge 2003, 6). In this context, charismatic-evangelical churches are to be found in both independent / New Church networks and in mainstream denominations.

5   Internationally, there appears to be growing empirical research interest on charismatic and Pentecostal social involvement (Miller and Yamamori 2007) and Pentecostal experiences and expressions of 'Godly love' (Lee and Poloma 2009). Within a UK context, however, there has been relatively little previous research on the way that charismatic-evangelical churches engage in urban mission.

and members of a further three charismatic-evangelical congregations.[6] The main findings of this study revolved around a series of six tensions that charismatic-evangelical urban churches experience (Wier 2013a, 65). These tensions, which we consider more fully in the next section, are as follows:

1. Collaborative versus Counter-cultural tendencies
2. Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic intentions
3. Reflexive versus Applied theology
4. Heroic versus Mundane self-perception
5. Service providers versus Intentional communities
6. Locally indigenous versus Expansive horizons

It was in an attempt to provide a creative conceptual response to these tensions that the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented in this article was developed. As documented elsewhere (Wier 2013b), the methodology for arriving at this model involved considering the study's qualitative findings through a range of theological lenses as well as extended reflection on the author's own experience of living with the six tensions. This process then culminated in the formulation of a six-part theological response.

CONCEPTUAL COMPONENTS

In this section, we introduce the six conceptual components of the proposed practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. With each component, we begin by briefly describing a tension from charismatic-evangelical urban practice to which the component seeks to

respond, before then going on to outline the proposed conceptual response.

i. Mission as God's turning to the world

The first tension identified by the qualitative study of charismatic-evangelical churches was a tension between *collaborative and counter-cultural tendencies*. The study uncovered various examples of charismatic-evangelical churches collaborating with secular organisations such as the Police, local authority, and other community groups. However, it also found evidence of strong counter-cultural tendencies that placed limits on the churches' willingness to collaborate with other organisations beyond the church (Wier 2013a, 66-67).

At the heart of this tension, there lie complex theological questions about the nature of the Church's relationship with the World. To explore these fully would be beyond the scope of this article. However, one potentially significant line of enquiry in constructing a charismatic-evangelical response that is open to insights from other traditions may be found in attempting to facilitate a mutually critical yet constructive conversation between charismatic-evangelical churches and public-reformist urban theology. Here, the work of John Atherton will be used as an example of a public-reformist approach. One of the central themes throughout Atherton's work is the importance of the Church partnering with others in pursuit of the common good (Atherton 2000, Atherton, Baker and Reader 2011). The case for such partnership, Atherton argues, can be located in a trinitarian understanding of a dialogic God (Atherton 2000, 7). Atherton's work would appear to challenge charismatic-evangelical churches to move beyond partnering with secular organisations only when there appears to be something in it for them (for example the possibility of external funding) and

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6   The three charismatic-evangelical churches studied through focus groups were a large 'magnet church', an Anglican parish church, and an Anglican 'fresh expression'.

towards a more deeply collaborative pursuit of the common good. As such, it may provide a helpful counter-balance to charismatic-evangelical churches' at-times excessive 'go it alone' tendencies.

For an evangelical social ethic, however, the case for partnership needs to be articulated in a way that is consistent with wider evangelical convictions. Or as Malcolm Brown puts it, the case for dialogue beyond a tradition must be made from within that tradition itself (Brown 2010, 130). In this regard, Atherton's methodological leap from the doctrine of the trinity to a prescriptive model of partnership may fail to convince many evangelicals. Alternative, and potentially more compelling, grounds for evangelical collaboration with organisations beyond the Church may be found in ideas of *missio Dei* (the mission of God) and "God's turning to the world" (Bosch, 1991, p. 376). As Bosch observes, many evangelicals in the twentieth century came to embrace an understanding of mission as *missio Dei* and, in some accounts, this has also been used to describe the activities of God's Spirit beyond the Church (Bosch 1991, 390-391). Furthermore, some of the members of the charismatic-evangelical churches studied frequently used phrases such as "joining in with what God is already doing" and one theologically informed participant explicitly expressed this through the vocabulary of "*missio dei*". Such statements appear to reflect a belief that God is already at work in situations and contexts beyond the Church. This, it would seem, provides some basis for charismatic-evangelical collaboration and partnership with non-Christian others in a way that is consistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions (Wier 2013a, 105).[7]

As a counter-balance to this suggestion, it needs to be acknowledged that *missio Dei* is a contested concept that encompasses a variety of diverging theological positions. As such, it has been met with suspicion in some evangelical quarters (Tinker, 2009, p. 149; Rowe, 2012, p. 17). Further work is therefore still needed to clarify the theological basis, scope and boundaries for its use within a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. In order to be authentically evangelical, a charismatic-evangelical social ethic will need to be counter-cultural as well as collaborative, retaining an appropriate sense of antithesis between Church and World. Within this, however, charismatic-evangelical churches need to be careful not to confuse being 'counter-cultural' with being 'anti-cultural' (Smith J. K., 2009, p. 35).

ii. A holistic vision of God's Kingdom

A second tension observed within the charismatic-evangelical churches studied concerned the relationship between *spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions*. Within all four churches, there were numerous references to wanting people in the community to become Christians alongside various articulations of wider socio-economic aims. Some participants used 'holistic' vocabulary to describe the integration of these two elements. However, closer analysis of the data gathered revealed that the relationship between the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic could also be a source of tension, with notable differences of opinion and emphasis between participants (Wier 2013a, 67-68).

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7   On the grounds for evangelical collaboration with non-Christian others, see also Bretherton (2010). Although wary of an uncritical emphasis on partnership between

Church and State, Bretherton argues that the case study of community organizing highlights the possibility of a more constructive form of collaboration. Community organizing, Bretherton argues, simultaneously allows the church to "be the church, cooperate with religious others in pursuit of earthly goods in common, and contradict the totalizing tendencies of the market and the state" (Bretherton 2010, 106).

In responding to this tension, we need to acknowledge that the relative importance of the evangelistic and the socio-economic has been debated extensively in evangelical circles over many years. Although it is sometimes claimed that the 1974 Lausanne Congress helped to decisively resolve the issue for evangelicals, the relationship between evangelism and social action remains contested territory (D. W. Smith 2009, 265). Joel Edwards' review of popular evangelical approaches, for example, highlights enduring tensions between the approach of evangelicals 'to the left' and evangelicals 'to the right' (Edwards 2008). While the former are deeply committed to social engagement and political activism on poverty issues (Edwards 2008, 71), the latter are highly critical of a 'social gospel' that "substitutes social action for gospel proclamation" (Edwards 2008, 77). Against this backdrop, any attempt to articulate an 'evangelical' response to the spiritual-evangelistic versus socio-economic tension is a perilous undertaking. Rather than attempting to provide a definitive Evangelical model, the social ethic outlined in this article is offered as a potential charismatic-evangelical response to issues that arise from a UK urban context.

For a charismatic-evangelical constituency, it would seem that it is within a holistic understanding of the Kingdom of God that the tension between the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic can be most creative. In this regard, concepts of the reign of God from urban liberation theology have particular potential to challenge, widen, and enrich charismatic-evangelical understandings of the Kingdom which are at times overly-individualistic (Wier 2013a, 105). In highlighting the social, economic and political nature of oppression, they also draw attention to the importance of addressing structural, as well as individual,

sin. Liberationist perspectives may therefore provide a vital corrective to the tendency of many charismatic-evangelicals to privilege the spiritual-evangelistic or provide overly-simplistic 'sticking plaster' responses to complex socio-economic problems (thereby ignoring systemic issues of social injustice). This, however, is not to say that the spiritual-evangelistic is now unimportant. While incorporating insights from liberation theology, a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic will also retain a distinctively evangelical emphasis on evangelism and conversion. In this sense, it may be helpful to regard evangelicalism and liberation theology as helpful correctives to each other.[8] Together, they provide our practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic with a richer, multi-faceted and (I contend) more biblical vision of God's Kingdom.

iii. Faithful improvisation

Thirdly, the study of charismatic-evangelical urban churches uncovered a tension between *applied and reflexive theology*. This was evident in the ways that different focus group participants responded to the question "do you think your faith and beliefs have been affected or changed by your experiences of engaging with this community?" Here, there was a striking difference between participants who felt that urban involvement had "increased" their faith and those who said it had caused them to "rethink" aspects of their faith. The first type of response seems to reflect an essentially applied theological model while the second may be indicative of a more reflexive approach that is open to new theological insights emerging from practice (Wier 2013a, 69).

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8   On the considerable scope for evangelical engagement with liberation theology, see the previous writings of David Sheppard (1983), René Padilla (1985), Greg Smith (1991), and (from a Pentecostal perspective) Eldin Villafañe (1993).

In response to this tension, the concept of faithful improvisation is proposed (Wier 2013a, 106). On the one hand, this insists that charismatic-evangelical churches need to become better at reflecting on practice and may have something to learn from more contextual approaches to practical theology. This may require a willingness to rethink aspect of faith and belief in the light of contemporary experience. On the other hand, however, an evangelical social ethic will require that the Bible is used more extensively and rigorously than is often the case within Practical Theology. This requires a "rather different version of the hermeneutical cycle" that begins not with a critical reflection on praxis but a "transformational indwelling of Scripture's Story" (Colwell 2005, 222).

Our conception of faithful improvisation draws on each of these contrasting convictions and holds them together in creative tension. At first impressions, this might seem counter-intuitive. Given that, within popular discourse, improvisation is sometimes taken to mean 'making things up as we go along', it might initially by presumed that the concept implies the devaluing of Scripture and Christian tradition. However, drawing on Sam Wells' work around the practice of theatrical improvisation (Wells 2004), we can see that effective improvisation requires schooling, practice and immersion in a narrative. Various other theologians like Wright (Wright 2005, 89-92) and Vanhoozer (Vanhoozer 2005) have also employed 'dramatic' analogies which lend support to our argument for a faithful improvisation that combines critical reflection on practice with a faithful indwelling of the biblical narrative. Although this may require a degree of 'rethinking', it also necessitates deep continuity with what has gone before. As Wright explains, Christians live in the fifth act of a five-act drama (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, church) and have an ambiguous relationship with the previous four acts "not because they are being disloyal to them but precisely because they are being loyal to them" (Wright 2005, 90).

iv. A Spirit-infused virtue ethic

A fourth tension, *the heroic versus the mundane*, was particularly pronounced within charismatic-evangelical discourse about the impact of church activities on the local community. Charismatic-evangelical urban Christians, it seemed, sometimes had a tendency to see themselves as super-heroes on a mission to 'turn communities around'. This was evident within the practice of repeatedly telling stories of dramatic transformation. On the other hand, however, a more mundane outlook was evident at times in the more cautious vocabulary of "glimpses", "moments", and impact "beneath the surface" (Wier 2013a, 69).

In response to this tension, it may be particularly helpful to think of Christian discipleship as a Spirit-infused virtue ethic. This requires integrating perspectives from the ecclesial virtue ethics of theologians like Hauerwas and Wells (2006) with Spirit-infused charismatic insights. Once again, recent work by Wright (2010) may be instructive for evangelicals.   While charismatic-evangelical Christians sometimes have a tendency to see the transformation of character as something that can only happen through the spontaneous work of the Spirit, Wright argues that virtue within the New Testament is infused and acquired. It is "both the gift of God and the result of the person of faith making conscious decisions" (Wright, 2010, p. 170).Wright also goes on to suggest that, unlike the classical virtues, the Christian virtues are not designed to produce "grand isolated heroes… but integrated communities, modelling a life of self-giving love" (Wright

2010, 188). Similarly, Wells (2010) contrasts Aristotle's concept of the hero, who is always at the centre of the story, with the New Testament description of Christians as saints. The saint, Wells suggests, may be almost invisible, easily missed, quickly forgotten, and must expect to fail (Wells 2010, 34-37).

Such perspectives provide a much-needed corrective to the at times excessive heroism of charismatic-evangelical urban practice. Nevertheless, a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic will also seek to retain some of the energy and enthusiasm that arises from charismatic-evangelicalism's heroic tendencies. It will also continue to be open to 'the supernatural', while resisting the temptation to pursue the spectacular independently of the transformation of character (Wier 2013a, 108).

v. Church as oikos-polis
Fifthly, the qualitative study uncovered a tension between two contrasting modes of operation – *church as service provider and church as intentional community*. On the one hand, the charismatic-evangelical churches studied all functioned to some degree as service providers. In areas such as youth work, debt advice and social care, they provided a variety of formally organised services, some of which were funded or commissioned by public sector bodies. On the other hand, however, charismatic-evangelical churches also functioned as geographically focused intentional communities – small, and less formally organised, groups of Christians committed to 'being church' and 'doing community' together within a particular locality (Wier 2013a, 66).

In response to this tension, we propose the hybrid concept of oikos-polis. This is informed by the work of Bretherton (Bretherton 2011) and Wannenwetsch (Wannenwetsch 1996). Drawing on Ephesians 2:19-22, Bretherton

(2011, 329-330) observes that the New Testament vision of church includes aspects of both the household (οἶκος) and the political realm (πόλις). That the first urban Christians described their common life in both family and political language has radical conceptual significance for Christian political ethics (Wannenwetsch, 1996, p. 279). This would appear to affirm the legitimacy of both the modes of operation we have identified (service provider and intentional community) and enable us to see them as mutually complementary.[9]

Although our study found some evidence of charismatic-evangelical churches playing the role of service provider and engaging with the political realm, it would appear that many most naturally gravitate towards an intentional community mode of operation. An explicitly *oikos*-centred vision of church is also influential within wider charismatic-evangelical networks. Charismatic-evangelical churches are less likely, it seems, to acknowledge the inherently political character of church.[10] This may therefore need to receive particular attention within a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic (Wier 2013a, 108-109).

vi. A comprehensive Christological framework
The sixth and final tension identified by the qualitative study was between *locally indigenous and expansive horizons*. The four charismatic-evangelical churches studied were all based in, and committed to engaging with, urban neighbourhoods with high levels of social and economic deprivation. A significant proportion of their members also lived in those neighbourhoods. Despite this strong focus on

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9   Although a description of church as *polis* may not necessitate churches becoming service providers, it should cause them to reflect on how they engage with the political realm.

10   On the wider depoliticization of church, see Bretherton (Bretherton 2010, 47).

the neighbourhood, however, the study also found evidence of more expansive horizons that extended far beyond the immediate locality. One of the ways in which this manifested itself was a strong emphasis on the role of the church at citywide, regional, national and international (as well as local) levels. Another was the coexistence within charismatic-evangelical urban congregations of middle class incomers and people who were indigenous to the local area. In both these respects, the study found the relationship between locally indigenous and expansive horizons to be one that was sometimes characterised by tension (Wier 2013a, 68).

Our response to this tension is informed by the observation that within urban theology literature there has often been a tendency to regard Christ's incarnation as the most appropriate theological principle.[11] This has sometimes led to a privileging of the locally indigenous 'view from below' and a repudiation of more expansive 'views from above'. At times, 'incarnation' has also been abstracted, theorised and translated into a general principle that requires little connection to the person of Christ. For many evangelicals, such ad hoc deployment of incarnational language will be deeply problematic. As a corrective to this, it is proposed that our practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic needs to be informed by a more comprehensive Christological framework (Bosch, 1991, p. 399). This will insist that every part of the Christological narrative (Christ's incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit and expected return) is indispensable for the Church's mission and that one element cannot be treated in isolation from

the others. A focus on Christ's incarnation quite rightly affirms the importance of the locally indigenous in urban mission, as Anna Thompson's reflections on Philippians 2: 5-11 vividly demonstrate (Thompson 2010). Such insights, however, need to be held in tension with other aspects of the Christological narrative (particularly Christ's death, resurrection and sending of the Spirit) that appear to open up, and indeed necessitate, more expansive horizons. In this regard, an appreciation of the horizon-expanding character of the Spirit's work (see Acts 1:8) may be particularly significant within a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic (Wier 2013a, 109-110).

ASSESSMENT

In summary then, the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented in this article consists of six conceptual components that have been formulated in response to six tensions uncovered through qualitative research with UK charismatic-evangelical urban churches. These six components are represented diagrammatically on figure 1.

As stated in the introduction to this article, this social ethic is presented as an outline sketch, not a finalised model. As such, it may be difficult to provide a detailed assessment of the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented here. An interim assessment, however, is essential in order to inform this model's further development, as well as wider evangelical debate. In the brief discussion that follows, we concentrate on assessing the evangelical credentials of the proposed theological model.[12] This will be structured

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11 Andrew Davey provides a brief but helpful overview of some of the ways in which urban theology has deployed incarnational language (Davey 2010, 90-92).

12 Further work is also needed to assess and develop the *charismatic* credentials of the proposed charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. With this in mind, this article's concluding section briefly highlights various

Conceptual component	Tension this relates to
i) Mission as God's turning to the world	Collaborative versus Counter-cultura
ii) A holistic vision of God's Kingdom	Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic
iii) Faithful improvisation	Reflexive versus Applied
iv) A Spirit-infused virtue ethic	Heroic versus Mundane
v) Church as *oikos-polis*	Service providers versus Intentional communities
vi) A comprehensive Christological framework	Locally indigenous versus Expansive horizons

Figure 1 – Components of a Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic

around the four historic characteristics of UK evangelicalism identified by David Bebbington (Bebbington 1989).[13]

i. Conversionism

Bebbington defines conversionism as "the belief that lives need to be changed" (Bebbington 1989, 3) and describes this with reference to evangelical understandings of justification by faith. Within the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic sketched out above, conversionist or spiritual-evangelistic aims are affirmed within 'a holistic vision of God's Kingdom'. However, here they are also accompanied by socio-economic motifs. Some

'evangelicals to the right' may see this as a dilution of conversionism and a departure from traditional evangelical concerns. Others 'to the centre' and 'to the left', however, will see this as entirely consistent with evangelical convictions, pointing to emerging evangelical understandings of "mission in all its dimensions" (Lausanne Movement 2011).

ii. Activism

Activism, for Bebbington, is associated with "the expression of the gospel in effort" (Bebbington 1989, 3). Although much evangelical effort has historically been linked to a desire for the conversion of others, Bebbington also provides various historical examples of evangelical activism in social reform. Once again, therefore, our practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic's affirmation of both the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic may be seen as consistent with traditional evangelical concerns. There are also clear parallels between our Spirit-infused virtue ethic (in which

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potential conversation partners from Pentecostal political theology and social ethics.

13 Bebbington's four-fold model is used here because it provides one of the most widely accepted starting points for defining and conceptualising UK Evangelicalism (Larsen 2007, 1). We need to acknowledge, however, that an over reliance on this model may be seen to neglect the various internal tensions at work within contemporary Evangelicalism. For a more recent and complex model, with a specifically English focus, see Rob Warner's reworking of the Bebbington quadrilateral (Warner 2007).

virtue is simultaneously infused and acquired) and evangelicalism's historic combination of an appeal to activism with an emphasis on justification by grace.

iii. Biblicism

The component of our social ethic in which biblicism, evangelicalism's "particular regard for the Bible" (Bebbington 1989, 3), is most evident is the proposed 'faithful improvisation'. Here, however, a faithful indwelling of the biblical narrative is combined with acknowledgement of the need for improvisation and critical reflection on practice. Although we have been at pains to point out that this does not mean that 'anything goes', this proposal might be met with suspicion in some evangelical circles. This may be seen to expose significant internal tensions within contemporary evangelicalism concerning the way that the Bible is handled. For charismatic-evangelical Christians, who give great credence to the role of the Holy Spirit as interpreter, reading the Bible is a particularly dynamic experience that involves the emotions as well as the mind (Tidball 2005, 260-261). A charismatic-evangelical outlook, it would seem, may therefore allow more scope for the kind of improvisation proposed in this article than more conservative or rationalist approaches do. The social ethic presented here may therefore receive more support in charismatic-evangelical and open-evangelical circles than in conservative and reformed ones.

iv. Crucicentrism

Finally, Bebbington defines crucicentrism as "a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross" (Bebbington 1989, 3). Of the four historic characteristics of UK evangelicalism, it is with crucicentrism that the proposed practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic engages the least. The cross is certainly implicit at various stages, most notably as one element of 'a comprehensive Christological framework'. However, for some evangelicals the very fact that the cross is included only as one of a number of elements will be problematic. This is something that a more fully developed practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic will need to further reflect on. While continuing to affirm the need for a comprehensive framework, the centrality of the cross for Christian life and witness does need to be made more explicit. There are various potential lines of enquiry for refining and developing our theological model in this regard. Chief among these is the need to articulate a more integrated understanding of the relationship between 'Kingdom' and 'Cross' (Wright 2012).[14]

CONCLUSION

In summary then, the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic presented in this article has been developed in an attempt to articulate a theological response to some of the tensions identified through a recent qualitative study. This seeks to root charismatic-evangelical urban practice in a wider social ethic which is simultaneously consistent with evangelical convictions and open to insights from other Christian traditions.

In response to this model, it might be suggested that the proposed practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic contains relatively little new theological material. Although this may be true in the sense that the preceding discussion draws heavily on the work of other theologians like Bosch, Wright and Wells, such a challenge may be

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14 While "kingdom Christians" and "cross Christians" often place themselves in opposing camps (Wright 2012, 159), Wright highlights the centrality of both 'Kingdom' and 'Cross' in the gospels.

countered by appealing to an understanding of "theology in four voices" (Cameron, et al. 2010, 54).[15] In articulating a social ethic that emerges out of issues identified in contemporary ecclesial practice, this article has been bringing churches' 'espoused' and 'operant' theologies into dialogue with 'normative' and 'formal' theologies in a way that most existing models do not (Wier 2013a, 113).

As we have seen, the theological model constructed here has been sketched out only in outline and requires further conceptual refinement. In this regard, an engagement with recent developments in Pentecostal political theology (Yong 2010) and social ethics (Castelo 2012, Augustine 2012, Wariboko 2012) may be particularly helpful.[16] In its current form, however, our practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic nevertheless still illustrates the possibility of an evangelical response to tension that is both faithful and creative. No doubt, some evangelicals may take issue with aspects of the model constructed and propose alternative theological responses. Such alternative suggestions are to be welcomed. The intention of this article has been to provoke further evangelical reflection, discussion and action on the subject of living with tension. If it encourages other evangelical theologians to take seriously some of the ambiguities and tensions that arise in contemporary mission contexts,

and stirs them to articulate a theological response, this article will have achieved its main purpose.

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15 Cameron et al distinguish between normative theology (scriptures, creeds, official church teaching, and liturgies), formal theology (the theology of professional theologians), espoused theology, and operant theology. Espoused theology is the theology "embedded within *a group's articulation of its beliefs*", while operant theology is the theology "embedded within *the actual practices of a group*" (Cameron, *et al.* 2010, 54).

16 Further empirical research is also needed to explore how UK charismatic-evangelical urban practice relates to more explicitly Pentecostal forms of social involvement, both in the UK and overseas. A promising development in this regard is the University of Birmingham's recent commencement of a major research project on Megachurches and Social Engagement in London.

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Andy Wier

Andy Wier (DProf) is a freelance researcher, consultant and practical theologian who has spent the past fifteen years working in community regeneration and urban mission (www.andywierconsulting.com). He holds a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology from the University of Chester and degrees in Social and Political Studies (BA, The University of Sheffield) and Urban Regeneration (MSc, Sheffield Hallam University). In a lay capacity, Andy also serves on the leadership and ministry team of an inner city Anglican church.