



## Archbishop Michael Ramsey and evangelicals in the Church of England

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Date:

2014

Group(s):

[British History](#)

Subject(s):

[Religious history](#), [Evangelical studies](#)

Item Type:

[Book chapter](#)

Tag(s):

[Anglicanism](#), [archbishops of Canterbury](#), [Church of England](#)

Permanent URL:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M67W67515>

Abstract:

Michael Ramsey's time as archbishop of Canterbury (1961-74) was a crucial period of transition in evangelicals' view of themselves and of how they should relate to the wider church. However, Ramsey has often been assumed to have been either indifferent or actively hostile to evangelical concerns. This chapter argues that this understanding of Ramsey was a product of a relationship of tension between evangelicals and the wider church, a story which has since been told in terms of dogged evangelical persistence in the face of calculated marginalisation. In fact, Ramsey enjoyed

good working relationships and indeed friendships with many within the liberal or centrist parts of the evangelical constituency; though early contact with conservative evangelicals was tentative, there was a marked change in atmosphere after the safe passage of the Vesture of Ministers Measure in 1964. Ramsey was viewed as clearly orthodox in his theology, and that there were several points of contact with evangelical theology, in relation to the Cross, evangelism, and his emphasis on personal holiness. There was, however, a real difference of emphasis in relation to method, in that what some evangelicals saw as doctrinal 'clarity' and a willingness to contend for the truth was to Ramsey evidence of intellectual rigidity and an unwillingness to engage with an opposing view. Even if there was mutual distrust, there is no evidence of deliberate efforts by the central institutions of the Church to keep evangelicals from positions of influence. This was the case with the appointment of bishops, membership of the Church Assembly and of the many commissions and working groups set up to consider difficult issues including Anglican-Methodist unity. The persistent story in evangelical folklore of exclusion from the corridors of power tells us as much about (some) evangelicals' view of themselves as it does about the actual workings of the Church of England.

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