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EVANGELICAL POLITICAL IDENTITY IN TRANSITION: MAPPING THE INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION, POLITICS AND CHANGE IN POST-BELFAST AGREEMENT NORTHERN IRELAND

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Abstract

This paper analyzes changes in Northern Irish evangelical identity since the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Drawing on previous studies of Northern Irish evangelicalism, it constructs three schematic models that test hypotheses regarding what contributes to changes in identity in traditional/conservative, pietist, and moderate/radical directions. Based on interviews with evangelicals from the Queen's University of Belfast Christian Union; a Church of Ireland (Anglican) parish; and a Presbyterian congregation; it challenges previous conclusions about evangelical identity. It argues for a more multi-dimensional understanding of identity change, highlighting the complex ways in which factors such as age, education, class, lived experience in a rural or urban location, and interaction with evangelical leadership intersect. It argues that evangelical identities may be more diverse than originally expected; and that evangelicalism's ability to continue to influence Northern Irish politics in its traditional, conservative direction, is uncertain.

Introduction

If there has been an "ideal type" Northern Irish evangelical, it has been the Rev. Ian Paisley. The much-studied and much-maligned founder of the Free Presbyterian Church and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has supposedly embodied *the* evangelical identity: a rock-solid loyalist resisting change in religion, politics and society.

It is often assumed that Paisley commands a vast army of evangelicals whose religious and political identities fall neatly into step with those of their leader. These

evangelicals identify the Protestants of Ulster¹ with God's chosen people, who faithfully preserve the gospel in the midst of corruption (Mitchel 2003; Jordan 2001; Brewer 1998; Bruce 1986; A. Thomson 2002, 1998; Morrow 1997; Akenson 1992). Their enemies are many, united in a conspiracy "... instigated by the Devil [and] ... the Church of Rome, including the British and Irish governments, Protestant apostasy, the media, the American administration, Irish nationalism, the European Community, the ecumenical movement, Irish republicanism, the RUC,² the Fair Employment Agency, the godless Protestant paramilitaries, all periodically aided by the weakness of the Ulster Unionist Party [UUP]" (Mitchel 2003: 182-183).

Paisley undoubtedly raises evangelicalism's public profile. But evangelicals' numbers and historic commitment to socio-political activism indicate that they would be a formidable presence in the public sphere regardless. According to most estimates, 25-30% of the Protestant population is evangelical (Bruce 1986; Boal 1997; *A Future With Hope* 1995; Mitchell and Tilley, forthcoming). There is some consensus that they have exhibited a social and political influence far beyond the weight of their numbers (Bruce 1986; Mitchell 2001; Brewer 1998; Smyth 1987; Cooke 1996). That said, most previous research has obscured the complexity and variety of evangelical identities. It also has not adequately considered evidence of changes in evangelical identities, nor drawn out what the implications of those changes might be. Some recent work has addressed this imbalance (Mitchel 2003; Jordan 2001; Ganiel 2002; Liechty and Clegg 2001). This research indicates that evangelical identity construction is intersecting with socio-political change and moving in three dominant directions: a traditional Paisley-style identity; a pietist identity; and a moderate/radical identity. These three ideal types are depicted either in conflict or uneasy co-existence, trying to carve out their niches in post-Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland. Granted,

there have always been Paisley-style, apolitical, and moderate/radical evangelicals in Northern Ireland (Ganiel 2003; McBride 1998; McCaughey 1993). But in times of crisis and change like the Catholic civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish agreements – it was the Paisley-style identity that gained prominence (Bruce 1986). Currently, it is unclear if one of the three is a dominant response, or if Northern Irish evangelicalism will return to its familiar traditional, conservative pattern.

Accordingly, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of evangelical identity formation by asking several questions. First, is genuine change occurring among Northern Irish evangelicals? If so, in what direction(s)? Are there any factors that contribute to change in particular directions? Finally, what are the implications of those changes upon the wider socio-political landscape?

The following addresses those questions by considering how socio-political changes intersect with evangelical identity formation in three diverse settings. It concludes by considering possible future directions for evangelical identities and politics.

Socio-Political Change After the Belfast Agreement

The Belfast Agreement has ushered in a number of socio-political changes. The details of the agreement have been well-rehearsed elsewhere and need not be analyzed exhaustively here (Coakley 2003; Ruane and Todd 1999; Todd 2003; McGarry 2001). But several points should be highlighted. A new, power-sharing Assembly has been established, intended to end direct rule from Westminster.³ And the level of violence has decreased significantly. Protestants, however, have become increasingly disillusioned. In the Nov. 2003 Assembly elections Paisley's anti-

agreement DUP emerged as the largest party, surpassing the UUP for the first time. The level of disaffection among Protestants should not be underestimated. As such, changes in evangelical identity could have a significant impact on the continuing expression of Protestant discontent; or for finding other, creative ways to address it.

Mapping Changes in Evangelical Identity

Historically, evangelical and political identities have been tightly-woven. In the 18th and 19th centuries, evangelicalism was conceived as an integral part of a progressive, civilized British Empire, taking the gospel to the nations. After the partition of Ireland in 1920, evangelical Protestants linked the preservation of their religious freedom with maintaining their place in the United Kingdom (Hempton and Hill 1992; A. Thomson 2002; Mitchel 2003).

Mitchel (2003) argues that when evangelicals linked their religious identity with their political identity it produced a religion concerned to protect privilege and political power – evangelicalism became religious nationalism. However, since the Troubles evangelicalism has been experiencing “a crisis of identity” (87). Mitchel says that evangelicals in the Orange Order and evangelicals that follow Paisley have responded with a retrenchment of traditional beliefs. On the other hand, a significant number of evangelicals in the Presbyterian church and “the evangelicals of ECONI [the political action group Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland]” (260-298) have attempted to forge a radical new identity that rejects the linking of evangelical and political identities.

Mitchel’s work has gone farthest in mapping changes in evangelical identity, and it informs the hypotheses tested below in the theoretical models of change. The models also address some of the limitations of Mitchel’s research. For instance, his

analysis is limited to the documents and articulations of elite spokesmen. This likely over-emphasizes the importance of theological reflection in the process of change;⁴ and raises questions about identity changes among non-elites. Moreover, it focuses on evangelical activism without a detailed analysis of pietist identity. This may be a serious limitation, given that other works (Jordan 2001; Mitchell 2001) hint that pietism is becoming an increasingly attractive option. A growing body of ethnographic, qualitative research based on semi-structured interview material provide further insights into changes in evangelical identity. (Jordan 2001; McKay 2000; Ganiel 2002; Mitchell 2001, Porter 2002). These works are a useful starting point for exploring how factors such as the age, gender, education, lived experience in a rural or urban area, level of social engagement, and character of interaction with evangelical leadership inform the dynamics of change.

The following research builds on the prior work by considering change among non-elite evangelicals in three institutionalized settings: the Christian Union (CU) at the Queen's University of Belfast, a Church of Ireland (COI) parish in rural Co. Antrim, and a Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) congregation in rural Co. Antrim. The advantage of talking to individuals in an institutionalized context is that it allows for the testing of generalized hypotheses about the process of identity change, holding some factors constant (such as lived experience in a rural or urban setting) so that other factors that may contribute to change can be isolated. In addition, the focus on congregations allows for analysis of the influence of clergy/leaders on change among members. This builds on a growing body of literature addressing the socio-political implications of clergy activism on their flocks (Guth et al. 1997; Marty 2000; Olson and Crawford 2001).

Schematic Models of Change

As such, both the literature on Northern Irish evangelicalism and on general theories of social change was used to construct three “ideal type” schematic models of change. The models draw on theoretical conceptions of late modernity that have variously described socio-political changes as “detraditionalization” (Heelas 1996), the “rise of the network society” (Castells 1996-2000), and “individualization” (Beck 1992). Differences in coping with these changes are apparent in variables such as youth/older age, level of education, class, and lived experience in rural and urban areas (Castells 1996-2000; R. Thomson et. al 2002; Jamieson 2000; Furlong and Cartmel 1997).

For instance, factors that may be conducive to change in a moderate/radical direction are youth, education, belonging to the middle and upper classes (or being upwardly class mobile), and lived experience in an urban setting. Youth may be open to change because of the break down of traditional authority (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992) and because they face an ongoing series of transitions (R. Thomson et. al 2002). Those with higher levels of education and middle or upper class status have the resources to cope with and even shape social change (Weber 1963; R. Thomson et. al 2002). Urban settings, which bring together people with diverse backgrounds and points of view, may facilitate the exchange of ideas that contributes to radicalism (Weber 1963; Habermas 1989).⁵

Factors that may be conducive to conservatism or change in a conservative direction include older age, lack of education, belonging to the lower classes, and lived experience in a rural area. This may be because older people are more invested in traditional customs or institutions than the young; or because they develop

conservative attitudes due to aging effects (Harding and Jencks 2003; Erikson 1980). Those with a lack of education or of lower classes might not have the means to respond to or shape change; while living in a rural area may reproduce conservative values due to strong family and community socialization, and lack of contact with others.

In sum, the models presented below investigate hypotheses about identity change based on general theoretical considerations; while taking into account the responses to change identified in the literature on Northern Irish evangelicalism. As such, the models are schematic, exemplary ideal types; and are not based on the work of any one author.

Radical Change? The Queen's University Christian Union

This model was constructed to explore the process of evangelical identity formation in a moderate/radical direction. Accordingly, the CU at Queen's University provided an context in which the young, educated, middle/upper class or upwardly mobile, and socially active would interact in an urban university setting.⁶

CU's are present on nearly every university campus in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, operating under the jurisdiction of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES).⁷ A typical CU would have a weekly meeting with singing and a guest speaker, special activities, and small group Bible studies. Students and young post-graduates provide leadership. A CU is not meant to replace the local congregation. CU's are not "political," although it would not be unprecedented for a CU meeting to feature a speaker who raised political issues. The Queen's CU encourages social activism. For example, its web-site asks, "Why bother about evangelism and social action?", and concludes:

If we let God's word inform and transform us then we will be powerfully moved to witness to others in both word and deed. ... Learning ways to evangelize personally is of course important but why not try something as a group, too? Organize a supper party for your friends or have a department talk or debate, use your imagination! Why not get your hands dirty with Social Action, pick up litter, get involved in a homework club for kids or set out the chairs at CU. It's about practically showing Christ's love to others (McClune, QUBCU.com)

Hypothetically, then, evangelicals in the Queen's CU might exhibit change in a moderate or radical direction.

An Island of Moderation? A Rural Church of Ireland Parish

Similarly, a model was constructed in which moderate, but perhaps not radical, changes might be expected. A COI parish in rural Co. Antrim provided a context in which individuals belonging to a congregation shepherded by a rector known for moderate, evangelical views could interact in a rural setting.

The COI is a member of the Anglican Communion, so its denominational structure is hierarchical. In Northern Ireland, it is considered a "mainline" denomination. There are undoubtedly a number of evangelicals within the COI, although it would be difficult to quantify them. Its relatively solid ecumenical links with the Catholic Church and other Protestant denominations contribute to its reputation for moderation. That said, the COI's relationship with the Orange Order has damaged its moderate image to some degree. The rector, whom the researcher met at an event sponsored by the moderate evangelical group ECONI in 2001, described his parish in this way:

I have always maintained that the Church of Ireland [in this area] would be the more moderate of the churches. ... I've come to see the parish almost as an island in what is a quite hardline area. And

in fact we've drawn into our membership ... a number of people from other churches who felt they couldn't identify with some of the very hardline.

Hypothetically, then, individuals in the COI might be open to change in a moderate direction – especially if the rector of the parish was moderate. This might be more likely in an urban setting. Therefore, to control for lived experience in an urban area, a parish in a rural setting was sought. Evangelicals here might exhibit change in a moderate direction – but not as radically as the young people in the Queen's CU.

An Island Unto Itself? A Rural Presbyterian Congregation

Finally, a model was constructed in which changes in the traditional/conservative or pietist directions might occur. Accordingly, a PCI congregation in rural Co. Antrim provided a context in which evangelicals in a congregation with a minister with outspoken traditional/conservative beliefs could interact in a rural setting.

The PCI is the largest denomination in Northern Ireland and is largely considered “mainline.” However, the PCI has a much more evangelical reputation and ethos than the COI (Fawcett 2000; Holmes 2000; Mitchel 2003). The PCI also has links with the Orange Order; and many of its rural congregations, in particular, are considered theologically and politically conservative. Contact was made with the pastor, who is a member of the Orange Order, through the traditional/conservative organization the Evangelical Protestant Society. His congregation has an evangelical reputation that long preceded him. He said:

[This congregation] is in many ways unique [amongst PCI congregations]. ... They would be very much evangelical but they're very much the church is the center of their lives. Full stop. I mean I know in country areas that tends to be the case but to be truthful I've been around many churches

... but I haven't come across a church where they have that – where the church and the life of the church and the work of the church – they live for it, they just simply live for it.

When asked why the pastor thought this was the case, he said that a “mission” came to the town about 50 years previously and 34 people (in a congregation of 100-115 families) were converted.

Hypothetically, then, evangelicals in a rural PCI congregation might be more likely to be moving in a conservative or pietist direction. Lack of opportunity for interaction with the “other” might contribute to pietism or traditional conservatism. Having a pastor who is politically involved and outspoken might indicate that members were less likely to turn to pietism, however. Thus change in the traditional/conservative political direction was expected.

Investigating the Model Hypotheses

The operationalization of the models yielded both expected and unexpected results.⁸ As expected, members of the Queen's CU and the rural COI exhibited evidence of moderate/radical change, and members of the rural PCI exhibited evidence of increased pietism. There was more evidence of change in a pietist direction among the Queen's students than was originally expected. The reasons cited for change were both expected and unexpected. The influence of clergy, particularly the influence of the PCI clergyman on political matters, was much less than expected. There was scant evidence of traditional conservative identity. Only one person in the PCI and two in the CU fit somewhat comfortably into that mould – and none of them felt that their beliefs were a result of change.⁹ As such, the data highlight the complex and multi-dimensional process of identity formation; and confirm the diversity of evangelical identities.

Queen's CU

The case study of the Queen's CU was conducted in 2000-2001.¹⁰ Participants were selected on the basis of a questionnaire, which was distributed at a weekly meeting of the CU. 204 members were present (a CU office holder estimated that about 500 different students attend CU meetings during the year). Thirty-four were willing to participate, and 20 were selected to gain a balance of male/female (12 male and eight female) and a variety of denominational and political party preferences. Denominationally, there were five Presbyterians, three non-denominational, three Protestant, two Baptist, two Church of Ireland, two did not indicate a denomination, one Congregational, one Free Presbyterian and one Nazarene. Politically, nine favored no party, six were UUP, three DUP, one Alliance and one Women's Coalition/Women's Labour.¹¹

The overwhelming majority of the interviewees had a moderate/radical evangelical identity. Only two could be characterized as traditional/conservative. One of those students, Douglas,¹² identified himself as a minority within the CU. The religious and political characteristics of the interviewees are summarized in the table below. The category "evangelical identity" is based on interviewees' descriptions of their theological and political beliefs; while the "perceived change?" category includes perceived changes in either theology or politics. Voting no in the Belfast Agreement referendum and being opposed to a united Ireland are associated with traditional conservatism.

Table One: Religion and Politics of the Queen's CU

Name	Party	Denomination	Belfast Agreement Vote	United Ireland	Evangelical Identity	Perceived Change?
Diane	DUP	Baptist	No	No	Trad/Cons	No
Noah	DUP	COI	Yes	No	Mod/Rad	Yes
Lucinda	None	Protestant	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	No
Nathan	UUP	Protestant	Yes	OK	Pietist	Yes
Paul	UUP	Protestant	Yes	OK	Pietist	No
Roger	None	Not Given	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Elizabeth	WC/WL	Baptist	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Jeremy	UUP	Non-denom.	Yes	No	Mod/Rad	Yes
Gwen	UUP	PCI	Yes	OK	Pietist	Yes
Chris	None	Congregational	Yes	OK	Pietist	Yes
Grant	None	Non-denom.	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Alan	None	Non-denom.	Yes	OK	Pietist	Yes
Grace	UUP	Free Pres.	No	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Daniel	None	Not Given	No	OK	Pietist	Yes
Andrew	None	Nazarene	No	OK	Pietist	Yes
Ben	None	PCI	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Maggie	Alliance	PCI	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	No
Judy	None	COI	No	No	Pietist	No
Douglas	DUP	PCI	No	No	Trad/Con	No
Jennifer	UUP	PCI	No	No	Mod/Rad	No

Thirteen students perceived changes in their identity. Seven perceived themselves as moderating, while six moved toward pietism. The data also reveals why students believed they changed, with two dominant dimensions emerging: education and social activism. For Andrew, who perceived change in a pietist direction, those changes were linked with leaving the Free Presbyterian Church.

What follows focuses on two interviewees' narratives and how they explained the formation of their religious identity, including their perceptions of the factors that contributed to change. Rather than inserting representative quotes, the interviews are presented holistically to capture the variety of experiences, perceptions and contradictions that contribute to the dynamics of change.

Roger is a 21-year-old from Co. Down who is not affiliated with a party and did not indicate a denomination. He describes Northern Irish culture as “oppressive” and is conscious that some of his beliefs are regarded as “betrayal” by people from his background (including his grandmother, a “Paisleyite”). He voted for the Belfast Agreement.

Roger's impressions of the Republic of Ireland are positive, and he says if he had to choose between a British culture and an Irish culture, he would choose Irish. Even so, Roger battles against what he calls an inherent, internal bigotry. He came to these realizations when he spent a year studying in the USA:

Spending time away from the country I realize how my views scare me ... some of the emotions that come out of me when I see stuff on TV ... I ... have that inbuilt prejudice against people that no matter how hard I can work against it, it will still be with me for the rest of my life. ... When I was about 14 there was a Catholic guy in school and I remember vividly calling him a Fenian bastard ... and that was my first realization that I was totally bigoted and [should] ... work against that.

Roger has discussed his beliefs with those of opposing views and has worked with children in a working class estate in his hometown. He describes the children as “receptive” and has been impressed with their responses to cross-community activities.

In sum, Roger perceives change as coming through education. He acknowledges the value of discussing issues with people with different points of view, and believes that process also contributes to change – in himself and in the young children with which he works.

Andrew is an 18-year-old Nazarene from Co. Antrim who is not affiliated with a party. He attended a Free Presbyterian Church until he was 17, when his family decided to leave their congregation after a personal dispute between his mother and a new pastor. He describes his father as a dedicated DUP voter.

Andrew would not have voted for the Belfast Agreement but he is relatively comfortable with the idea of a united Ireland. He says he has experienced changes in his theological and political beliefs since the move to the Nazarene church:

The Free Presbyterian [Church] you always in every sermon would have one line or comment that would please the ones that were there just to hear this political comment. In the Nazarene it's completely different, it's never preached at all. ... Three to five years ago I would have been quite ... narrow-minded and bigoted. Now over the past few years I've found myself becoming more into touch with God and more active as a Christian ... and I find that has caused a sort of change. ... it's definitely been the change from the Free Presbyterian to the Nazarene.

Andrew's changes have taken a pietist tack. He believes that Christians should disengage from politics and focus on sharing the gospel, saying that the best strategy for peace is to "win this country for Christ, not for any political party."

In sum, the evangelicals in the CU who perceive themselves as changing are constructing moderate/radical and pietist identities. They link those changes to education and social interaction; or in Andrew's case, leaving the Free Presbyterian Church. Pietism does not necessarily mean the students are socially inactive (of the 20 interviewees, only four did not participate in volunteer work). Rather, pietists' social

action is simply more likely to be linked to evangelism or volunteering in “non-political” venues.

RURAL COI

The case study of the rural COI was conducted from November 2002-June 2003. The rector agreed to be interviewed and to provide the researcher with contact information for five-seven members of his parish. He was asked to select participants with a wide range of characteristics (age, male/female, education, social class, and representing a variety of theological and political beliefs).¹³ Of the parishioners interviewed, four were male and three were female; ages ranged from 19-60; five supported the UUP and two supported no party; and occupations¹⁴ included student, retired (administrator); skilled tradesman, school administrator, shop worker, professional medical worker, and professional engineer.

The parish comprises two congregations, which are located in nearby towns in rural Co. Antrim, with a total of 380 families: the larger congregation is situated in a predominantly Protestant town (320 families) while the smaller congregation is situated in a mixed town (60 families). Presbyterianism is the dominant form of Protestantism in the area – there are five PCI churches between the two towns. Of the interviewees, six were from the larger congregation and one was from the smaller congregation.

Unsurprisingly, the parishioners exhibited largely moderate identities. The religious and political characteristics of the interviewees are summarized in the table below.

Table Two: Religion and Politics of the Rural COI

Name	Occupation	Age	Party	Belfast Agreement Vote	United Ireland	Evangelical Identity	Perceived Change?
Susan	Student	19	UUP	Yes (parents)	Don't care	N/A ¹⁵	No
Jean	Retired administrator	56	UUP	Yes	OK	Mod/Rad	Yes
Gordon	Skilled tradesman	53	UUP	No	No (OK)	Pietist/Mod	Yes
Richard	School administrator	46	None	Yes	No	Mod/Rad	Yes
Anna	Shop worker	39	None	Didn't vote	Unsure	Mod/Rad	No
Ray	Professional medical worker	60	UUP	Yes	No	Mod/Rad	No
Robert	Professional engineer	57	UUP	Yes	"Happy enough"	Mod/Rad	Yes

Most perceived changes were toward moderation. The only exception is Gordon, who moved toward a combination of pietism and political moderation. The data also reveals why the interviewees believed their beliefs changed: responding to preaching (either within the parish or from evangelists) and observing the political process with a view to understanding the Catholic/nationalist position. The following profiles two of the individuals who perceived changes in their identities.

Jean is a 56-year-old retired administrator who has been attending services in the parish for about 18 months. She grew up in the area, was raised a Presbyterian, and has attended PCI churches for most of her life. She attended another COI parish

immediately prior to attending this parish. She describes herself as “actually Presbyterian,” and is still a member of a Presbyterian church.

Jean voted for the Belfast Agreement, supports the UUP, says a united Ireland would be “okay” if it wasn’t “forced,” and believes that there should be more cross community activities and integrated education.

Jean says the preaching, friendliness and hymnody in the COI has changed how she feels about “others and politics.” When asked to compare the COI and the PCI she says:

[P]ossibly, and this may be more to do with the individual churches, but ... possibly the Church of Ireland ... talk more about how you feel towards and act towards your neighbor. I think that has struck me a bit. They’re very strong on love your neighbor and therefore that has got to affect how you feel about others and politics.

When asked for examples of how love your neighbor has come through to her in the COI, she says:

Certainly in ... preaching ... even I think in the hymns in the Church of Ireland hymn book, you know, there’d be large sections to do with that. And again it may just be ... something to do with [this particular] church but I certainly found that as a stranger going in there ... they have been so welcoming and so caring. ... I’ve certainly noticed a difference between that and the previous Presbyterian church that I had been involved in.

And when asked how that has caring has affected her:

Well I think that you respond to that, don’t you, and if you’re shown sort of care and consideration and so on, then you want to return that ...

This theological emphasis on “love your neighbor” has coincided with what Jean perceives as more tolerance in her politics – although that tolerance is tempered with an awareness that in other ways she might be “more extreme”:

I've become more tolerant and ... [with] devolution .. we had an opportunity to see how the different political parties ... behave ... and how responsible they are, and I've become ... more impressed with the SDLP¹⁶ than I would have been a few years ago. But also a bit more impatient with some of the more extreme ... DUP's and Sinn Fein.¹⁷

Jean links her tolerance for the SDLP with her observations that they “care more about ... the issues that affect people rather than about their own party” and “they’re not always asking for more and more concessions.” As far as her difficulties with the DUP, she says that is because all they do is criticize without proposing solutions. In the case of Sinn Fein, she doesn’t trust its links with paramilitaries.

In sum, Jean perceives herself as moderating both theologically and politically. She associates this process with theologically-based encounters in the COI and with coming to a better understanding of the moderate nationalist position.

Gordon is a 53-year-old skilled tradesman who has been a member of the parish for ten years. He was raised in the area, and from his youth attended a COI in a nearby large town. He left that parish when a new rector began introducing changes in the youth ministry that as a youth leader, he did not agree with.

Gordon voted against the Belfast Agreement. He would accept a united Ireland if it was brought about democratically, but he would be “saddened” by it. Gordon is a member of the Orange Order and supports the UUP. He describes himself as politically active when he was younger, and was a member of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) before it became a paramilitary organization. Now, he perceives himself as becoming more spiritual; and less interested in politics:

I've got less and less interested in politics, quite honestly. I get sick with them, and I actually [am] more into the spiritual side, I'm involved more in the church now. I would pray a lot more often than I did years ago, to be quite honest. ... I was a member of the UDA when I was young cause at

that time we all joined. Then as I said, fortunately I had the sense to see the way things were going and ... it wasn't what it was originally set out to be. So I said that's it, I'm away. ... I was still always looking at the news, got involved in politics, went to political meetings in the town if a guest speaker came to ... the town hall, went to hear what they had to say, went to church on a Sunday – that was it, out again ... but ... over the past 4 or 5, 10 years probably, less and less politics cause I've seen the way it's went ... I found, you know, myself going to Bible classes, reading tracts... we had ...[a] curate in [the town] ... and he played football, and I could talk to him as I played football myself ... and he gave me a couple of books to read. ... I said to him ... I attend church on Sunday ... I don't feel I'm doing anything wrong. I'm happily married, I have a family and all now, I says there's something still missing in my life – I couldn't – to this day I still can't say yes, that's what's missing. So he gave me a couple of books to read from theologians and that, easy reading, then I started thinking, he talked to me about it, and then I started going to Bible classes and study things and probably just that way, no great big, some people I'm speaking to it's flashing lights they've seen and this that and the other thing. Which is fair enough, maybe they have, I don't know, but I always felt that I wasn't that far down in the gutter. People maybe who are drunkards or drug addicts or sleeping rough and that and have amazing conversions and ... mine was a gradual thing, so I feel more spiritually involved now than politically involved. ... My views I keep them to myself personally or as I say I don't discuss them much even with my family.

After these comments, Gordon was asked explicitly if changes in his theology affected how he believed politically. He replied:

Well it would yes ... now if you had asked me about 12 years ago about the Orange Order and about parading, if there had been a parade every day of the week I would have been out there, but when I sit down and think about it, to me it's all wrong because we're bringing thousands out into the streets ... we went home then [and] all the yahoos who had drink in them ... next thing started stoning the police, they were throwing things, and then you had 2 or 3 days riot, you know, our own police officers were getting hurt. Our own people were getting hurt. ... But I mean 12 years ago I seen nothing really wrong with that.

Here, then, Gordon's disgust at politics; coupled with a renewed spiritual commitment spurred by street preachers, tracts, and a curate in the town, have contributed to his

move to pietism. Gordon's move is confirmed by the disapproval with which he speaks of what he perceives as his rector's political messages from the pulpit:

...[B]efore the Belfast Agreement ... he devoted his whole talk that day to the importance of – I mean, people knew it was important – but he more or less told us a yes vote was what was required of us. Now, I know personally I voted against it. I wasn't in favor of it. My family weren't in favor of it. Although I never say to them the way they have to vote. ... I don't mind him preaching the gospel from the pulpit, that's what he's there for, and that's what he should be doing. The gospel of peace and love, and then on the other hand you're talking about politics ... I still can't get me head around it.

Gordon's moves toward pietism and political moderation are linked. It is interesting that the religious experiences that he credits with this transformation occurred outside the context of his parish – indeed, the changes he has undergone have led him to disapprove of the way his rector approaches religion and politics.

In sum, most changes in the rural COI were in the expected direction – moderation. Reasons given for these changes included the influence of the rector, hymnody, the friendliness of the COI, and the observation of nationalist politics. Amongst these interviewees, there was little evidence that lived experience in a rural community contributed to traditional conservatism. Gordon's move toward pietism might have been somewhat unexpected in this setting, although it should be noted that he linked this personal change with evangelistic experiences outside the context of his parish.

RURAL PCI

The case study of the rural PCI was conducted in March 2003. The pastor agreed to be interviewed and to provide the researcher with contact information for five-seven members of his congregation with a range of characteristics, as above in

the COI. Of the interviewees, three were female and two were male; ages ranged from 16-74; two supported the UUP, one supported both the UUP and DUP, one supported the DUP, and one did not support a party; and occupations included student, manager, retired teacher, office worker, and small businessman.

The pastor serves two congregations in nearby towns in rural Co. Antrim. The larger congregation consists of 115 families and is situated in a town that is about 90% Protestant; the smaller congregation consists of 80 families and is situated in a mixed town. All the interviewees were drawn from the larger congregation, the only church in the town.

In such a context, it was expected that the members would exhibit traditional/conservative or pietist beliefs. Pietism might be related to the lack of opportunity for contact with Catholics and the obvious church-based nature of community life. Traditional conservatism might be related to the influence of the pastor, a prominent Orangeman who speaks publicly on political issues, including opposing the Belfast Agreement. He also participated in the long march from Londonderry to Portadown to publicize the rights of victims and the families of victims of the paramilitaries. That said, the pastor does not sign up to all of the Paisley-style theological and political beliefs outlined above. For example, he did not articulate conspiracy theories, nor proclaim that Ulster Protestants are a chosen people.

There was little evidence of traditional/conservative identity among the interviewees, even though most of their exposure to religious and political issues seemed to come through their pastor via observation of his activities outside of church or his mentioning political issues in prayers or sermons. There was much talk of seeing souls saved among the Presbyterians; whereas the COI interviewees often

brought up social issues (poverty, education). The two youngest interviewees, Greg and Sarah, said that they weren't really interested in politics. With the exception of Jill, who plays in a flute band¹⁸, all of the interviewees' social activism was based in the church. The religious and political beliefs of the interviewees are summarized below.

Table Three: Religion and Politics in the Rural PCI

Name	Occupation	Age	Party	Belfast Agreement Vote	United Ireland	Evangelical Identity	Perceived Change?
Sarah	Office Worker	27	UUP/DUP	No	Incomplete ¹⁹	Pietist	Yes
George	Small Businessman	74	DUP	No	No	Pietist/Mod	No
Millie	Retired Teacher	74	UUP	Yes	Yes	Mod/Rad	No
Greg	Student	16	None	Yes (parents)	Yes	Pietist	Yes
Jill	Manager	32	UUP	Yes	No	Trad/Con	No

In light of that, the perceived changes among members of the congregation were all in the direction of pietism, with Greg and Sarah reporting that they had grown spiritually over the past few years. The consequences of this are more Bible reading, prayer, and involvement with church-based activities. This spiritual growth was linked to the guidance and enthusiasm of the pastor; and the encouragement of others in the congregation. No one perceived changes in their political beliefs. Rather than dwelling on issues like a united Ireland or fears of Catholic domination; the interviewees stressed that Christians should be law-abiding. And given that the pastor said that he has only met one person who admitted to voting for the Belfast Agreement, it is surprising that of the five interviewees, three supported it.²⁰ The following focuses on Sarah and Greg, the only interviewees who perceived changes in themselves.

Sarah is a 27-year-old office worker who was raised in the town and has attended the church all her life. She says she is not interested in politics, but followed her parents' lead in voting against the Belfast Agreement. As far as perceived changes, Sarah says she is growing as a Christian:

Whenever I was at school I would find it was very, very hard ... being a Christian. Obviously you would have been different from the rest but ... it would have been easy to stand down if somebody said something about being a Christian, it would have been easy to laugh along with them, you know. ... Whereas now I find that I don't really care what people [think] ... you realize that you've got something that they haven't got ... I would have more concern for non-Christians, more of a burden to see them saved and praying for them. ... I think as well since I've got older I would be more committed to being in church, and being involved in activities, attending prayer meetings and church services.

When asked what it was about growing older that contributed to her increased involvement, she said:

Well, you get more mature ... but I would think [the pastor] has an awful lot to do with it, too. Since he came I would find myself growing an awful lot more as a Christian and ... I've benefited from his teaching, and he's a good friend, which means a lot as well, he's somebody you can talk to ... and just generally to help you grow as a Christian, become stronger.

Sarah said that the pastor had a "big influence" on her no vote in the Belfast Agreement referendum, but when asked what he would have said or done that would have been an influence, she couldn't recall specific examples.

Sarah, then, links change to growing more mature, and to interaction with the pastor and others in the church. Although she says the pastor influenced her no vote, her pietism indicates that his potential influence on her political views is quite limited.

Greg is a 16-year-old secondary school student who was raised in the town and the church. He said he is not interested in politics, although politics are

increasingly discussed in his classes at school. His parents both voted for the Belfast Agreement and he supports it. He would also support a united Ireland if it meant an end to violence.

Like Sarah, Greg perceives the changes in himself as spiritual:

I've definitely become a stronger Christian in the last few years ... I go to SU [Scripture Union] at school and all that ... and I try to go to every [church] meeting I can ... cause I feel that's my duty as a member. ... As for politics I think I've never really been interested in politics before, it's always been too complicated for me. As I said, I think it's just something that should be kept outside the church and not brought in.

When asked what contributed to his becoming a stronger Christian, he said:

I just feel that I come to that stage in my life where I've come to church ever since I was a baby, on every Sunday, and I just thought; like I wasn't reading my Bible every day, I wasn't praying every day, I thought there must be more to it than this here. And I talked about it with my dad and he encouraged me to read the Bible, start reading it every night, and I started trying to do that. I couldn't do it every night but I try and do it as many nights as I can ... and I feel that's really developed me as a Christian and then [the pastor] just announced on Sunday if anybody was wanting to become a new member of the church, there'd be meetings starting, so I talked to him about it and he said that would be fine, he really encouraged me to come to it. ... And then at school I've friends and they're starting to do things I'm not wanting to do, like the pubs, smoking and stuff like that there, and I thought, well I don't really want to join them in these sorts of things, so I joined the SU, and I got friends that are really close to me now, they're like my best friends, and I think that's really helped me in the last couple of years.

Greg disapproves of some of the pastor's political activities, although this doesn't seem to affect his overall positive impression of his pastor. The following series of questions and answers highlights Greg's concerns:

Greg: [The pastor's] quite high up in the Orangemen ... so he would do a lot of political stuff. I've heard him on ... Radio Ulster talking about political stuff.

Interviewer: And what did you hear him say on Radio Ulster?

Greg: I think he was talking about ...[the] Protestant faith... complete Protestant, anti-Catholic ... he was saying ... evil shouldn't be in there and how right the DUP were and stuff ...

Interviewer: What do you think of your minister's opinions on those subjects?

Greg: Well I believe they're his opinions ... it's up to him what he does with them, but I ... feel happy as long as he doesn't bring it into the church.

Interviewer: Would you agree or disagree with most of his political opinions?

Greg: I believe Sinn Fein is evil because like Gerry Adams has murdered people and stuff like that there ... but I don't believe that you can just be specific to one party, you know, all the time, because parties are changing all the time and the way they're going is changing, so I think you have to be with whatever party is ... going the right way, whenever the voting comes.

Interviewer: As far as his activities as an Orangeman, could you elaborate a bit more on what you think of that?

Greg: Well again it's up to him ... He went on the long march there not long ago, so he missed a couple of weeks preaching. ... If he believes that's right then I don't disagree with it ... but I don't want to be like that. I want to be kinda in between you know, I don't want to be just completely anti-Catholic.

Although he was only 10 years old at the time, Greg recalls his parents' negative impressions of what they perceived as the pastor encouraging a no vote on the Belfast Agreement referendum:

Greg: I remember my dad saying after a church service one day, cause I was out in children's church so I didn't hear it, but I remember him saying to mum, ah, the minister was very no today, like voting no.

Interviewer: What was his feeling about the minister encouraging people to vote no?

Greg: I think he thought that it wasn't right ... he thought that politics is something for outside the church, it shouldn't be brought in and talked about. Well, maybe talked about but not preached about.

Like Sarah, Greg perceives his changes as a result of growing older and of interacting with his pastor and other members of the congregation. Sarah and Greg's opinions of the pastor's political activities are also interesting. It is worth comparing their comments with those of two other members of the congregation, Jill and George, to present a fuller picture of the pastor's influence in this congregation.

George exhibited a strong pietist identity, saying that politics should not be brought into the pulpit. In contrast to Greg, he said that the issue of the Belfast Agreement referendum "was never mentioned in the church, from the pulpit," although the majority of the congregation knew that the pastor was against it.²¹

Jill could not be described as pietist; rather, she expressed beliefs that were more traditional. She believed that religion should have a wider influence in society (this might include the closing of shops on Sundays) and that religion and politics need not be so "separate." Her political views seemed to most closely match the pastor's. Yet she said:

[Our] pastor would be fairly political. He would have fairly strong views. When the campaign was on about the Belfast Agreement we knew very well that [he] thought no, it wasn't a good idea. That didn't mean he told us what way to vote. Cause, I mean, at the end of the day I voted yes because ... if we didn't accept what was going, chances are it would just be, right, this is what you're having. ... And fair enough, it's for him to make his views clear. But the way I would look at it – I don't have to agree with him always, you know.

These comments illuminate the contradictory and complex ways that church members in the pews perceive and interact with their pastor – and highlight the difficulty of attempting to gauge clergy influence. Yet it was still unexpected that no interviewees seemed to be moving in a traditional/conservative direction. A larger sample of interviewees from the congregation might have provided some examples of

traditional conservatism – particularly since the pastor seemed to believe that most of his congregation agreed with him politically. That said, the moves toward pietism were not unexpected either, based on aspects of the hypotheses behind the model such as lived experience in a rural setting.

Discussion

The data presented here offer insights into the research questions posed above. First, the data indicate that genuine changes in evangelical identity are occurring. However, when the models' hypotheses were investigated, change did not always occur in the expected directions. All of the variables included in the models seem relevant, but none of the factors are strictly causal. Rather, the factors interact with each other in complex, multi-dimensional ways. This challenges previous assumptions about evangelical identity. In particular, it demonstrates that a retrenchment of Paisley-style beliefs is not inevitable in times of crisis, as Bruce implies. It also goes beyond Mitchel's argument that change in moderate/radical directions is based largely on theological reflection on the conflict.

Second, the data most strikingly reveal changes in the moderate/radical and pietist directions. Moderation in the Queen's CU and COI models was expected, but pietism within the Queen's CU was unexpected. This may be a case of the well-documented pietist strand of evangelicalism overriding the expected effects of youth, but more research is necessary before anything more than tentative conclusions may be drawn. The lack of traditional conservatism in the PCI model was unexpected. This may be due to the small sample size, which might call for further research among that particular congregation. Or it might be that there actually *are* fewer traditional conservative evangelicals than there used to be. Or it could be that the Paisley-centered focus of previous research overestimated the numbers and influence of

traditional evangelical identity. These are all questions to be addressed in future research.

Third, this data highlighted factors that contributed to change in a moderate/radical direction. In the Queen's CU, interviewees perceived themselves as changing as a result of education and social interaction. Other significant variables in this mix are the interviewees' youth and lived experience of urban Belfast. In the COI, interviewees perceived themselves as changing as a result of COI theology, reflection, and the influence of the rector. The rural location is another significant variable in this context, especially as it didn't seem to inhibit moderation. This data also highlighted several factors that contributed to change in a pietist direction. In the PCI, interviewees perceived themselves as changing as part of a process of growing older, and because of interaction with their pastor and church community. The rural location is another significant variable in this context, particularly the lack of opportunity for contact with Catholics. In the Queen's CU, change in a pietist direction was linked with social interaction and leaving the Free Presbyterian Church. In the COI, Gordon perceived himself as changing as a result of the preaching and teaching of clergy/leaders not associated with his parish.

The congregational data was also significant in that it highlighted the complex and often ambiguous influence of clergy when it comes to influencing the formation of religious and political identities; or affecting change. It is an obvious point, but there are no simple one-to-one relationships between the beliefs of the clergy and the beliefs of their flock. It is perhaps most remarkable that even with small samples the interviewees had such diverse impressions of the way their clergyman presented issues of religion and politics. The members of these congregations may be listening

to the same sermon, but it is as if they are hearing different words. As such, the ability of clergy to influence their flock should not be over or under estimated.

Evangelical identities, then, are in a process of change and are more diverse than was previously assumed. This may have wider implications. For instance, moderate/radical evangelicals may become more active in challenging Paisley-style politics, offering new models for political engagement. Mitchel seems to hold out this hope. Or more evangelicals may assume pietist identities, foregoing political engagement. It may be that right now changes are occurring simultaneously in all these directions, and whether a dominant direction will emerge remains to be seen. If it is not clear that Paisley remains the “Voice of Protestant Ulster,”²² it is certainly clear that more voices have joined the conversation.

Notes

¹ Ulster refers to the northernmost province of Ireland. Ulster is comprised of nine counties; six of which remained part of the United Kingdom after partition in 1920.

² The Royal Ulster Constabulary, now the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

³ The Assembly was suspended in Oct. 2001 after the PSNI uncovered evidence of IRA intelligence gathering at parliament buildings.

⁴ He does not discount other factors – for instance he notes that in ECONI “the age profile of key personnel is that of well-educated individuals in their 30s and 40s with significant ministry experience outside Northern Ireland” (266) – but neither does he highlight them or explore fully how other factors may interact with theology.

⁵ That said, Boal’s (1997) survey of churchgoers in Belfast indicates that young people may be more conservative than the older generation. This challenges the theoretical claims about youth and lived experience in an urban setting presented here.

⁶ The generalizations stressed here should not obscure the fact that students at Queen’s come from a variety of backgrounds: rural and urban; rich and poor. A word on Queen’s setting in Belfast is also in

order. Belfast is Northern Ireland's largest city, and has a reputation for being its most liberal city.

Attitudes among members of a CU at a university in a different setting might be quite different.

⁷ Membership of CU's is overwhelmingly Protestant. Catholics are not precluded from joining CU's, but few do.

⁸ The Queen's CU case study sample size is significantly larger than the rural COI and PCI sample sizes. This is because research on the Queen's CU was conducted separately, as part of a pilot study on changes in evangelicalism. The 20 interviewees comprise the total study. The research on the rural COI and PCI are part of a much larger study on evangelicalism. When completed, it will have gathered data from an urban Free Presbyterian congregation, an urban PCI congregation, and six evangelical organizations. Since the focus in this ongoing study is much broader, data are being collected from a much smaller sample from each congregation/organization. The entire study will gather data from about 50 evangelicals.

⁹ For the interview questions, contact the author.

¹⁰ For a fuller analysis of the case study, see Ganiel 2002.

¹¹ The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) is the largest unionist party in Northern Ireland and is officially pro-agreement (although there is a significant and growing anti-agreement group within the UUP); the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is anti-agreement; and Alliance, Women's Coalition and Women's Labour are cross-community and pro-agreement.

¹² Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

¹³ Though the rector might consider himself evangelical, that does not necessarily mean that all the members of his congregation identify themselves as evangelical.

¹⁴ To protect confidentiality, occupations were changed to similar.

¹⁵ Susan said that she is not even a Christian, let alone an evangelical. Therefore it is unfair to describe her "evangelical identity." However, her political beliefs were moderate/radical.

¹⁶ The moderate nationalist party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

¹⁷ The nationalist party with alleged links to the IRA.

¹⁸ The flute bands march with Orange Order lodges during the parades.

¹⁹ Due to a tape recorder malfunction, the part of the interview addressing this question was destroyed.

²⁰ The pastor said: “I think the vast majority [of members of the congregation] were no ... to be perfectly honest over the time since the Belfast Agreement was signed ... I have met one person who admitted voting yes ... and admitted that he was wrong.”

²¹ George is an office holder in the church; it is not likely that he would have been away on all of the Sundays that the Belfast Agreement could have potentially been mentioned.

²² The title of Clifford Smyth’s (1987) book: *Ian Paisley: The Voice of Protestant Ulster*

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