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EDITORIAL

1976 marked three important events in the history of “American Evangelicalism.” First, evangelicalism came to the attention of the American public with a splash. *Time*, *Christianity Today*, and *The Christian Century*—each popular magazine catering to very different audiences—celebrated the importance of the evangelical movement. Jimmy Carter, a self-professed evangelical, had just been elected president of the United States of America. And through its scientific polling, Gallup had just discovered that 34 percent of Americans were properly identifiable as evangelical. Fifty years ago, evangelicalism emerged from relative obscurity to become the nation’s most prominent theological movement.

In a second important event that same year, *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell was published by Zondervan. The author, a founding member of the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, felt compelled to address debates occurring at that evangelical institution. Lindsell’s book not only gained Fuller’s attention; it also tapped into a widespread desire among many evangelicals to help their theological schools preserve a high view of Scripture. In a way, the book exceeded its name. The shots fired in the “battle” for Fuller were echoed by running battles in several denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention. These battles together point to the existence of a broader “war” that would define the bulk of the evangelical movement as inerrantist.

Third, David S. Dockery enrolled in 1976 as a seminary student with a deep hunger to know God’s Word, to form orthodox theology, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Having read several of Francis Schaeffer’s books and J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, he developed a conviction to dive into the biblical languages. Dockery went on to earn master’s degrees from three separate institutions. He then completed a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Texas system while teaching theology and New Testament at Criswell College. Soon after, Dockery began demonstrating the theologically wise and personally winsome leadership which made him a highly respected evangelical. He served theological institutions from

Louisville to Jackson to Chicago before returning to his beloved *alma mater* in Fort Worth, where he is now the tenth president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

This issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* is dedicated to an important emphasis in the life and thought of Dockery and in the identity of this institution. I have entitled the issue, “David S. Dockery and American Evangelicalism,” in emulation of his appreciative way of marking some important contributions by our common mentor, James Leo Garrett Jr. In the Fall of 2022, at a critical moment for our seminary, Dockery as the editor of this journal gathered several essays under the title, “James Leo Garrett Jr. and the Southwestern Theological Tradition.” That issue defined a trajectory for theological recovery in our school and denomination. Long before 2022, however, Dockery built on Garrett’s legacy by repeatedly demonstrating why Southern Baptists must be classified as evangelicals. For more on the theological and institutional importance of Dockery, I commend the essays written by Garrett himself in *Convictional Civility* and *Baptist Theology*.¹

While all the articles in this issue address American Evangelicalism, four were delivered at the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) Annual Conference which met in Fort Worth in January 2026. These four lectures were written by Gregg R. Allison, Nathan A. Finn, Robert B. Sloan, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III on behalf of the new Southwestern Center for Global Evangelical Theology.

This issue begins with a preparatory yet pointed historical–theological essay that echoes a similarly titled essay written by Dockery. “Evangelicalism: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” rehearses some of the same material as Dockery’s “Evangelicalism: Past, Present, and Future,” but breaks new ground by exposing several significant theological shifts. These troubling trends developed in the nineteenth century and have reached epidemic proportions today. Next, Allison, who teaches at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, reviews the history of the evangelical view of Scripture. Of interest to some will be the chart that Bob Yarborough collated to document the important work of the Evangelical Theological Society recurring sessions dedicated to the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

¹James Leo Garrett Jr., “David Samuel Dockery: Evangelical Baptist and the Doctrine of the Bible,” in *Convictional Civility: Engaging the Culture in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of David S. Dockery*, ed. C. Ben Mitchell, Carla D. Sanderson, and Gregory Alan Thornbury (B&H Publishing, 2015), 3–10; James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), 704–10.

Next, Jeffrey Bingham, a treasured colleague and research professor at Southwestern Seminary, discloses how the early church father, Irenaeus, can help evangelicals learn to honor and interpret Scripture in the proper manner. Bingham's inspiring essay, "Evangelicals, Irenaeus, and the Bible," is a must read for any evangelical interested in the intersection of hermeneutics and orthodox Christianity, which should include every evangelical in every theological discipline. Allen Bramlett then takes us closer in time to our day with his review of B. H. Carroll's pneumatology. The pastor of Trinity Hills Baptist Church in Benbrook, Texas, finds that the first president of Southwestern Seminary and leading Texas Baptist must be classified evangelical according to David Bebbington's famous quadrilateral.

In the fifth article of this issue, Finn, a professor at North Greenville University and longtime friend of Dockery, reminds us of how Carl F. H. Henry insured American Evangelical identity would be intertwined with a robust doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Afterward, Blake McKinney of Texas Baptist College rehearses the history of Dockery's efforts to help Southern Baptists realize they are truly evangelical. Finally, Sloan, president of Houston Christian University, offers eleven theses to help Christian schools remain firmly evangelical. We hope you as a reader are blessed by each essay and by the book reviews which follow.

Malcolm B. Yarnell III

EVANGELICALISM: YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Malcolm B. Yarnell III*

A perennial question faces the evangelical movement when it looks in the mirror: Who are we? What exactly is “evangelicalism”? In an essay for the 1993 volume, *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, edited by David S. Dockery, Robert Johnston surveyed the opinions of various scholars: Cullen Murphy compared American evangelicalism to a twelve-ring circus under a “vast tent.” Thomas Stransky deemed it “a confusing conglomeration.” Leonard Sweet coined a triple aphorism for evangelicalism in the late twentieth century: “First, it is important. Second, it is understudied. Third, it is diverse.”¹

Sweet’s third truth is an understatement. Evangelicalism incorporates descendants from both the German Pietist and English Puritan movements, locates peaceful Mennonites with the Dutch Reformed who once persecuted them, and encloses the Baptists who arose in the seventeenth century with the Methodists who arose in the eighteenth century, the Dispensationalists who arose in the nineteenth century, and the Pentecostals who arose in the twentieth century. However, some members of each of these modern denominations are better characterized not as evangelical but “liberal.” John Stott divided contemporary Western Christianity into three “species”: Catholic, liberal, and evangelical.²

Nonetheless, we still seek to define evangelicalism. Johnston listed several efforts to restrict the meaning of evangelicalism so certain groups might benefit by claiming the whole for their part. Narrow definitions have been offered by partisans from the fundamentalist, revivalist, premillennialist,

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¹Robert K. Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (B&H, 1993), 40.

²John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (2003; Langham, 2013), xiii.

Baconian, and Calvinist camps.³ Proposing a fuller theological definition for evangelicalism, William Abraham recognized evangelicalism was “an essentially contested concept.”⁴ Alas, historical and systematic theologians may approach despair as they attempt to define it. Donald Bloesch found its meaning “fluid.” Donald Dayton recognized no “univocal definition.” Timothy Weber classified its meaning as “one of the biggest problems.” Norman Kraus concluded, “The movement defies a precise theological definition.”⁵

Its varieties, fluidities, and imprecisions should not keep scholars from at least describing evangelicalism. J. I. Packer characterized evangelical Christianity generally as practical, pure, unitive, and rational. Its fundamental doctrines include the supremacy of Scripture, the majesty of Christ, and the lordship of the Spirit, as well as conversion, evangelism, and fellowship.⁶ Most famously, David Bebbington, studying the British movement which arose in the eighteenth-century revivals, said evangelicalism could be described under a fourfold rubric: “conversionism,” “activism,” “biblicism,” and “crucicentrism.”⁷ I remember when two editors asked me to write an endorsement for a book celebrating the quadrilateral. I struggled, because the definition seemed both narrow historically and geographically. While those four principles certainly characterize evangelicalism, more than a few Roman Catholics might qualify as evangelicals if shorn of historical context. Don’t get me wrong. This systematic theologian thinks this quadrilateral, written by a treasured friend, is helpful, but it is context limited.

Others have tried different ways of defining evangelicalism. George Marsden used a broad approach of scholarly classification and a narrow approach of self-description to define evangelicals in a lecture in Louisville, Kentucky. Under the broad approach, Marsden discovered five basic views held by evangelicals: the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture; the historical character of divine redemption; salvation by faith alone in the cross of Christ; and the necessities both of evangelism and missions and of spiritual transformation.⁸

³Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” 41.

⁴William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (Harper & Row, 1984), 72.

⁵Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” 42–43.

⁶J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Identity Problem* (Latimer House, 1978), 15–23.

⁷David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 203. Cf. Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral: Characterizing the British Gospel Movement* (Baylor University Press, 2011).

⁸George M. Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 28–29.

Earlier than Marsden, James Leo Garrett Jr., arrived at a similar conclusion. The dean of Southern Baptist theologians said evangelicals “insist upon the supremacy of Scripture, the all-sufficiency of the divine-human Jesus Christ, the necessity of the transforming experience of being born anew or justified by grace through faith, and the inner compulsion to share one’s faith in Christ with those who do not believe.”⁹

Johnston postulated a definition which accounted both for the movement’s center and divisions. “Evangelicals,” he wrote, “are those who believe the gospel is to be experienced personally, defined biblically, and communicated passionately.”¹⁰ These practices appear to be what bring evangelicals together. However, Johnston argued the diversity in this “family” of believers must also be given account.¹¹ Having long studied the movement’s variety,¹² he found two causes for divergence. These causes borrow Scripture’s names for two Persons of the divine Trinity, the Word and the Spirit. Evangelicals inclined toward dogmatic description are characterized by a “theology of the Word.” Other evangelicals, inclined toward personal experience, embrace a “theology of the Spirit.”¹³

The most recent effort to define evangelicalism contains less historical description and more theological prescription. In *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, Cory Marsh tries to remove the “elasticity” from evangelicalism, “Exorcising the Jello out of Evan-Jello-Calism.”¹⁴ The professor of New Testament at Southern California Seminary offers two doctrinal fundamentals for evangelicalism—“the supremacy of Scripture” and “the exclusivity of Jesus”—and three practices—“zealous evangelism,” “participating in theological education,” and “consistent local church fellowship.”¹⁵ Marsh is concerned that the evangelical label is being coopted or confused by “quasi-Christian cultists,” by derisive terms like “Big Eva” and “Big Tent Evangelicalism,” and by the populist attempt to circumscribe evangelicalism under the American cultural and social group known as

⁹James Leo Garrett Jr., “Who are the ‘Evangelicals?’” in *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’*, James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull (Mercer University Press, 1983), 63.

¹⁰Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” 48.

¹¹The descriptor, “family,” derives from Samuel S. Hill. Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” 46.

¹²Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

¹³Johnston, “Varieties of American Evangelicalism,” 49–51.

¹⁴Cory M. Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith: Five Fundamentals of Evangelical Identity* (Mentor, 2026), 9.

¹⁵Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, chs. 2–6.

“white evangelicals.”¹⁶ He also provides “rants” on “evangelical politics” and “evangelical Christian celebrityism” and makes a case for “biblical fundamentalism.”¹⁷

Recognizing the variability and fluidity found in the many studious descriptions and prescriptions, we can still discern some coherence. So, what exactly draws evangelicals together? Scripture and history can help here. Before considering the present and future of evangelicalism, let us survey the past of the movement. Americans are perhaps the most historically illiterate among the Western nations, but Scripture tells us that the Lord promised never to leave his people alone (Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5; John 14:18; Heb 13:15) and that the Holy Spirit comes to indwell all true believers (John 14:16–17; Rom 8:8–11; 1 Cor 7:40). Pressed by the weight of such inspired texts, we must learn to hear the voices of believers past and present.¹⁸ We begin, however, as any evangelical would, with the voices of the prophets and the apostles, who were themselves inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF EVANGELICALISM

Toward the end of my tenure as a Master of Divinity student at this conservative evangelical seminary, I passed the associational ordination council called by my Southern Baptist church in Shreveport, Louisiana. During this sacred occasion, I was asked several memorable questions. The most important came from a pastor who wanted my definition of “the gospel.” I took him to the first words of Jesus in the first written Gospel account: “After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:14–15). But he wanted to go beyond Jesus, kingdom, repentance, and faith, and get into historic arguments over Calvinism and Arminianism. At first, I failed to hear the real question behind his stated question. Nevertheless, he set me on a positive lifelong journey of clarifying the gospel.

Many systematic theologies presume or provide a quick definition of the gospel. Because of the training and impassioning I received from Roy

¹⁶Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, 12–16.

¹⁷Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, chs. 7–9.

¹⁸This was the burden of the second half of Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (B&H Academic, 2007), chs. 4–6.

¹⁹Cf. David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture* (B&H Academic, 2024).

J. Fish, the holder of the L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism (“Chair of Fire”) here at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I am deeply convicted to proclaim the gospel upon every occasion possible—every sermon, every wedding, every funeral, every counseling session, every civic prayer, etc. But to proclaim *ton euangelion*, “the gospel,” one must understand what the gospel is. As a result, perhaps my most developed lecture dwells upon the gospel. I also point students to the utility of the creeds of classical Christianity—the Apostles’ Creed in the mind properly orients one’s thoughts toward the gospel during proclamation.

In my systematic theology, the longest chapter thus answers the question, “Who will save us?” After rehearsing the biblical evidence for grounding salvation in Trinitarian grace,²⁰ for a holistic understanding of Christ’s divine and human work,²¹ and of the significant gospel themes and terms of the Bible, such as “Word,” “truth,” “faith,” “teaching,” “testimony,” and “tradition,”²² as well as “promise,” “God and Savior,” “God and Man,” “proclamation,” and “gospel,”²³ I summarized the gospel as follows:

1. The gospel includes the truth about both Christ’s person and his work: Jesus is the Lord God incarnate, the promised Messiah who brings God’s Kingdom.
2. For our salvation, Jesus died on the cross and was buried.
3. For our justification, he arose from the dead and was seen by many. By his life, death, and resurrection, he recapitulated humanity itself.
4. Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, where he now intercedes for his followers and will soon return to judge the living and the dead.
5. The church must call upon all human beings to respond in repentance toward and faith in the man Christ Jesus as the one Lord God if they would be saved.
6. Saving faith, which comes through the verbal proclamation of the Word and by the internal grace of the Holy Spirit, requires both faith and confession.
7. The gospel was so prominent in the preaching of the Lord

²⁰Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Word*, Theology for Every Person, vol. 2 (B&H, 2026), 242–43.

²¹Yarnell, *Word*, 243–46.

²²Yarnell, *Word*, 246–52.

²³Yarnell, *Word*, 252–75.

and his apostles, and its eternal consequences are so critical, that we can only conclude every Christian proclamation must highlight the gospel.²⁴

A few notes before we leave the biblical basis of evangelicalism. First, the effort to clarify the gospel bears fruit, even in the seminary classroom. One Presbyterian student interrupted a class of one hundred to announce he just believed the gospel and had become a believer. We rejoiced.²⁵ He is now a rising New Testament scholar.

Second, I disagree with Marsh, who argues the “content” of the gospel changes with each divine administration (dispensation).²⁶ A careful study of the Bible’s language of “promise” (Hebrew *dabar*; Greek *epangelia*) and “covenant” (Hebrew *berith*; Greek *diatheke*) demonstrates the continuity of gospel content across redemptive history is located in the promised Messiah and his redemptive work upon the cross and in his resurrection.²⁷ Third, without an emphasis on proclaiming the *euangelion*, there can be no “evangelicalism.”

THE REDISCOVERY OF EVANGELICALISM IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

While I use the language of “rediscovery” regarding evangelicalism in the Protestant Reformation, please do not hear me saying it was somehow lost in the previous centuries. Any evangelical who has carefully and generously read the orthodox church fathers—from Polycarp of Smyrna to Athanasius of Alexandria to Gregory Nazianzus and Augustine of Hippo—alongside the great theologians of the long medieval period—from Boethius to Anselm of Canterbury to Thomas Aquinas to John Wyclif and Jan Hus—recognizes such Christians have much to teach us about the gospel in its substance and import. The Roman Catholic Church does not exclusively own the sum of Christianity before the sixteenth century.

What I mean by “rediscovery” concerns the undeniable fact that the souls of such Christians as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Katharina Schütz Zell, and Pilgram Marpeck, as well as Balthasar Hübmaier, William

²⁴Yarnell, *Word*, 275–76. I also call each reader to make certain his or her personal salvation. Yarnell, *Word*, 239–40, 276.

²⁵Alex Sibley, “Student born again during Systematic Theology lecture,” *Southwestern News*, May 2001, <https://swbts.edu/news/from-the-profs-student-born-again-during-systematic-theology-lecture/>.

²⁶Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, 72–73.

²⁷Yarnell, *Word*, 252–62.

Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, and Anne Askew were profoundly stirred by the gospel of Jesus Christ. They acted with conviction and wrote at length about their faith in terms of its rediscovery as well as its antiquity. The latter four were brutally martyred for their explicitly “evangelical” faith by those who rejected it as a novelty.²⁸

Marsden noted that, “despite all the varieties of evangelicalism,” “most of them are connected by a common heritage that produces common traits. All reflect the sixteenth-century Reformation effort to get back to the pure Scriptures as the only ultimate authority and to confine salvation to the God-given faith in Christ, unencumbered by presumptuous human authority.”²⁹

As mentioned above, Leo Garrett proposed a similar historiography. Garrett also focused his review of evangelicalism on four broader land areas.³⁰ His chronologically longer and geographically wider approach yields similar results to that of Bebbington. But Garrett has the advantage of pushing us outward to global Christianity from a predominantly Anglo-American worldview. He also has the advantage of reminding us of the roots of modern evangelicalism in the sixteenth century.

Various linguistic terms such as *evangelische* (German), *évangélique* (French), and “evangelical” (English) were used across Europe, from the time of Erasmus onward to describe those who were or are called “Protestant,” “Lutheran,” “Reformed,” “Anglican,” “Anabaptist.”³¹ The central shared doctrinal characteristics of evangelicals of the Reformation period include continuing affirmation of the classical understanding of Trinity and Christology; an emphasis upon justification by personal or conscientious, though not atomistic or experientially programmatic, faith; a high view of the authority of the Christian scriptures; some appropriation of the doctrine of the royal priesthood of all believers; and a rejection of the Roman doctrines of the sacrifice of the Mass and transubstantiation, although there remained a range of views on the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.

²⁸Historians generally consider “evangelical” a proper description for most English Reformers. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (Yale University Press, 1996), 2. However, sixteenth-century evangelicals do not exhibit the same characteristics as eighteenth-century evangelicals, as seen in their differing attitudes toward “conversionism.” Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 397–405.

²⁹Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 29.

³⁰Garrett, “Who Are the ‘Evangelicals?’” 35.

³¹“Continental Europe, the British Isles, Latin America, and the United States.” Garrett, “Who Are the ‘Evangelicals?’” 35–38.

Besides their various positions on the eucharist, major divisions among Reformation-era evangelicals can be found in their understandings of water baptism, especially its recipients; their doctrines on the governance of the church, ranging from congregationalism to Presbyterianism to Episcopacy; and their multiple views of the relationship between church and state, from royalism and Erastianism to toleration and religious liberty. The divisions focus primarily although not exclusively on the more practical aspects of the Christian faith. These divisions became solidified in the confessionalization of the various Reformation faiths. Happily, we know much about the Reformers' understanding of the gospel itself through the great confessions generated in Augsburg, Wittenberg, and Switzerland, as well as London, Heidelberg, and beyond. Sadly, evangelicals can be found not only among the persecuted; the persecuted too often became the persecutors.³²

THE RADICALIZATIONS OF EVANGELICALISM IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In the seventeenth century, newer churches continued to form and confess their faith alongside the existing evangelical churches of the Reformation. The British Isles and their colonies are instructive, for here the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers have their origins. These denominations extended the logic of the Puritanism which became a major party in the Church of England. The origins of Puritanism are found in Elizabeth Tudor's reign. The evangelical Queen of England's steady refusal to reform the nation too fast or too far bothered those who became known as the Puritans.³³

The difference between the evangelical Anglicans and the evangelical Puritans can be seen at first in their temperaments more than in their theologies. Drawing on the phrase of an Elizabethan pamphleteer, Patrick Collinson, the most accomplished scholar of Puritanism, famously described Puritans as the "hotter sort of Protestants."³⁴ Puritans saw the

³²Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Religious Liberty: A Survey of its Progress and Challenges in Christian History," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6.1 (Spring 2009): 119–38; Yarnell, "Roger Williams's Contribution to Religious Liberty and Baptists: A Reassessment," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 67.1 (Fall 2024): 9–29.

³³On Elizabeth's Lutheran-leaning evangelical faith, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Theology of Elizabeth I: Politique or Believer?" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 62.1 (Fall 2019): 3–31.

³⁴Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967; Oxford University Press, 1998), 26–27.

gospel as requiring not only deep contemplation but vigorous action. They were driven by their brand of Calvinism to seek both personal assurance of salvation and social change through government.

The Germanic-speaking continental context is also instructive. The Pietistic movement memorialized in the life and writings of Philipp Jakob Spener³⁵ had its greatest impact among the Lutherans. Its deep devotional and moral emphases borrowed from the writings of some Puritans, influenced many Reformed Christians on the continent, and persuaded many Mennonites. Pietism's "second" reformation³⁶ gained traction in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The Moravians, who helped inspire both the modern missions and Methodist movements, became a major arm of Pietism in the early eighteenth century through the tireless efforts of Nicholas von Zinzendorf.³⁷

Both Puritanism and Pietism, and the denominations they changed or spawned, were marked by a radical passion for further reformation, a reformation not merely of the head but of the heart, not only in the person but in the church parishes or pious gatherings (*collegia pietatis*), indeed in the broader church and society. Whether deservedly or not, both passionate Pietists and dissenting Puritans could by turns be quite critical of Protestant scholasticism for their supposed doctrinal coldness and the state churches for their reticence to require gospel faithfulness in the whole society. It may startle some to learn that neither radical spirituality nor radical "Christian nationalism" is new. Both have roots in the attitudes and actions of European evangelicals.³⁸

THE REVIVAL OF EVANGELICALISM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Like the radical evangelicals of the seventeenth century, the revival evangelicals of the eighteenth century both changed denominations and spawned new groups of Christians. Part of the genius of evangelicalism is its ability to inspire the pursuit of godliness; part of the difficulty of

³⁵Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, transl. Theodore G. Tappert (1675; Fortress Press, 1964).

³⁶Roger Olsen and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2015).

³⁷J. E. Hutton, *Illustrated History of the Moravian Church* (Hosanna Fellowship Press, 2017), 147–249.

³⁸For an example of early Christian nationalism taken to radical extremes, see the Fifth Monarchist movement which swept up some Congregationalists and Baptists. Bernard S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism* (Faber, 1972).

evangelicalism is its propensity to become the cause of division. The multiplicity of denominations in America, whose people were profoundly shaped by the revivals, is truly amazing. One huge group of denominations can trace its roots to the heart and head of the Arminian John Wesley and Charles Wesley, another to the Calvinistic George Whitefield.

All three developed their spirituality in the Holy Club which met with other devoted Christians in Oxford in the 1730s.³⁹ Their early lives were marked by intense piety, social service, and controversy over method. John Wesley went to colonial America on mission. After failing and fleeing Georgia, he came under the influence of the Moravians, who had established a work at Fetter Lane in London. Troubled and seeking assurance, Wesley was overcome by divine grace in his personal “moment of Pentecost” on May 24, 1738. He felt his “heart strangely warmed” while Luther’s preface to Romans was read in a Christian meeting at Aldersgate. “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine.”⁴⁰ Wesley’s experience compelled him into a life of itinerant preaching and active organizing among the Arminian Methodists.

Whitefield followed a similar track with the Calvinist Methodists, and with Jonathan Edwards, became one of the leading lights in the Evangelical Revivals in colonial America. These revivals had a huge impact on American culture. Whitefield both upheld the sovereignty of divine grace in human salvation and freely proclaimed the gospel to everyone he could reach with his voice. His blend of Puritan orthodoxy and activity in calling for personal conversion established a standard for American evangelical piety. Baptists in America were reinforced in doctrine and benefited numerically under the impact of Whitefield’s powerful heartfelt preaching.

Alas, however, Whitefield was a proponent of slavery and Edwards purchased fellow human beings as if they were portable property. Thankfully, Wesley opposed the evil institution. Race-based chattel slavery has long bedeviled the American evangelical movement. It has arguably still not come entirely to grips with its legacy of hierarchy, abuse, and racism.

THE REVOLUTIONS IN EVANGELICALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In his introduction to *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, Fisher

³⁹Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (London, 1837).

⁴⁰Roy Hattersley, *The Life of John Wesley: A Brand from the Burning* (Doubleday, 2003), 136.

Humphreys argues evangelicals were transformed by three upheavals in “an age of revolution.” These upheavals occurred in the arenas of politics, industry, and intellect, but the intellectual revolution challenged evangelicals most. The rationalism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment spread through the Protestant academy with the historical critical method of Bible study.

Two kinds of theology thus began to emerge rather early: On the one hand, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ernst Troeltsch, and Albrecht Ritschl helped create Protestant liberalism in their effort to provide an apologetic to those immersed in the latest intellectual trends. Humphreys, perhaps following Karl Barth’s similar critique of Schleiermacher,⁴¹ opined, “An apologist is always tempted to give away too much to the opposition.”⁴² On the other hand, those who became known as evangelicals “did their work for the community of faith, the church.”⁴³

The intellectual revolution affected conservative evangelicals in ways historians have discussed extensively and in ways we have not. Bebbington noted Edward Irving’s speculation about the potential peccability of Christ in his humanity,⁴⁴ and Michael Watts highlighted the late nineteenth century decline in preaching about hell,⁴⁵ but evidence abounds for further and widespread substantial shifts, especially in Trinity and Christology. There is little doubt evangelicals in the late nineteenth and subsequent centuries began defending the faith against the encroachment of unbelief in the academy. However, evangelicals certainly began to slip, not in the existence of faith, but in its essence.⁴⁶

For instance, evangelicals began dividing over the immutability of the divine Christ. On the one side, scholars like H. P. Liddon, the Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, defended the deity of Jesus Christ. Liddon

⁴¹Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, new ed., transl. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (1947; Eerdmans, 2002), 430.

⁴²Humphreys, “Introduction,” in *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, ed. Fisher Humphreys, Christian Classics (Broadman Press, 1981), 12.

⁴³Humphreys, “Introduction,” 13.

⁴⁴Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 93.

⁴⁵Michael R. Watts, *John Clifford and Radical Nonconformity*, ed. Joel C. Gregory and David W. Bebbington (Baylor University Press, 2025), xv, 45, 53, 57, 99, 113; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 145.

⁴⁶Innovation can be seen in the very arrangement of representative nineteenth-century theological texts. Humphreys placed the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of his systematic ordering of evangelical texts, mimicking the approach of Schleiermacher. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, transl. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler, 2 vols. (Westminster John Knox, 2016), 1019–37.

deployed the Athanasian Creed to remind his readers that Christ is “equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.”⁴⁷ Liddon listed four misconceptions about the Person of Christ, the second and third of which stated, “The Infinite Being was confined within the bounds of the finite Nature which he assumed,” and “God ceased to be really Himself when He thus took on Him man’s nature.”⁴⁸ The New Testament scholar F. J. A. Hort joined Liddon in upholding the divine nature of the eternal Christ.⁴⁹

On the other side were Kenotic theologians like H. R. Mackintosh, Edinburgh professor of systematic theology, and English congregational pastor Peter T. Forsyth. Mackintosh began by accusing “traditional” theologians of shrinking from the truth that Christ was “kinsman Redeemer.”⁵⁰ Differentiating his new diminution of Christ from “the older Kenoticism” of the German conservative Gottfried Thomasius,⁵¹ Mackintosh supported his Kenoticism with four claims. The fourth is heard among conservative evangelicals today: “We cannot predicate of Him two consciences or two wills.” Starting from this monothelitic position, which was condemned at the third ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680–681), he argued Christ underwent “a real surrender of the glory and prerogatives of deity,” “a Divine self-reduction,” and “a prior self-adjustment of deity.” Christ, he said, “laid aside the form and privilege of deity.”⁵² Mackintosh went on to mix temporal and eternal categories in the vein of Arianism. He accused those who teach Christ had a truly human mind and a truly divine mind of sinning.⁵³ Forsyth argued that Christ laid aside his “less ethical” divine attributes, such as his omniscience, omnipotence, and ubiquity.⁵⁴ Forsyth’s favored analogies all treat Christ as mere man.⁵⁵

In yet another instance, we find evangelical theologians beginning to diverge over God as Trinity. It surprises us to learn that the most stalwart

⁴⁷H. P. Liddon, “The Incarnation of Christ,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 189.

⁴⁸Liddon, “The Incarnation of Christ,” 189.

⁴⁹Fenton John Anthony Hort, “Jesus the Lord,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 212–14.

⁵⁰H. R. Mackintosh, “A Kenotic Christology,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 193.

⁵¹Mackintosh, “A Kenotic Christology,” 194.

⁵²Mackintosh, “A Kenotic Christology,” 196.

⁵³Mackintosh, “A Kenotic Christology,” 201.

⁵⁴P. T. Forsyth, “Analogies for the Incarnation,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 203.

⁵⁵Forsyth, “Analogies for the Incarnation,” 204–6.

and respected defender of divine reality and biblical truthfulness within the German academy, Adolf Schlatter, denigrated the Trinity. “For St. John,” he wrote, “the foundation of faith lay solely in Jesus himself—not in a metaphysical Christology or a doctrine of the Trinity, not in a speculation about the life of God before the creation or of the eternal glory of the Son, but in a particular history.”⁵⁶ Schlatter defended the historicity of the biblical text, but diminished the God of the text. He disagreed with his friend and colleague at the University of Berlin, the last great German liberal theologian, Adolf von Harnack, about Scripture.⁵⁷ But Schlatter’s dogmatics focus on philosophical discourse, reflect Harnack’s Hellenization thesis, and promote love at the expense of justification by faith.⁵⁸

Thankfully, orthodox theologians were still found among evangelicals. R. W. Dale both defended penal substitutionary atonement and rejected the Hellenization thesis that undermined the classical doctrine of the Trinity. The Birmingham Congregationalist pastor expressed appreciation for the fourth-century church’s triumph for the Trinity: “The struggle of Athanasius was a struggle for the very substance of the Gospel of Christ; and the creed of Nicaea is the symbol of his victory.”⁵⁹ Critical Greek New Testament scholar Brooke Foss Westcott likewise connected the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to the gospel.⁶⁰

The intellectual revolutions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries bequeathed a conflicted legacy upon evangelicalism. She surely if slowly began compromising the ontological truth of God and Christ even as she defended the epistemological truth of Scripture. The churches fared little better, as preaching on the doctrine of the Trinity notably declined between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶¹

We have not mentioned the Second Great Awakening, which began in the early eighteenth century but became organized and energized through the ministry of Charles Grandison Finney. Finney has been criticized

⁵⁶Adolf Schlatter, “Jesus the Word of God,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 218.

⁵⁷Werner Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian*, transl. Robert W. Yarbrough (Baker, 1995), 96–97.

⁵⁸Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 103, 121, 125.

⁵⁹R. W. Dale, “The Revelation of the Holy Trinity,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 388.

⁶⁰Brooke Foss Westcott, “The Glory of the Holy Trinity,” in Humphreys, *Nineteenth Century Evangelical Theology*, 391.

⁶¹Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Preaching,” in *The Trinity in the Canon: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Proposal*, ed. Brandon D. Smith (B&H Academic, 2023), 369–400.

practically for instrumentalizing the grace of spiritual “revival” so that it became human “revivalism.”⁶² He can also be criticized theologically for a tendency toward Pelagianism, ascribing to the subject some agency to regenerate itself.⁶³ Whatever the substance of his evangelistic theology, the numeric increase in evangelicalism seemed spectacular.

A RECOVERY IN EVANGELICALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The courageous struggle to maintain the epistemological credibility of holy Scripture in the middle decades of the twentieth century is well known. In the 1920s, evangelicals began splitting from modernists over their views of Scripture, especially in the northern denominations. Southern denominations generally remained conservative.⁶⁴ Conservative evangelicals joined together to contribute to the tracts known as *The Fundamentals*.⁶⁵ Marsden found two contrary impulses among these conservative or fundamentalist evangelicals in the 1930s: a negative “militancy against modernist theology and cultural change,” accompanied by “a positive impulse” to win souls for Christ.⁶⁶

A “new evangelicalism” began to emerge from the fundamentalist movement in the 1940s and 1950s as, among others, Carl F. H. Henry argued for, and Billy Graham carried out, a positive program of social engagement and evangelism.⁶⁷ Alongside these positive pursuits, fundamentalists and evangelicals diverged over theological prioritization. David Dockery noted, “The problem was that fundamentalism struggled to distinguish the core of the Christian faith.” By contrast, evangelicals recognized some doctrines were more important.⁶⁸ However, after the dramatic social changes of the 1960s, evangelicals also began detecting signs of liberalism in their own ranks. Harold Lindsell’s 1976 bestseller, *The Battle for the Bible*, brought

⁶²Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Banner of Truth, 1994).

⁶³Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology*, New Expanded Edition, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst Jr. (1878; Bethany House, 1994), 274–75.

⁶⁴George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁶⁵R. A. Torrey and Charles L. Feinberg, eds., *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*, updated ed. (1910–15; Kregel, 1958).

⁶⁶Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 32.

⁶⁷Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 32–34.

⁶⁸David S. Dockery, “Evangelicalism: Past, Present, and Future,” *Trinity Journal*, new series 36 (2015): 12.

the controversy over biblical inerrancy to widespread public attention.⁶⁹

Two large denominations, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention, developed internal political movements and began changing their institutions in the 1980s and 1990s to forestall any rise of theological liberalism. They were overwhelmingly concerned to preserve the teaching of Scripture's authority and sufficiency in their schools.

When paired with the Chicago Statements on biblical inerrancy and biblical hermeneutics,⁷⁰ and the phenomenal growth of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), these events demonstrate that the bulk of evangelicals required a robust understanding of biblical authority. The first sentence in the "Doctrinal Basis" of ETS thus states, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."⁷¹

Among others, Dockery dedicated much of his career to recovering and preserving a proper doctrine of the Holy Bible. But Dockery also wisely joined with Timothy George to issue a call for their evangelical denomination to find unity not only in biblical authority but in the classical theology of the Great Tradition.⁷²

THE RISK TO EVANGELICALISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This brings us to the critical theological problem evangelicals face today. The risk to evangelicalism in the twenty-first century concerns the troubling indications that while evangelicals may have won the battle for the Bible, they have been losing the war for God and Christ. These indications come from both the academy and the people.

Among evangelical theologians both the Trinity and Christology have been diminished. While evangelical scholars generally affirm the dogma of the Trinity, some treat it rather quickly. One scholar affirmed the acceptable if incomplete second sentence of the Evangelical Theological

⁶⁹Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976).

⁷⁰"The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *Themelios* 4.3 (1979), <https://www.thegospel-coalition.org/themelios/article/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-inerrancy/>; "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25.4 (1982): 397–401, https://etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/files_JETS-PDFs_25_25-4_25-4-pp397-401_JETS.pdf.

⁷¹"Doctrinal Basis," Evangelical Theological Society, <https://etsjets.org/about/>.

⁷²David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *Building Bridges* (Convention Press, 2007), <https://www.uu.edu/dockery/BuildingBridges.pdf>.

Society’s “Doctrinal Basis,” which states, “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”⁷³ But his summary rearranged it to say, “God is triune in essence.”⁷⁴ Moreover, as was widely reported, the 2016 meeting of that society prompted deep reflection on the new doctrines of Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware known as “eternal functional subordination” and “eternal relations of authority and submission.” Grudem and Ware corrected their rejection of generation that year but kept their Trinitarian novelties for culture war against feminism.⁷⁵ Finally, the Christological error of Kenoticism continues to be taught by evangelical scholars, even as others roundly reject it.⁷⁶

Professional polls this century have repeatedly shown rank-and-file American evangelicals also undermine the classical dogma of the Trinity. First, according to the latest LifeWay Research poll, released in late 2025, they diminish the doctrine of God: “Nearly half of American evangelicals (47%) agree that ‘God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.’” Second, they diminish Christ: “Only 68% of evangelicals disagree with the heretical claim, ‘Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.’” Third, they diminish the Spirit: “A clear majority of American evangelicals (53%) agree with the heretical statement, ‘The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being.’”⁷⁷ Last March, Barna found only 16 percent of self-proclaimed American Christians are truly Trinitarian.⁷⁸

Next to Billy Graham, the Anglican pastor John Stott was the most well-known evangelical in the world at the turn of the century. Stott led the theological committee that crafted the Lausanne Covenant signed by Graham and evangelicals from over 150 nations in 1974. That covenant contains 15 points, the first of which affirms the eternal Triunity.⁷⁹ The

⁷³“Doctrinal Basis,” Evangelical Theological Society, <https://etsjets.org/about/>.

⁷⁴Marsh, *Recovering a Vintage Faith*, 3.

⁷⁵Yarnell, *Word*, 39, 368–70.

⁷⁶Yarnell, *Word*, 352–56.

⁷⁷Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Identifying the Crisis in Evangelical Theology Today,” LifeWay Research, November 2025, <https://research.lifeway.com/2025/11/03/identifying-the-crisis-in-evangelical-theology-today/>.

⁷⁸George Barna, “Most Americans—Including Christian Churchgoers—Reject the Trinity,” Arizona Christian University, March 2025, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/AWVI-2025_03_Most-Americans-Reject-the-Trinity_FINAL_03_26_2025.pdf.

⁷⁹John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide* (Lausanne Movement, 2009), 21, <https://lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Lausanne-Covenant-%E2%80%9393-Pages.pdf>.

third point exalts Jesus as the unique God–Man.⁸⁰ The remainder of the Lausanne Covenant is concerned with the practice of evangelism.

A quarter of a century later, Stott wrote *Evangelical Truth* to place worldwide evangelicalism on a firmer theological basis. He argued that evangelicalism must distinguish between “essentials” and “indifferent things” (Greek *adiaphora*).⁸¹ Before defining these terms, however, he provided three disclaimers: evangelicalism is “not a recent innovation” but harkens to the New Testament; evangelicalism is “not a deviation from Christian orthodoxy” but has deep roots in Christian history; and evangelicalism is “not a synonym for fundamentalism,” although it holds to the fundamentals of the faith.⁸²

The first essential truth for evangelicalism is that its gospel is “trinitarian.”⁸³ Stott then listed six “noteworthy” aspects of the gospel that derive from this essential truth. The gospel is Christological, biblical, historical, theological, apostolic, and personal.⁸⁴ The essentials concern “the initiative of God the Father in revealing himself to us, in redeeming us through Christ crucified, and in transforming us through the indwelling Spirit. For the evangelical faith is the trinitarian faith.”⁸⁵ The three essentials of the gospel as understood by evangelicals then form the subject matter of the first three chapters of his book. Practical issues follow from the essentials.

Stott used a slogan that originated with the seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian, Peter Meiderlin: “In truth unity, in doubtful matters liberty, in all things charity.”⁸⁶ The essential Christian truths are contained in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, and “together with the great Reformation emphases on the supreme authority of Scripture, the atoning death of Christ, the justification of sinners by grace alone through faith alone, and the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit. On these we must insist.”⁸⁷ We require these matters, being prepared to suffer for

⁸⁰Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant*, 32.

⁸¹Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 1, 90.

⁸²Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 2–4. He showed how fundamentalism differed from evangelicalism, not only historically but in ten tendencies of fundamentalism that evangelicals reject. Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 5–7.

⁸³Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 11.

⁸⁴Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 13–14.

⁸⁵Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 18.

⁸⁶Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 91.

⁸⁷Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 91.

them,⁸⁸ while we allow freedom on doubtful matters.⁸⁹

Our recently deceased friend, Daniel Treier, Gunther H. Knoedler Chair of Theology at Wheaton College, also prioritized the essentials of the Christian faith in his 2019 volume *Introducing Evangelical Theology*.⁹⁰ Dan highlighted the Nicene Creed at the beginning of his system then allowed the form of baptism commanded by Christ to shape his entire project.⁹¹ Treier defined evangelical theology according to the gospel and defined the gospel by the Trinity. “Evangelical theology,” he said, “announces a primary theme: the gospel. This good news of the Triune God’s love for sinners and redemption of the whole creation is the heart of the Bible’s story.”⁹² The Trinitarian gospel: This is how evangelicals will restore integrity to their theology and practice.⁹³

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Evangelicalism is a deep movement with a history of support for the gospel coupled with splintering over orthodoxy and practice. The risk evangelicalism faces in the next few decades concerns its willingness to embrace wholeheartedly both the genius and genus of Christianity. John Stott provided a taxonomy of religious labels to describe himself with three labels: “genus: Christian, species: Evangelical, subspecies: Anglican.”⁹⁴ If we accept his taxonomy, the crisis facing us today concerns the ascription to all evangelicals the genus of Christianity.

It is providential that the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ garnered the attention of Christians in the first seven centuries of the history of the church of the God–Man Jesus Christ. It is also providential that the Nicene Creed of 381 became the most universally accepted confession among Christian churches and theologians. Alas, evangelicals since the nineteenth

⁸⁸Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 91–93.

⁸⁹What are the indifferent things over which evangelicals should not divide? Here, Stott places various more practical issues surrounding baptism, the Lord’s Supper, church government, liturgy, spiritual gifts, women in ministry, ecumenical pursuits, fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, degrees of holiness, relations between church and state, the pursuit of social justice, and some matters in eschatology. Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 90.

⁹⁰Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2019).

⁹¹The first part of his book was titled, “Knowing the Trinitarian God;” the remaining three parts honor each divine Person respectively. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology*, xvii.

⁹²Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology*, 1.

⁹³My own popular-level evangelical system follows lines similar to those encouraged by Stott and exemplified by Treier. The first volume is *God*, the second *Word*, and the third will be entitled “Spirit.”

⁹⁴Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, xiii.

century have been fudging the foundational Nicene (and Chalcedonian) dogmas of the Christian faith. If we do not proclaim the one and only God of the gospel with integrity, we ought not claim we proclaim the one and only “gospel of God” (Rom 1:1–4).

Yesterday, in 1989 to be exact, George Marsden was concerned that evangelical accommodation to popular American culture might undermine the Christian faith. He pointed to the problems of “American nationalism,” “militarism,” and “the autonomy of the self.”⁹⁵ Other evangelicals in Marsden’s day would doubtless have listed a different set of social problems. But perhaps their controversy over culture was never really the primary issue.

That brings us to *today*, a half-century after evangelicalism became widely known as a major cultural movement. Unlike the great scholar of twentieth-century evangelicalism, I think the primary problem in evangelicalism today resides not with our anthropology. There definitely are severe crises requiring immediate and long-term correction in our anthropological and cultural views. Rhyne Putman and I thus argue for the recovery of human dignity.⁹⁶ However, the primary problem in evangelicalism today concerns our doctrine of God. Improper theology leads to improper anthropology. To correct the latter, we must recover the former.

As for *tomorrow*, we are not without hope. In his own call for hope, Marsden alluded to perhaps the most misunderstood parable told by Jesus. “The tares will grow with the wheat.”⁹⁷ Jesus reminded us that evil must grow along with good until the final judgment of the world (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43). Sometimes, those tares will claim to be Christian. They may also push their doctrinal and moral perversities under the label “evangelical.” But the true believer must be careful never to use the name of the Lord in vain or distort his saving gospel, the *euangelion*.

We will all face the divine Judge, the eternal Lord Jesus Christ, and provide an account for every untoward attitude, every self-serving word, every evil deed. And those of us who are teachers will be required to give a higher accounting (Jas 3:1). Are we truly ready for that Day? Are we proclaiming the one and only God as well as his one and only gospel?

⁹⁵Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 38–39.

⁹⁶Rhyne R. Putman and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Anthropology,” in *Confessing Christ: An Invitation to Baptist Dogmatics*, ed. Steven A. McKinion, Christine E. Thornton, and Keith S. Whitfield (B&H Academic, 2024), 133–67.

⁹⁷Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” 39.

EVANGELICALS AND THE BIBLE

Gregg R. Allison*

A century ago, Walter Binwell Hinson (1862-1926) preached a sermon at First Baptist Church (now Hinson Memorial Baptist Church), in Portland, Oregon, on the inerrancy of Scripture.¹ Though relatively obscure, Hinson was a contributor to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, with the former movement defending the authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and traditional interpretation of Scripture against attacks from the latter movement. As part of their defense, fundamentalist leaders published *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (1910-1915), a collection of essays that addressed topics such as the Bible and modern criticism, evolution vs. biblical creationism, Scripture (e.g., its inspiration and unity), and hermeneutics. Fundamentalism was a powerful force against biblical and theological progressivism that sought to overthrow the consensus of the church on the doctrine of Scripture and most all other doctrines; fundamentalism opposed such revisionism.

Though believing in the fundamentals in terms of the orthodox Christian faith, evangelicalism broke ranks with fundamentalism over issues of cultural engagement. While fundamentalism was largely isolationist in its withdrawal from the public square, evangelicalism sought to engage society and its establishments, both to curb their decline and to champion biblical morality and social policies.² One impetus for the rise

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¹I was privileged to be chairman of the board of Hinson Memorial Baptist Church from 1999 to 2003. Bruce Boria, the lead pastor (who, for the occasion, dressed smartly in 1920s formal-wear), re-preached Hinson's sermon on inerrancy to honor this fundamentalist figure. Hinson's vision for theological education was instrumental in launching Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, which was officially dedicated in 1927, the year after his death. I taught at Western Seminary from 1994 to 2003.

²For histories of the fundamentalist-modernist clash and the rise of evangelicalism see David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Bob Jones University Press, 1986); Joel Carpenter, *The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 1991); George Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Bob Jones University Press, 1973); Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (Oxford University Press, 1991); J. Gresham

and development of evangelicalism was articulated by Kenneth Kantzer, a leading critic of fundamentalism:

Evangelicals never again dare withdraw from the intellectual battlefield of the day and hope thus to protect their delicate faith from worldly attack. Such anti-intellectualism is irresponsible. Not only does it lead inevitably to loss of faith, but there is something inherently antibiblical and anti-Christian about such an ego-protecting stance. It is a reflection of little faith. Moreover, it is inconsistent with the commands of the Lord to the church to go into all the world preaching and teaching and to let the light of the gospel shine out into the cultures of all people.³

Accordingly, the founders of modern evangelicalism—for example, Kantzer, Carl F. H. Henry, and Harold J. Ockenga—studied at the finest secular institutions (Harvard University, Boston University), interacted with leading scholars (for example, Kantzer attended lectures by Karl Barth in Basel), founded or contributed significantly to evangelical seminaries (for example, Henry, Ockenga, Wilbur Smith, and Edward J. Carnell started Fuller Theological Seminary, and Kantzer became the dean at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and started scholarly organizations like the Evangelical Theological Society (1949).

Both fundamentalism and evangelicalism, in their own way, articulated and defended the canonicity, inspiration, inerrancy, authority, clarity, sufficiency, and necessity of Scripture. As an evangelical, I will address evangelicalism and the Bible 1976 to the present.⁴

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) launched in

Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; reprint Aquarius, 2025); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and the American Culture*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2022); Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1991).

³Kenneth S. Kantzer, “Evangelicals and the Doctrine of Inerrancy,” in James Montgomery Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (London & Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, 1979), 149.

⁴Though these last fifty years constitute the period of my presentation, I will occasionally discuss previous developments. For example, the very influential First Lausanne Conference in 1974 formulated the Lausanne Covenant. Among its fifteen articles, many of which addressed evangelism, Article 2—“The Authority and Power of the Bible”—offered, “We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, *without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice*. We also affirm the power of God’s word to accomplish his purpose of salvation.”

1977 out of the conviction that many “evangelical believers are being turned away from the Bible as their final authority in matters of Christian doctrine and Christian living. There seems little question that this turning away is directly related to the denial, in many quarters, of the historic doctrine of the verbal inerrancy of the Bible.”⁵ An example of such drift was Fuller Theological Seminary. As noted above, Fuller was founded as an evangelical seminary and affirmed that the canonical books of the Bible are “plenarily inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part. These books constitute the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”⁶ In 1971, it revised its statement of faith by removing the phrase “plenarily inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part.”⁷ Fuller Seminary moved away from the historical doctrine of full inerrancy and instead promoted a Bible that is infallible in matters of faith and practice but which can and does indeed contain errors in matters of history, science, and geography.⁸

Alarmed by such a defection, evangelicals responded with a defense of the doctrine of inerrancy. Two examples suffice. The first was Harold Lindsell’s book *The Battle for the Bible* (1976), which warned that a drift away from full affirmation of this watershed doctrine would result in a drift from other essential doctrines.⁹ The second was the ICBI’s publication of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), which affirmed belief in both the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. As for infallibility (Article XI),

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may

⁵“International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,” Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, <https://alliancenet.org/icbi/>.

⁶Cited in Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976), 107. Other examples include “I do not affirm that the Bible is inerrant. . . . I can affirm . . . that the Bible is ‘the only infallible rule of faith and practice.’ By that I simply mean that I find the Bible entirely trustworthy on matters of faith and practice.” Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (The Westminster Press, 1977), 15.

⁷“Statement of Faith,” Fuller Seminary, <https://fuller.edu/about/mission-and-values/statement-of-faith/>.

⁸To be noted is the fact that the two terms *infallible* and *inerrant* were historically synonymous terms.

⁹Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 107.

be distinguished but not separated.

Concerning inerrancy (Article XII),

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Clearly, the *Chicago Statement* stood against a limited view of inerrancy, denying that Scripture's truthfulness can be restricted to matters of faith and salvation alone.

Additionally, the *Chicago Statement* (Article XV) underscored "that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration." Two articles addressed this matter (Article VI; Article IX):

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

And

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude of fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

As the foundation for biblical inerrancy, the inspiration of Scripture had been affirmed by the church from the outset. By way of definition, inspiration is the special work of the Holy Spirit by which he superintended the human authors of Scripture in such a manner that, employing their

different theological perspectives, writing styles, grammatical abilities, and personalities, he ensured that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted them to write: the Word of God, fully truthful, without error in the original manuscripts, and with divine authority.¹⁰ B. B. Warfield had underscored “three very impressive facts regarding the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures”:

1. “this doctrine has always been, and still is, the church-doctrine of inspiration;”
2. “it is undeniably the doctrine of inspiration held by Christ and his apostles;” and
3. “it is the foundation of our Christian thought and life.”

Thus, by linking Scripture’s inerrancy with its inspiration, the *Chicago Statement* reflected the historical practice of the church.

Despite this theological consensus, and despite 1976 being proclaimed the “Year of the Evangelical,” evangelicalism began to manifest an uneasy tension between what may be called traditional/conservative expressions and novel/progressive expressions, with the former attempting to halt inroads into the doctrine of Scripture by the latter.¹¹

One example of attacks against the traditional view as expressed by the *Chicago Statement* was the 1979 proposal of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. It claimed that the doctrine of inerrancy was a recent innovation in church history, specifically the invention of the post-Reformers (especially Francis Turretin [1632-1687]) and so-called “old Princetonians” (e.g., A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield).¹² Thus, as a novelty, the doctrine

¹⁰For publications about the inspiration of Scripture, see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Baker Book House, 1948); René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Sheffield, 1969). For an opposing voice, see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Baker, 2005).

¹¹In September 1976, George Gallup Jr., 46, president of the American Institute of Public Opinion, proclaimed that 1976 is the “Year of the Evangelical.” *Time Magazine*, on October 4, 1976, reported Gallup’s announcement, which *Newsweek* echoed in its October 25, 1976, edition.

¹²Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Harper & Row, 1979). Rogers and McKim relied heavily on the (mistaken) proposal of Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (University of Chicago Press, 1970). The definitive response was given by John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Zondervan, 1982).

of inerrancy should give way to the doctrine of infallibility, which the church has always embraced. Critiquing the Rogers-McKim proposal's "deeply-rooted deficiencies" (e.g., its "arbitrary selection of data," misunderstandings of historical sources, "inappropriate 'historical disjunctions,'" and indebtedness to Karl Barth's neoorthodoxy), John Woodbridge decried their distinguishing between the "central saving message of Scripture and all of the difficult surrounding material that supports that message."¹³ His exposé remains as a sharp rebuke to those who subjectively (and hopelessly) make such a distinction and thus affirm the infallibility of its central message as opposed to the inerrancy of the message and all that supports it—that is, all Scripture. Woodbridge's critique was joined by other negative assessments of the Rogers-McKim proposal by evangelical scholars. For example, D. A. Carson joined Woodbridge in editing *Scripture and Truth* (1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (1986).¹⁴

Reflecting and expanding on the *Chicago Statement*, Paul Feinberg, in "The Meaning of Inerrancy" (1982), wrote what many consider to be the classical evangelical definition of inerrancy: "Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."¹⁵ I list nine of his specifications:¹⁶

1. Inerrancy is characteristic of all of Scripture, not just the parts that address salvation, faith, and morality.
2. Inerrancy applies to the original manuscripts, or autographs, of Scripture (an important technical but not pedantic point).
3. Inerrancy is consistent with the Bible's use of the language of ordinary, everyday speech (e.g., Moses's "two great lights" is phenomenological language describing the

¹³Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Zondervan, 1982), 153, citing Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 461.

¹⁴D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Zondervan, 1983); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Intervarsity, 1986).

¹⁵Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Zondervan, 1982), 267–304 (quote is from p. 294).

¹⁶Many of these specifications had been previously challenged by critics of inerrancy. See for example Davis, *The Debate about the Bible*, 24–28. Appealing to these qualifications of the doctrine, Davis averred "this is certainly enough to show how difficult it is to say precisely what is meant by the apparently simple claim that the Bible is inerrant" (p. 28).

- sun and the moon).
4. Inerrancy is consistent with the New Testament's use of loose or free quotations from the Old Testament (the New Testament authors could and did use allusions to, paraphrases of, and summaries of Old Testament writings).
 5. Inerrancy is consistent with the fact that the *logia Jesu* (the sayings of Jesus) do not contain the *ipsissima verba* (the exact words) of Jesus. On only a few occasions—for example, "*Talitha cumi*" which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41); "*Ephphatha*," that is, "Be opened" (Mark 7:34); "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33-34)—do we have the exact (Aramaic) words of Jesus. What we have is the exact voice of Jesus, that is, the Greek versions of his Aramaic sayings are faithful renditions of the words Jesus actually spoke.
 6. Inerrancy is consistent with unusual grammatical constructions (solecisms) in the Bible (e.g., Revelation 21:9 raises the question "who or what was full of the seven last plagues?" Was it the angels, or was it the bowls held by them, that were full of the seven last plagues?)
 7. Inerrancy is consistent with different chronological ordering of events (e.g., Matthew and Luke's divergent "order" of the wilderness temptations of Jesus).
 8. Inerrancy is consistent with divergent parallel accounts in the Bible (e.g., the summary of Jesus's encounter with the centurion in Matthew and the more detailed narrative involving the Jewish elders and the centurion's friends in Luke).
 9. Inerrancy may be asserted, but not demonstrated, with respect to all of the phenomena of Scripture. We cannot "prove" the inerrancy of Scripture; rather, we embrace it by faith as we seek to understand and work on the difficulties. The beginning of Feinberg's definition—"When all the facts are known"—invites us to wait hopefully for the eschatological fulfillment of salvation history to fully embrace Scripture's complete truthfulness and absence of all errors.

Together, the *Chicago Statement* and Feinberg's "The Meaning of Inerrancy" have provided guidance and guardrails for conservative evangelicalism's high view of the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture.

Of course, other aspects of the doctrine of Scripture need to be addressed in terms of their development or demise over the last fifty years. Each of these—canonicity, authority, clarity, sufficiency, and necessity—will be addressed in turn.

CANONICITY

This list of divinely inspired and authoritative writings that make up Scripture developed in the early church and eventually led to the Roman Catholic canon, which includes the *Apocrypha*, extra books in the Old Testament (e.g., Tobit, Judith), and additions to certain Old Testament writings as found in the Protestant Bible (e.g., additions to Esther, Bel and the Dragon in Daniel). These additional writings were not included in the Protestant canon, which is composed of only sixty-six books.

Despite challenges to the traditional view of canonization—for example, questioning the authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses and 2 Peter by the apostle Peter—evangelicals continue to uphold the sixty-six books as composing Scripture, which was the canon affirmed by the early church in the fourth century and the Reformers and their Protestant churches in the sixteenth century, and which continues to be affirmed today in ecclesial and denominational statements/confessions of faith. Controversy still persists, however, as to the value of all those writings. For example, Andy Stanley has created a "canon within a canon" by (apparently) dismissing the relevance of the Old Testament for Christians and their churches.

Commenting on the deliberations at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Stanley offered, "(First Century) Church leaders unhitched the church from the worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish scriptures . . . Peter, James, and Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well." A reason for decoupling Christianity from its roots is to remove the stumbling block many contemporary people encounter when they read Old Testament laws that seem archaic and embarrassing and Old Testament narratives that portray God as vindictive and genocidal. Moreover, Stanley detached Christian salvation from Scripture and set it in opposition to Jesus's work: "Jesus' new covenant, His covenant with the nations, His covenant with you,

His covenant with us, can stand on its own two nail-scarred resurrection feet. It does not need propping up by the Jewish scriptures ... The Bible did not create Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus created and launched Christianity. Your whole house of Old Testament cards can come tumbling down. The question is, did Jesus rise from the dead? And the eyewitnesses said he did.”¹⁷

Stanley’s proposal pushed aside traditional views of Scripture’s canonicity and its inseparable link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The very fact that these two testaments are physically bound together in all versions of the Bible stands visibly in opposition to his view. Additionally, before Jesus rose from the dead and “launched Christianity,” the Jewish Scripture/Old Testament prepared the way through its prophecies, pledges, and promises concerning Jesus himself. In fact, some of the first words of the resurrected Jesus were, “This is what is written [in the Jewish Scripture/Old Testament]: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

AUTHORITY

Put simply, the authority of Scripture means that to believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God himself, and to disbelieve and disobey the Bible is to disbelieve and disobey God himself. For its first millennium and more, the church affirmed and practiced the supreme authority of Scripture, but this consensus eventually yielded to a division between Roman Catholicism—whose authority, like a three-legged stool, consists of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium (the teaching office of the church)—and Protestantism, whose formal principle is *sola Scriptura*, that is, Scripture alone.

Despite its firm stance on biblical authority, Protestantism eventually caved in to the Enlightenment rejection of all authority. Specifically, the dismissal of biblical authority was fueled by antisupernaturalism and the rise of biblical criticism. In its wake, Friedrich Schleiermacher (the so-called “father of modern Protestantism”), referring to historical ideas of biblical inspiration, truthfulness, and authority, asserted that “in order to attain to faith, we need no such doctrine of Scripture.”¹⁸ Indeed, one of

¹⁷Andy Stanley, “Aftermath, Part 3: Not Difficult” (April 30, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShxFTNRCWI>.

¹⁸Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (T & T Clark, 1928, repr. 1960), 593.

Schleiermacher's key proposals was that "the authority of holy Scripture cannot be the foundation of faith in Christ; rather [faith in Christ] must be presupposed before a particular authority can be granted to holy Scripture."¹⁹

Once again, the *Chicago Statement* articulated an evangelical high view of biblical authority. Its opening presentation affirmed that Scripture "is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises."²⁰ Despite this clarity, attacks against biblical authority persist. One approach to such criticism is to make an appeal to divine accommodation, which is "God's act of condescending to human capacity in his revelation of himself."²¹ In terms of the basic principle of accommodation, "for an infinite, perfect, and holy God to interact with finite, fallible, and fallen humanity, he must accommodate himself to our ability to understand him, coming down to our level so that we can grasp what he says and does."²² Historically, such accommodation was never used to dismiss the truthfulness and authority of the Word of God.

Recent developments, however, disfigure the idea and appeal to accommodation to dismiss biblical authority. For example, Kenton Sparks, invoking divine accommodation in his 2008 work *God's Word in Human Words*,²³ placed readers of Scripture on the horns of a dilemma: either Jesus accommodated himself to incorrect ideas of Old Testament authorship, having learned wrongly that Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel authored their biblical writings; or Jesus knew better—he knew that these men did

¹⁹Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 591.

²⁰*Chicago Statement*, "Short Statement," 2.

²¹Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Compact Terms* (Baker, 2015), s.v. "accommodation." As Donald McKim defines "accommodation," "Theologians trained in classical rhetoric (Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Calvin) used this idea to indicate God's condescension in revelation. God communicated in ways adjusted to limited human capacities." Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd and rev. ed. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), s.v. "accommodation."

²²Glenn S. Sunshine, "Accommodation Historically Considered," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eerdmans, 2016), 238.

²³Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Baker Academic, 2008), 165; cf. 252–53. Other attacks include A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (IVP Academic, 2007); Craig T. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, *Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church's Future*, ed. D. H. Williams (Baker Academic, 2007); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2005).

not author those writings—but accommodated himself by not revealing the truth to his naïve and misinformed audiences. In either case, Jesus’s embrace of accommodation leads to error and/or deceit and thus discredits his teachings. As for the biblical authors, Sparks proposed “the possibility that a *limited* perspective [on their part] might inevitably lead to a *mistaken* perspective,”²⁴ thus undermining the authority of their writings.

Leading evangelical figures continued to champion the full authority of Scripture against such critics. J. I. Packer was such a defender: “It is true that these critics pay lip-service to the principle of biblical authority, and, indeed, suppose themselves to accept it; but their view of the nature of Scripture effectively prevents them from doing so. It is evident that they have not thought out with sufficient seriousness what subjection to biblical authority means in practice. Their view really amounts to saying that the question of biblical authority is now closed; the supreme authority is undoubtedly Christian reason, which must hunt for the word of God in the Bible by the light of rationalistic critical principles.”²⁵ Updating Packer, we may say that contemporary critics insist on the supreme authority of Christian expressive individualism, which must hunt for the word of God in the Bible by the light of personal sentiments and feelings.

Additionally, as I was taught by Kenneth Kantzer, our approach to critics of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority is to raise four questions:

1. What was Jesus’s view of Scripture? (he held to its full inspiration, inerrancy, and authority)
2. Do you call Jesus your Lord? (Christians should respond positively)
3. Do you think you should have the same view of Scripture as that of Jesus your Lord? (again, Christians should respond positively, but if they don’t, ask the next question)
4. What reason(s) could you give for taking a different view of Scripture? (e.g., Jesus did not hold this view; Jesus accommodated himself to this doctrine, and even though he knew better, he taught it anyway; Jesus was ignorant)

²⁴Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 225, 226.

²⁵J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1958), 72-73. For other publications on the authority of Scripture see David. S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, eds., *The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture*, rev. and exp. ed. (Seminary Hill Press, 2024); H. van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Brill, 2008).

of this matter; Jesus was just mistaken).²⁶

By engaging in this way, we turn the discussion to the core issue, which is the gospel: Do you believe in the lordship of Jesus Christ in your life? And such lordship connects directly to the full authority of Scripture.

CLARITY

The church has historically, though hesitantly, affirmed the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture, which “means that the Bible is written in such a way that it is able to be understood, but right understanding requires time, effort, the use of ordinary means, a willingness to obey, and the help of the Holy Spirit; and our understanding will remain imperfect in this lifetime.”²⁷ Against the common Roman Catholic critique of this doctrine, Scripture’s clarity does not mean that all Scripture is easy to understand; the apostle Peter, referring to Paul’s letters, frankly admits that “there are some things hard to understand in them” (2 Peter 3:16). At the same time, the Roman Catholic emphasis—that Scripture is largely obscure and should be interpreted only by its clergy—was exaggerated and led to Protestantism’s articulation of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture.

As an implication, Protestants translated the Bible into the languages of common people, based on the conviction that ordinary believers and not just Bible scholars and church leaders are able to hear/read and understand it correctly. Bible societies published Bibles and distributed them, often in missionary contexts. Many churches today follow this Protestant doctrine, especially in their encouragement of personal reading of the Bible, discussion of Scripture in group Bible studies, and interaction with the Word as it is preached by pastors and ministers.

Sadly, this doctrine became marginalized even among evangelicals.²⁸

²⁶Kenneth Kantzer, class notes, Systematic Theology 511, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (fall quarter, 1982).

²⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 109. To expand on this definition, perspicuity is “a property of Scripture whereby it is clear and thus comprehensible to all Christians who possess the normal acquired ability to read texts or understand oral communication (when Scripture is read to them). This clarity is true regardless of their gender, age, education, language, or cultural background, though it does not mean Scripture is necessarily easy to understand. This doctrine is affirmed in the context of the church, to which God has given pastors and teachers to assist members in better understanding Scripture. Moreover, its clarity means that unbelievers can gain some cognition of Scripture in general.” Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary*, s.v. “perspicuity of Scripture.”

²⁸Happy exceptions include Gregg R. Allison, “The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Theology” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical

A contributing factor was the rise of the science of hermeneutics—the study of the rules of interpretation as applied to *all literature*—which replaced the long-standing principles of *biblical* interpretation. “Gone was the *confession of faith*—Scripture is clear—and in its place was put a *literary principle*—all literary works are clear. There is nothing particularly religious about this principle, and certainly nothing that is distinctively Protestant.”²⁹ A second contributing factor was the development of biblical criticism. As T. P. Weber noted: “Higher [biblical] criticism took away the individual believer’s ability to interpret the Bible for himself . . . The findings of higher criticism forced many lay people to doubt their ability to understand anything.”³⁰

As before, the *Chicago Statement* sought to overcome this sorely neglected attribute of Scripture, specifically in two articles (Article XXIII; Article XXIV):

We affirm the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin. We deny that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption.

And

We affirm that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars. We deny that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by biblical scholars.

SUFFICIENCY AND NECESSITY

These two characteristics of Scripture have historically been treated together (and then referred to as the *perfection* of Scripture). First, by way of definitions, the sufficiency of Scripture is

Divinity School, 1995); Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2006).

²⁹Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Zondervan, 2013), 138.

³⁰T. P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1982* (Zondervan, 1983), 36.

an attribute of Scripture (in written form or orally transmitted) whereby it provides everything that non-Christians need to be saved, and everything Christians need to please God fully. However, Scripture is not absolutely sufficient; indeed, there is much about God that he chose not to reveal (Deut. 29:29). Rather, the sufficiency of Scripture is restricted to its purpose, which is instructing non-believers about salvation and training believers to be “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).³¹

The necessity of Scripture is

an attribute of Scripture (in written form or orally transmitted) whereby it is essential for knowing the way of salvation, for progressing in godliness, and for discerning God’s will. Negatively, without Scripture, there can be no salvation, growth in holiness, and knowledge of God’s will. However, Scripture is not absolutely necessary; indeed, before the Old Testament was written, people were saved, pleased God, and knew his will. Rather, there is a necessity conditioned on God’s good pleasure to reveal his truth through a written Word. Without Scripture, people cannot have what God willed to reveal through Scripture.³²

The early church’s belief in both Scripture’s sufficiency and necessity gave way to Roman Catholicism’s denial that it was its sole source of divine revelation. Rather, both Scripture and Tradition constitute divine revelation, which in turn is interpreted by the Church’s Magisterium, or teaching office. These three elements together form its sufficient knowledge of God and his ways. Additionally, Roman Catholicism claimed that the Bible is not necessary for the church’s existence but only for its well-being. Against these two Roman Catholic denials, Protestantism articulated the sufficiency and necessity of the Bible. Because Scripture is its sufficient revelation, the church does not need anything (Tradition, the Magisterium) or anyone (the pope) in addition to the Bible. Also, because Scripture is its

³¹Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary*, s. v. “sufficiency of Scripture.”

³²Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary*, s. v. “necessity of Scripture.”

necessary revelation, the church could not even exist apart from Scripture.³³

While evangelicalism broadly holds to these two attributes of Scripture, such belief is not without controversy. One such disagreement swirls around the Holy Spirit in relationship to Scripture. Specifically, the issue is raised as to the Spirit's ongoing guidance of individuals and/or their churches. Those who deny such leading by the Spirit often claim that it undermines the sufficiency of Scripture, replacing it or supplementing it with subjective sensations. Those who defend such ongoing guidance clarify that it is completely subordinate to Scripture. For example, the Pentecostal theologian J. Rodman Williams asserted that "God's truth has been fully declared. Accordingly, what occurs in revelation within the Christian community is *not* new truth that goes beyond the special revelation (if so, it is spurious and not of God). It is only a deeper appreciation of what has already been revealed, or a disclosure of some message for the contemporary situation that adds nothing essentially to what he has before made known."³⁴

Another debate has to do with the continuation or cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit: prophecy, the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing (some would include dreams and visions, as well as exorcisms, in this list). Generally speaking, those who oppose such continued distribution of those gifts by the Holy Spirit—the position of cessationism—claim that it minimizes or even contradicts the sufficiency of Scripture. From the perspective of continuationism, Wayne Grudem articulated a traditional view of Scripture's sufficiency and necessity while maintaining the legitimacy of ongoing prophetic revelation, revelation that does not possess the same authority of Scripture and which requires the assessment of the church to affirm its truthfulness and validity of application.

A third disagreement focuses on the incorporation of extra-biblical resources—for example, secular psychology and medical intervention—for providing care for hurting Christians. Some proponents of the absolute sufficiency of Scripture question the advisability of, or reject, resources other than Scripture in some cases of suffering (e.g., depression, obsessive-compulsion disorder). On the opposite side are those who support the

³³For publications on the sufficiency of Scripture see Dockery and Yarnell, eds., *The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture*; Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Banner of Truth, 1988).

³⁴J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, 3 vols. in 1 (Zondervan, 1996), 1:44.

use of medication and extrabiblical resources to deal with such suffering, maintaining that the all-sufficient and infinitely resourceful God has provided measures for the relief or melioration of such suffering.

In terms of the other attribute, contemporary challenges would never blatantly propose that Scripture is not necessary; rather, they appear in more subtle ways. An example is Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*. It claims to offer Young's personally sensed communication of Jesus's words of peace, comfort, and reassurance that he gave to her as she sought "something more" from him. Its accessibility has attracted millions of readers, some (many?) of whom find Scripture to be difficult to understand and/or not as immediate as are the words in *Jesus Calling*. Proponents of the necessity of Scripture are alarmed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while many attacks against the historical and consensus-enjoying doctrine of Scripture have been launched in the last fifty years—certainly by non-evangelicals, but sadly by so-called evangelicals as well—proponents of its inspiration, inerrancy, canonicity, authority, clarity, sufficiency, and necessity continue to emerge and flourish. For example, since its founding in 1949, the Evangelical Theological Society continues to affirm its original doctrinal commitment that "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."

Moreover, since 2013 the Executive Committee (now the Board of Directors) of ETS has sponsored a session on bibliology at the annual meetings, initially titled "The Inerrancy of Scripture" and now "The Doctrine of Scripture." Over the course of thirteen years, ETS members have presented fifty papers on bibliology (see Appendix). Additionally, leading evangelical scholars have published significant books addressing the doctrine of Scripture; for example: D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*; John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*; and our very own David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture*.³⁵

³⁵D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Eerdmans, 2016); John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture* (Crossway, 2018); and our very own David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture*, Theology for the People of God (B&H Academic, 2024).

APPENDIX: HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE SESSION

Papers Presented at the ETS Doctrine
of Scripture Session, 2013–2025
(known as Inerrancy of Scripture Session until 2023)
collated by Robert W. Yarbrough

65th Annual ETS meeting, 2013, Baltimore, MD

Scripture and Tradition: Biblical and Historical Support for Inerrancy

Richard Schultz (Wheaton College)	Is Inerrancy a Biblical Concept? Examining the Old Testament Evidence
Armin D. Baum (Freie Theologische Hochschule Giessen, Germany)	Is Biblical Inerrancy a Biblical Concept? The New Testament Evidence
Douglas A. Sweeney (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)	Jonathan Edwards on the Character of Scripture (and Its Readers)
David B. Garner (Westminster Theological Seminary)	Redemptive History, Epistemology, and Biblical Authority: An Apostolic Exhortation for the Post-Apostolic Age (2 Peter 1:12–21)

66th Annual ETS meeting, 2014, San Diego, CA

Inspiration and Inerrancy

John Feinberg (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)	Inspiration and Inerrancy: A Theological Perspective
Michael A. G. Haykin (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)	Inerrancy and Inspiration in the Fathers
Peter Williams (Tyndale House)	How Use of Poor Terminology Can Cause Unnecessary Problems for Advocates of Inerrancy
J. Michael Thigpen (Evangelical Theological Society)	“From the Mouth of God”: Inspiration and Inerrancy in Old Testament Perspective)

67th Annual ETS Meeting, 2015, Atlanta, GA
Beyond Criticism of Criticism: The Fruitfulness of Inerrancy

Robert W. Yarbrough (Covenant Theological Seminary)	Beyond Wilckens and Berger: Restoring a Damaged Enterprise
Sigurd Grindheim (Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo, Norway)	Inerrancy—What Is It Good For? Why Jesus and the Apostles Insisted on a High View of Scripture
Richard Schultz (Wheaton College)	Believing Criticism or Believing Criticism? Inerrancy and Evangelical Old Testament Scholarship After Enns and Sparks
Armin Baum (Freie Theologische Hochschule Giessen, Germany)	“Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived”: 1 Tim 2:14 in Ancient and Modern Perspective

68th Annual ETS Meeting, 2016, San Antonio, TX
Inerrancy and the Trinity

Paul House (Beeson Divinity School)	Inerrancy and the Trinity: Old Testament Perspectives
Vern S. Poythress (Westminster Theological Seminary)	Inerrancy and the Trinity: New Testament Perspectives: John 17:6–8 as a Window onto Divine Communication in Language
Rebecca Rine (Grove City College)	Inerrancy and the Trinity: Patristic Perspectives
Dan Doriani (Covenant Theological Seminary)	Inerrancy and the Trinity in Pastoral Proclamation

69th Annual ETS Meeting, 2017, Providence, RI
The Recent Spike in Books Supporting Inerrancy: Dying Gasps or Wave of the Future?

C. John Collins (Covenant Theological Seminary)	Recent Inerrancy Studies and the Old Testament
Oswaldo Padilla (Beeson Divinity School)	Postliberals and Inerrancy: Do They Point the Way Forward?
John Woodbridge (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)	Recent Inerrancy Studies and Church History
Matthew Barrett (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)	Is our Doctrine of Inerrancy Christological Enough? The Future of Inerrancy and the Necessity of Dogmatics

70th Annual ETS Meeting, 2018, Denver, CO
Inerrancy in the Life of the Church

Michael A. G. Haykin (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)	“The Holy Beauties of Scripture”: Andrew Fuller on Biblical Inerrancy
J. V. Fesko (Reformed Theological Seminary)	Charles Briggs, Revelation, and Worshipers of the Sacred Fire: Nineteenth Century Objections to Inerrancy
M. Sydney Park (Beeson Divinity School)	Inerrancy and Blood: Women and Christology in Leviticus 12 and 15, and Mark 4:21–43
Dana M. Harris (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)	“Today If You Hear My Voice”: The Spirit Speaking in Hebrews—Implications for Inerrancy

71st Annual ETS Meeting, 2019, San Diego, CA
Old Testament Genres and Inerrancy

C. Hassell Bullock (Wheaton College)	The Psalter and Intertextuality: Voices Once Heard and Still Speaking
Daniel J. Estes (Cedarville University)	Well-Crafted Proverbs, and Yet God's Inspired Word
Eugene H. Merrill (Dallas Theological Seminary)	Must Stories Be "Factual" to Do Theology? Old Testament Narrative and Biblical Inerrancy
J. Michael Thigpen (Biola University)	The Messenger of YHWH: Prophetic Literature and Inerrancy

72nd Annual ETS Meeting, 2020 (Virtual)
New Testament Genres and Inerrancy

Eckhard Schnabel (Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary)	Jesus' Parables as Target of Form Critics and Redaction Critics: Blind Spots, Failures, and Scholarly Integrity
Darrell Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary)	A Different Kind of Genre Sequel: Acts as an Extension of the Gospel of Luke
Gregg R. Allison (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)	Inerrancy and Speech Act Theory
Brian Tabb (Bethlehem Seminary)	The Unsealed Scroll: Revelation as the Trustworthy Divine Word

73rd Annual ETS Meeting, 2021, Fort Worth, TX
The Chicago Statement after 40 Years: Retrospect and Prospect

John Woodbridge (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)	The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy: A Wayward Gambit of American Fundamentalism?
Wayne Grudem (Phoenix Seminary)	Why Has the Chicago Statement Had Such Wide Influence? Reflections by a Participant
Sydney Park (Beeson Divinity School)	Christ Crucified, the Perfect Efficacy of God's Word as Sole, Urgent Remedy for Nominalism
Derek Brown (The Cornerstone Bible College and Seminary)	Reformulating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in Light of Contemporary Developments

74th Annual ETS Meeting, 2022, Denver, CO
Inerrancy and New Testament Textual Criticism

Daniel B. Wallace (Dallas Theological Seminary) [sick, could not present]	Textually Transmitted Dis-ease: Have Variants Fatally Infected Orthodoxy?
Dirk Jongkind (Tyndale House Cambridge)	"It Does Not Make a Difference": The Fraught Relation between the Textual Criticism of the New Testament and Systematic Theology
Peter Gurry (Phoenix Seminary)	The Initial Text and Inerrancy: How the Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism Does and Does Not Affect Our Doctrine
Matthew Bennett (Cedarville University)	Apples and Oranges: The Theological Implications of Textual Critical Discoveries in the Bible and in the Qur'an

**75th Annual ETS Meeting, 2023, San Antonio, TX
Inerrancy and Adam and Eve**

C. John Collins (Covenant Theological Seminary)	Biblical Authority and Human Origins: Reading the Hebrew Bible
Guy Prentiss Waters (Reformed Theological Seminary)	Who Is ‘The First Man’? The New Testament, Adam, and Inerrancy
Wayne A. Grudem (Phoenix Seminary) [paper read by Gregg Allison]	Inerrancy Requires We Affirm Ten Doctrinally Significant Details in the Adam and Eve Narrative
Fred G. Zaspel (Reformed Baptist Church)	Inerrancy, Adam and Eve, and B. B. Warfield

**76th Annual ETS Meeting, 2024, San Diego, CA
Responses to Ben Witherington III, *Sola Scriptura*
(30-minute comments on *Sola Scriptura*; panel interaction with Witherington)**

Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)	A Note on Ben Witherington’s <i>Sola Scriptura</i>
Mark Gignilliat (Beeson Divinity School)	Holy Scripture’s Plenitude: An Appreciative Engagement with Ben Witherington’s <i>Sola Scriptura</i>
Peter Gurry (Phoenix Seminary)	Could not attend; paper canceled
Jeff Dryden (Covenant College)	<i>Sola Scriptura</i> and the Theology of Scripture

**77th Annual ETS Meeting, 2025, Boston, MA
The Bible in Baptist Teaching and Practice: Past, Present, Future**

Michael A. G. Haykin (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) [paper read by Matthew Stewart]	“These Celestial Lines”: British & Irish Baptists and Their Love of the Bible, 1640s–1840s
David S. Dockery (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)	Key Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life
Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)	Applying the <i>Regula Fidei</i> to Contemporary Evangelical Theological Formation
Craig Carter (Tyndale University College & Seminary) [paper cancelled]	Are Baptists Protestants? The Particular Baptists between Biblicism and Confessionalism
Robert W. Yarbrough (Covenant Theological Seminary)	Pagels and Schlatter on Jesus: A Creedal (so Baptist) Reading

EVANGELICALS, IRENAEUS, AND THE BIBLE

D. Jeffrey Bingham*

Safety, wisdom, and counselors are a frequent grouping in Proverbs (11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:5-6; 27:9). It is wise to seek insight from a multitude of counselors for it increases the margin of safety as we attempt to live life skillfully in the fear of God, rather than recklessly. This sage teaching certainly applies to both individuals and groups, and, I think, to different Christian communities in different periods of history. More pointedly, contemporary Christianity can learn from early Christianity or, say, from the church in the age of reformation. It is patently risky to assume that a modern vision is without fault and cannot gain deeper biblical understanding upon which to model itself by listening to earlier Christian voices. This principle has ramifications for the contemporary free church tradition.

This side of glory, both temporal versions, the early church and the free church, though devoted to biblical reflection, evidence treasures and drawbacks. Each is an expression of Christianity, informed by both culture and the Bible, at different moments in the epoch of Christ's bride, "the Church." Each has elements of purity. Each has shamed the groom. Each has read portions of the Bible correctly. Each has supplanted the Bible with culture. Therefore, where appropriate, the present church should seek enrichment from the past and issue discerning warnings that guard against treacherous repetitions.

My purpose here is not to recount specifics of the assets and liabilities of each expression. Rather, I intend to focus on ways in which selected aspects of the early church's experience may inform and enhance the contemporary, free church. Of course, the free church has riches of its own that can ameliorate other settings. Fundamentally, here is my premise:

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benefit can come to my tradition from outside it.

My particular interest is how ancient Christian exegesis may speak to contemporary evangelicals within the free church tradition. More specifically, I wish to provide some idea of how the study of Bible reading in the early church can be appropriated into the training of contemporary evangelical graduate students. The need for exposure to such Bible reading arises from a peculiar feature currently prominent within American evangelicalism.

THE FREE CHURCH: SOLIPSISM IN EVANGELICALISM

Locating self-awareness of solipsism or individualism among evangelical thinkers and writers is not as difficult today as it was a quarter century ago. It is almost commonplace to critique it in lecture and literature. Whether such self-awareness has made its way into the mainstream of evangelical culture is another matter. In what follows, I briefly survey such criticism from both within and without the tradition.

David Wells, for instance, in a discussion of “self-piety” sees American individualism as a threat to theology’s very nature.¹ This individualism, stemming from the Enlightenment and endemic to modernity, dismisses theology outright as irrelevant because the individual has become self-absorbed and has located final authority in the self. The individual within this structure has dismissed all significant, authoritative connections outside of self.² For Wells, theology is replaced by individual consciousness and experience. Theology loses its authority in the light of the autonomous self.

For Michael Horton, American evangelical individualism unsurprisingly ends in loss of community.³ The emphasis on salvation as a personal, individual experience or relationship with Christ, leads to a collapse of the church as covenant community. Soteriology is no longer centered around a common faith, creed, or experience. Sanctification concerns personal rather than communal growth. Worship becomes an individual spectator event rather than an event of common participation. Regrettably, corrective often comes in the form of a fragment of the community, a small fellowship group. The purpose of the group is to provide the “fellowship” missing in corporate worship.

¹David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 137.

²Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 141–43.

³Michael Scott Horton, *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 166–71.

Stanley Grenz's summation is quite pointed:

Piety among evangelicals has tended to be highly individualistic. "Bible reading" means private Bible reading; "prayer" means private prayer; "Salvation" means being saved as an individual; "being in Christ" means having a personal relationship with Jesus; "the empowerment of the Spirit" means being capable as an individual to act. As Daniel Stevick notes, "The Christian pilgrimage is made alone. God's salvation is individually directed. His help is in an individual companionship. The way is the lonely route of personal sanctification, personally attained. And the goal is a mansion built for one."⁴

Grenz notes that evangelical individualism derives in part from the Protestant notions of the priesthood of the believer and soul competency.⁵ He affirms the principles in their meaning that redemption is not determined by any other person or by the church. Evangelicalism "exchanges the priority of the church for the priority of the believer," sees spirituality as "an individual matter," and pitches its preaching to the "individual listener."⁶

But for Grenz, although spirituality is predominantly an individual matter and responsibility, it is also a "corporate project." The individual "remains dependent on the group." The individual needs the group's resources of instruction, admonition, and encouragement, but does not require the community as a means of grace.⁷ In his own systematic theology, Grenz faults classic individualism for its "truncated soteriology" and "inadequate ecclesiology." The program of God has community as its direction and experience.⁸

For Simon Chan, the individualism that can accompany "Christological spirituality" can produce negative results. Infatuation with one's personal relationship with Christ can diminish one's other relationships. Within the

⁴Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 50.

⁵Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 50.

⁶Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 50–53.

⁷Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 53–54.

⁸Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 626–27.

free church, he notes, this leads to schism.⁹ Individualism also can lead to a preoccupation with feeling over what he calls “Fact.”¹⁰ The reality of the Triune God’s ministry within the life of the community is Fact. It exists whether an individual feels, internalizes, or accepts it. Protestantism, in its proclivity toward privatism in spirituality puts the objective, “factuality,” into the shadow of the subjective. Fact answers to private existence and concerns. Chan believes such a tendency “is one reason Protestantism did not develop a viable theology of the visible church.”¹¹

James Davison Hunter speaks also of “the subjectivism that pervades the private sphere” within evangelicalism.¹² It has a pressing effect upon the evangelical’s view of God. The emphasis is frequently upon God’s immanence. God is seen informally, familiarly, as a tolerant daddy with psychiatric talents: “The imagery of the immanence of God has translated from Divine Protector to Best Friend.”¹³ The evangelical accommodation to privatization and subjectivism has other results for Hunter. The self has become a fascinating frontier to be explored, charted, healed, admired, and pleased. Of course, this births a “*psychological Christocentrism*.” But, in addition, it produces an evangelical “narcissism and hedonism, the latter an extension of the former.”¹⁴ The hedonism frequently results in a duplicity between public expression and private experience. Rarely do evangelicals experience the exciting, rich, adventurous, happy, victorious life. But to admit this contradicts the message. He finds three areas from which narcissism detracts:

The narcissistic quality of this perception of the individual is in sharp contrast to the relative inattention of Evangelicalism to the common welfare of disadvantaged social groups and politically oppressed societies or even to the spiritual well-being of the church as a whole.¹⁵

Important elements of soteriology and Trinitarianism are endangered

⁹Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 47.

¹⁰Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 108–109.

¹¹Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 109.

¹²James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1983), 125.

¹³Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 124.

¹⁴Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 97.

¹⁵Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 98.

by individualism according to Peter Toon.¹⁶ The notion and language of “a personal relationship with Jesus” reveals the influence of Western culture upon evangelicalism. Toon doesn’t deny that faith and the blessings of salvation are personal and matters of experience. But salvation is not individualistic. The Holy Spirit unites the believer to the Father through Christ within the context of the body of Christ. “Therefore,” Toon writes, “there is never an individualistic union of a believer with God. The fellowship, union, and communion are truly personal and very real (as the saints testify), but are always also together with all others who are in Christ Jesus by faith and love with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ Any salvific relation to the Trinitarian God is both personal and corporate through Jesus Christ.

Some of those writing on behalf of the free church construct paradigms for ecclesiology. Miroslav Volf argues for the “ecclesiality of salvation” and clarifies the question of an individualism of faith. “One cannot, however,” he writes, “have a self-enclosed communion with the triune God—a ‘four-some,’ as it were—for the Christian God is not a private deity.”¹⁸ Volf aims his project at countering Protestant individualism. He offers a model of the church as image of the triune God where both “person and community are given their proper due.”¹⁹

Others critique the free church’s individualism by clarifying Protestant principles gone awry. Paul Galbreath and Timothy George, for example, bemoan the priority of community that has been supplanted by misunderstanding of the priesthood of believers. Galbreath argues that for Luther there was a new right for the Christian, but this “occurred within the context of community.”²⁰ Likewise, in Calvin, the individual’s authority is subordinate to the labor of Christ within his Body. George similarly writes that the isolated Christian is never in view for the Reformers. The idea was always of “a band of faithful believers united in common confession as a local, visible *congregatio sanctorum*.”²¹ He announces that individualism is

¹⁶Peter Toon, “Is a Personal Relationship with Jesus What I Really Want?” *Touchstone* (September–October 1998): 13–14.

¹⁷Toon, “Is a Personal Relationship with Jesus What I Really Want?” 14.

¹⁸Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 173.

¹⁹Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 2.

²⁰Paul Galbreath, “Protestant Principles in Need of Reformation,” *Perspectives* 7–8 (October 1992): 15.

²¹Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 291. Cf. idem, “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition,” *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 184–207.

suspect within Christianity and is related to a departure from both Bible and tradition.²²

Within discussions of individualism in evangelicalism, it is common to see the vice being related to the Enlightenment and modernism. A classic treatment of this connection is found in Karl Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. The eighteenth-century person is the one "who no longer has an emperor."²³ And this century begins Christian individualization, an attempt "to make Christianity a more individual, more inward matter."²⁴ Such individualization means many things: (1) the enthronement of the individual over every other authority; (2) the transformation of the external, objective into the internal, subjective; (3) the domination of the object; and (4) the original pietist who "knows no object which is not in the first place really within him."²⁵

This last one, for Barth, raises five challenges.²⁶ It jeopardizes the centrality of the temporal distance of the Incarnation by emphasizing the "real birth in our hearts," "his real death . . . accomplished in ourselves," "his real resurrection" of triumph in us. It also threatens the centrality of community, "the man in the church who is related to his fellow man." Third, it substitutes authority from church, dogma, and Bible with "the inner personal authority of the man." Fourth, it jeopardizes the command by stressing its internalization, interpretation, or application rather than simply obedience. It also minimizes mystery and sacrament by finding mystery and invisible grace within the inner sanctum of self.

The type of individualism I have been discussing thus far is what I wish to call "individualistic solipsism." This type fixates upon the self as the fundamental reality in the spiritual journey and emphasizes the private and the personal. Inaccurate visions of Christian egalitarianism, expressed through inappropriate understandings of the priesthood of all believers or *sola scriptura*, characterize it. The self opposes community.

But individualistic solipsism is characterized not only by a relation to the private. It is also marked by a fixation upon the present. It is not only the private experience which is sought after but the private experience informed by the contemporary moment. Such privatism cuts the believer

²²George, "The Priesthood of All Believers," 292.

²³Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (1946; Valley Forge: Judson, 1973), 41.

²⁴Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 113.

²⁵Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 113–14.

²⁶Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 114–23.

off from all communities. He or she is separated from the body of Christ in the contemporary age as well as that of the past. It is *me, now*. This essential connection between the individual and the present and the consequent disregard for the past is announced by the British historian, G. R. Elton. He compares self-centeredness to adolescence and growing up to a communal–historical awareness.²⁷ Adults function in company and have come to learn that prejudices which once seemed like eternal truths have powerful correctives in the complexities of history. World history is a study of the human community. Likewise, church history and Christian tradition reflect the community of the bride of Christ.

Such modern fixation upon the present, a twin of individualism, has been characteristic of modern optimism since the natural science of the seventeenth century. Those engaged in that enterprise believed they were seeing things as they are for the first time with accurate understanding. God's natural order was *finally*, only now, being interpreted properly. Recall here Kepler's understanding of his own findings and calculations in *Harmonies of the World* (1619):

The die is cast and I am writing the book—whether to be read by my contemporaries or by my posterity it matters not. Let it await its reader for a hundred years, *if God Himself has been ready for His contemplator for six thousand years.*²⁸

But an overwhelming optimism in present insight is not peculiar to the seventeenth century. The twentieth century's fascination with technologies which would solve society's woes also figures here. History lost its place among the pragmatic disciplines like physical sciences. History couldn't cure cancer, alter human behavior, or build a faster computer. The physical sciences seemed daily to be dismissing past interpretations. Historians, however, found it difficult to share such timeless optimism. They knew the complexity of human existence and its essential relation to time:

Historians could not join in celebrating the triumph of technique over fundamental interpretations because their

²⁷G. R. Elton, "Putting the Past Before Us," in *The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History*, ed. Stephen Vaughn (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1985), 41–42.

²⁸Johannes Kepler, *Harmonies of the World* 5. "Proem," trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, in *Epitome of Copernican Astronomy and Harmonies of the World*, Great Mind Series (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 170.

study of the past made them not only recognize how much more complex human life was than social science models assumed but above all how illusory was the denial of fundamental change [within contemporary models viewed as final or ultimate].²⁹

Legion are the causes of unhistorical attitudes in contemporary society. One can look at such convenient summaries as that of Stephen Vaughn and still, by one's own admission, lack comprehensiveness. Whether the particular American pride in its freedom from the Old World, the emphasis in modernity upon nature and personal experience, the artificiality of urban rather than rural life, the rapidity and persistence of change in a technological society, the speedy growth of scientific data, an evolutionary, chance-oriented bias, or Einstein's theory of relativity, the conclusion is the same: The present is the most important part of history.³⁰

But for evangelicals one element emerges as primary. Mark Noll points to it in his treatment of the role of populist revivalism in the relation between evangelicals, the life or virtue of the mind, and tradition—the union of individualism and immediatism. The revivals of the Second Great Awakening called upon individuals to immediately exercise faith themselves, to make a choice themselves without recourse to knowledge mediated by others from the past. “Revivals,” says Noll, “called people to Christ as a way of escaping tradition, including traditional learning . . . Everything of value in the Christian life had to come from the individual's own choice—not just personal faith but every scrap of wisdom, understanding, and conviction about the faith.”³¹

What matters, according to the revivalists, is that the individual make a choice immediately, *now*, based upon the immediate. Barth had already, remember, shown us this immediatism in eighteenth-century pietism. That perspective minimized the first-century event of the Incarnation in favor of the individual's subjective experience of Christ's birth in his or her heart. The event, the past, the voice of others from the Church, is supplanted by the immediate. Ambivalence toward the community in evangelicalism's

²⁹Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago, 1994), 406.

³⁰Stephen Vaughn, “History is it Relevant?” in *The Vital Past*, 1–14.

³¹Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 63. Cf. Martin E. Marty, *The Pro and Con Book of Religious America: A Bicentennial Argument* (Waco: Word, 1975), 43–44.

individualistic solipsism is a product of both the private and the present.

SOLIPSISM IN BIBLE READING

Having presented the commonplace recognition of the problem of individualism within modernity and particularly within the evangelicalism of the free church, I wish to move now to one specific facet of that problem—individualistic solipsism in Bible reading. We begin with Karl Barth. He worried that the biblicism produced by individualism involves a demand for the Bible to produce a set of expected answers, solutions, powers, and benefits. Such biblicism, interested more in gaining solutions and having curiosities satisfied than submitting to the text, imposes one's sovereignty upon the Bible. Such approaches to Bible reading still persist in the free church. So, Chan, mourning the loss of the communal activity of reading, says: "Reading the Scripture has become a private, information-gathering exercise assisted by key charts, study Bibles and guide books."³²

But my particular interest differs. Because of the unity between the private and the present, I wish to discuss the devaluation of tradition in evangelical Bible reading.

In the free church not only is there the emphasis upon private Bible study, as Grenz and others have shown, but also emphasis upon study without consideration for how the Church has read the text before now. There is, then, another type of solipsism, perhaps more common than the individualistic type, and just as troubling.³³ Many evangelicals read the Bible in groups, in community. They do so, for instance, in Sunday Schools and mid-week Bible Study groups. Even a book with the individualistic title, *The Bible: What's in It for Me?*, has a section entitled, "Why You Shouldn't Fly Solo."³⁴

Such communal Bible study, nevertheless, is still consumed with present insights and usually ignores tradition. We will label it "communitarian solipsism." Communitarian solipsism attempts Bible reading with attention only to the present community and usually with great optimism about current methods of study, which are naively viewed as "scientific." This type of solipsism, separate from the Christian communities of the past,

³²Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 116.

³³Cf. John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 242: "Interpretation is an inherently catholic enterprise... The limitations of individual study are paralleled by the limitations of study of scripture within homogenous groups."

³⁴J. Stephen Lang, *The Bible: What's in It for Me?* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1997), 144–45.

shows itself in both the evangelical congregation and scholarly community. It is an *us* and *now* solipsism, one founded entirely in *our* community. The average believer is taught modern Bible study methods which promise objective certainty under the guarantee that the method is inductive.³⁵ Scholars frequently share the conviction.

Historians of evangelicalism have usually connected this optimism in both congregation and study to the tradition's debt to Baconianism and Scottish Common Sense Realism. The believer approaches the Bible systematically, without bias, and with an inductive method that will yield precise, correct meaning, because Bible reading is an issue of "scientific" method and common sense. The student apprehends the facts of Scripture directly and needs only to organize them. As Martin Marty summarizes the view, "The biblical scholar was something like the botanist, geologist, or museum keeper."³⁶ And, of course, the view presupposes the pure objectivity of such scientific disciplines. Such claims reveal a lack of sensitivity to historical and hermeneutical factors in the art of biblical interpretation and nurture an unguarded optimism in one's own contemporary reading.

In recent years, however, in addition to making remarkable advances in learning and applying the historical critical method, evangelicals also have become more hermeneutically reflective. For example, Kevin Vanhoozer interacts with the complexities of modern hermeneutical theory to provide helpful perspective for evangelicals. Rather than advocating the naive hermeneutical realism of Bacon which gives "pride of place to induction," reads texts with an "optimistic faith in the powers of observations," and is "oblivious to the problems of interpretation," Vanhoozer prefers the approach of critical realism.³⁷

Yet, D. G. Hart sees evangelical biblical scholars emphasizing the objectivity of their work in a larger culture which recognizes the role of prejudice. Hart may overstate his case, but he recognizes the "old scientific optimism" still at work within some practitioners of the historical grammatical method.³⁸ There remain remnants of the attitude of the nineteenth

³⁵By its nature, of course, induction does not guarantee certainty. But this seems lost on many evangelicals.

³⁶Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 1, *The Irony of It All, 1893–1919* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago, 1986), 233.

³⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 48, 300–02.

³⁸D. G. Hart, "Evangelicals, Biblical Scholarship, and the Politics of the Modern American Academy," in *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*, ed. David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart, and Mark A. Noll (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 318.

century reported by George Marsden: Bible study “was essentially a scientific question—a job for the philologist who studied closely the history of language. Once the original meaning was determined, it seemed to follow on Common Sense principles that the meaning of a Scriptures should be settled once and for all.”³⁹

Hart also notes the danger which that optimism poses to the importance of reading Scripture with the consciousness that it always takes place within a tradition. Such optimism often nurtures an ambivalence toward tradition. Why consult the past if the current method is superior and free from troublesome encumbrances of older biases? Nevertheless, Gerald Bray, in recognizing the persistent diversity in interpretations that result from the method, identifies an evangelical “unwillingness to take church tradition seriously” as a probable culprit.⁴⁰ The historical grammatical method provides criteria for discovering meaning. But the criteria are not completely determinative.

Noll links evangelical distance from tradition in Bible study to non-academics as well. Here, too, principles, systems, expectations, and guidelines become authoritative traditions among people who formally disown traditions. Evangelicalism continues to share many features with fundamentalism on this score. If not a method, it is frequently a leader, a study Bible, or a handbook. Ironically, in the history of fundamentalism and evangelicalism, the very teachers who tout the objectivity of the inductive method have often been the ones to emphasize the necessity of intricate schemas—theirs, of course—for understanding the Bible.

Timothy Weber has pointed out the incongruity between the hailing of the method and the need of the student to refer to notes in a study Bible.⁴¹ Vanhoozer minces no words: “Fundamentalism thus preaches the authority of the text but practices the authority of the interpretive community.”⁴² Some evangelicals remain under that umbrella. The realism of Bacon ends up producing traditions it was embraced in order to avoid.

So, even when evangelicals read the Bible within their contemporary communities, academic or ecclesiological, the concept of community

³⁹George M. Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter?: The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1982), 92.

⁴⁰Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 562.

⁴¹Timothy P. Weber, “The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible,” in *The Bible in America*, 114.

⁴²Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 425.

is limited by the optimism surrounding the possibilities of the present. Though individualistic solipsism may be more readily acknowledged, communitarian solipsism is also problematic. And even within a scholarly community that confesses a critical, rational realism, an optimism in contemporary assessments of meaning persists.

Neither of these solipsisms, individualistic and communitarian, necessarily destroys the aptitude for accurate interpretations. They each contribute hypotheses for testing. But in order to avoid an uncritical naivete about the superiority of any one community, an evangelical approach must include a communal concept of interpretation which eclipses either solipsism. If not, we are numbered with Kepler: Hasn't God waited 2000 years for someone to gaze upon his revelation with understanding? As Horton says, "A return to community must, therefore, entail a return to Christian tradition."⁴³

Alister McGrath has helpfully sounded this note. Acknowledging the criticism of tradition within the Reformation, McGrath goes on to encourage evangelical sensitivity to tradition by highlighting its communal essence.

Yet the idea of "tradition" is of importance to modern evangelicalism. Evangelicals have always been prone to read Scripture as if they were the first to do so. We need to be reminded that others have been there before us, and have read it before us . . . "Tradition" is thus rightly understood (for example, by the Reformers such as Luther) as a history of discipleship—of reading, interpreting and wrestling with Scripture. *Tradition is a willingness to read Scripture, taking into account the ways in which it has been read in the past. It is an awareness of the communal dimension of Christian faith, over an extended period of time, which calls the shallow individualism of many evangelicals into question. There is more to the interpretation of Scripture than any one individual can discern* [emphasis added].⁴⁴

Attentiveness to tradition in Bible reading, then, is submission to the essentially communal nature of Christianity. It is a refusal to be infatuated with oneself as a Bible reader. But it is also another thing. It is the refusal

⁴³Horton, *Made in America*, 177.

⁴⁴Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 95–96.

to be infatuated with one's own time and methods.

THE EARLY CHURCH: IRENAEUS, THE CHURCH, AND THE SPIRIT

In the late part of the second century, we find a thoughtful model for Bible reading which may speak helpfully to contemporary concerns within the free church. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, in his confrontation with the Gnostics and Marcionites set forth an emphasis upon the gifts of the Spirit manifested in persons within the church as the environment within which true understanding takes place. A thoroughly biblical model, we find him developing it from 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:15–16.

The first text comes in *Adversus Haereses* 4.26.5, but he builds toward it strategically in the previous four paragraphs. In 4.26.1 (SC 100.2: 712.1–716.42) he argues on the basis of Matthew 13:38, 44, 52; Daniel 12:3–4, 7; Jeremiah 23:20; and Luke 24:26, 46–47 that the Old Testament Scriptures, read appropriately in light of the Incarnation, show forth Christ and the blessings he brings. Although the heretics and the Jews miss the treasure of Christ Incarnate in the Scriptures, it is due to their lack of the proper Christological prejudice, not the failure of the prophetic typology. Irenaeus introduces the prerequisite for proper reading of Scripture—the occurrence of the passion and glory of the incarnate Christ. This is the interpretive paradigm the disciples of Jesus received from the Master in Luke 24:26–27, 47.

The second paragraph, 4.26.2 (SC 100.2: 718.43–720.62), builds from the first. The disciples of Jesus, the Apostles, were succeeded by their disciples, the presbyters. These presbyters or elders (*presbuteroi*) have a teaching and interpretive authority which provides the church with proper understanding of things theological.⁴⁵ These presbyters, for Irenaeus, are to be obeyed on the ground that they with their succession in the line of bishops have “received the certain gift of the truth according to the good pleasure of the Father.”⁴⁶

Discussion of the meaning of “the certain gift of the truth” (*charisma*

⁴⁵The critical editions referenced are: Irénée de Lyon: *Contre les hérésies*, Livres 3, 4, 5, ed., trans., and annot., A. Rousseau, L. Deutreleau, B. Hammerdinger, and C. Mercier, 6 vols., Sources chrétiennes (SC), nos. 210, 211, 100.1, 100.2, 152, 153. (Paris: Cerf, 1974, 1965, 1969). Cf. *Adv. Haer.* 5.5.1 (SC 153:64.22–66.29); 5.36.2 (SC 153: 458.37–44); Rousseau, SC 100.1: 263.

⁴⁶*Adv. Haer.* 4.26.2 (SC 100.2: 718.46–47).

veritatis certum) has revolved around two questions.⁴⁷ Is the *charisma veritatis* a spiritual, supernatural gift received in ordination which placed one within the prophetic order of those who truthfully transmit and teach divine revelation? Or is the *charisma veritatis* a term which signifies the true doctrine, the deposit of faith, received according to tradition, which is maintained and passed on through purity of life and faithfulness of teaching? Put another way, is the gift a special charisma which imparts to the presbyter infallibility in teaching or is it the doctrine of the apostles which God has given to the church through the succession of bishops?

In my mind, to differentiate the two options is a movement in the wrong direction.⁴⁸ To emphasize a spiritual gift to the neglect of the content of faith or to stress the doctrine of the apostles without acknowledging the gift brought by the Spirit to the presbyter is to misread Irenaeus. The concept of spiritual gifts is certainly on his mind within the context (we will see it again in 4.26.5) and so is the idea of the apostles' doctrine.⁴⁹ The *charisma veritatis* is to be understood as a pneumatic gift which relates the individual presbyter to the church for the service of pastoral teaching in continuity with the apostles' doctrine.⁵⁰ The presbyter, as gifted, teaches in fidelity to that message. But he receives this gift along with his inclusion into the line of succession leading back to the apostles. And this carries with it a necessary relationship between the gift and his guarding of the apostolic tradition. In accordance with 1 Timothy 3:2 and 2 Timothy 2:2, his teaching and purity of life are a measure of his relationship to the episcopacy.⁵¹

⁴⁷See, e.g., K. Müller, "Das Charisma Veritatis und der Episkopat bei Irenaeus," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren kirche* 23 (1924): 216–22; D. van den Eynde, *Les normes de l'enseignement chrétien dans la littérature patristique des trois premiers siècles* (Paris: Gabalda & Fils, 1933), 186–87; E. Molland, "Irenaeus of Lugdunum and the Apostolic Succession," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 1 (1950): 12–28; A. Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 107–31; J. D. Quinn "Charisma Veritatis Certum: Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.26.2," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978): 520–25; L. Ligier, "La charisma veritatis certum des évêques," in *L'homme devant Dieu: Melanges Offerts au Père Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Aubien, 1963), 247–68; N. Brox, "Charisma veritatis certum (Zu Irenäus Adv. Haer. IV, 26.2)," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 75 (1964): 327–31. Cf. for brief bibliographical analyses: Y. de Andia, *Homo Vivens* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 229, n. 24; P. Bacq, *De l'ancienne à la nouvelle alliance selon Irénée: Unité du Livre IV de l'Adversus Haereses* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1978), 202, n.2.

⁴⁸Cf. Ligier, "La charisma veritatis certum des évêques," and Brox, "Charisma veritatis certum."

⁴⁹Cf. Brox, "Charisma veritatis certum."

⁵⁰Cf. Ligier, "La charisma veritatis certum des évêques," 267.

⁵¹Cf. Jacques Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 36.

In *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.1 (SC 211:30.10–12) he clearly states that bishops were appointed successors to the apostles in their teaching (*magisterium*) and in that ministry were to be beyond reproach.⁵² There is an inherent unity between the gift and the presbyter's teaching of the faith. The first does not exist apart from the second. Those who teach imperfectly, departing from the rule of faith, are not true gifted successors. For Irenaeus there are those who pass on the apostles' teaching with accuracy and humility through giftedness within the line of those who succeed the apostles. These are presbyters. Those who gather outside that succession or cause schisms are imposters who will be dealt with severely by God after the manner of Old Testament evildoers (Lev. 10:1–2; Num. 16:33; 1 Kings 14:10–16).

The third and fourth sections continue this line of thought by making explicit the differences between true and false presbyters. There are those who many believe to be presbyters but are not. These are selfish, contemptuous, prideful, and evil in secret. The Lord who judges the heart, not appearance, will bring condemnation upon them after the words of Daniel (13:56, 52–53) and his own words (Matt. 24:48–51; Luke 12:45–46). The true presbyters, however, stand apart. They “guard the succession of the apostles and with the presbyterial order⁵³ provide a sound word and unimpeachable conduct (Titus 2:8) for the example and connection of others.”⁵⁴ He goes on to compare such presbyters to Moses, Samuel, and Paul (Num. 16:15; 1 Sam. 12:2–5; 2 Cor. 7:2).

Helpful to our understanding of Irenaeus's notion of gift is the parallelism between sound teaching and character. For Irenaeus the *charisma veritatis* is a grace for truth in doctrine and conduct. They form an indivisible unity.

Finally, he concludes that presbyters of the type described in *Adv. Haer.* 4.26.4 are the ones brought forth by the church in accordance with Scripture's teaching (Isa. 60:17; Matt. 24:45–46; Luke 12:42–43). The emphasis for him is upon *where* such presbyters can be found. Of course, they are located in *the church* where the *gifts* are dispensed by the Lord, and it is from within the church, from the presbyters of truth, that one

⁵²The translation of A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:415, failed to capture this meaning with “government.” But see Rousseau, SC 210:222–23.

⁵³*Ordo presbyterii* is interchangeable with *episcopatus successio* (Douglas Powell, “Ordo Presbyterii,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s., 26 (1974): 290–328). Contra J. G. Sobosan, “The Role of the Presbyter: An Investigation into the *Adversus Haereses of Saint Irenaeus*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974): 129–46, who sees it as a college of presbyters.

⁵⁴*Adv. Haer.* 4.26.4 (SC 100.2: 722.82–86). The Armenian has *successionem* for *doctrinam*. This is Rousseau's preference and is followed here (Cf. SC 100.1: 262–63).

should learn what is true:

Paul, teaching the place where one finds them, says, “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers [1 Cor. 12:28].” Consequently, where the gifts of the Lord have been placed [1 Cor. 12:4], in that place it is necessary to learn the truth, that is, from those who have the succession of the church from the apostles and among whom abides sound and irreproachable conduct and purity and incorruption in word (Titus 2:8).⁵⁵

Such gifted presbyters preserve the church’s faith in the One God, increase its love for the Son of God, and honor the Spirit who inspired the patriarchs and prophets, by safely explaining the Scriptures.⁵⁶ For Irenaeus the gifted presbyters fulfill the mandate of apostles, prophets, and teachers in the sense that they: (1) hold and preserve the apostles’ doctrine, the church’s faith; (2) proclaim that doctrine founded upon the prophets; and (3) explain the Scriptures.⁵⁷ The *charisma veritatis*, this grace of the Spirit upon presbyters within the church, enables them to proclaim and explain from the Scriptures that which is apostolic. In this way they are within the line of continuity with the prophets and apostles, but they are teachers. Or, as we see in our next passage, disciples.

In *Adv. Haer.* 3.24.1 (SC 211:470.1–474.35) Irenaeus contrasts, again, the heretics and the church in their different teachings on God, Christ, and redemptive history. The church’s faith, in his view, has received harmonious testimony from the “prophets, apostles, and all the disciples,” those who have preserved the faith “through the beginning, the middle, and the end.” The three divisions refer in his mind to the three divisions of the progressive impartation of truth to the church. The prophets of the beginning indicate the Old Testament. The apostles of the middle period indicate those of the New Testament. The disciples of the end are the presbyters and those who follow the apostles’ teaching by following the presbyters.⁵⁸

⁵⁵*Adv. Haer.* 4.26.5 (SC 100.2: 278.115–22). Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, “Early Patristic Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures,” in *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1995), 129.

⁵⁶For the trinitarian structure, cf. Van den Eynde, *Les normes de l’enseignement chrétien*, 185–86.

⁵⁷J. Bentivegna, “The Charismatic Dossier of Saint Irenaeus,” *Studia Patristica* 18.3 (1989): 46–47.

⁵⁸“Disciples” of the apostles, for Irenaeus, has four references: (1) Luke and Mark who wrote

The true faith does not stall with the apostles. It continues to prosper through the apostles' disciples. Irenaeus cites 1 Corinthians 12:28 in order to support this thesis. In the church, by the vivifying, gifting presence of the Spirit, itself a gift from God (John 4:10), the faith of the prophets, apostles and disciples is preserved and renewed.⁵⁹ The reason is that there are those within the church, presbyters and others, who have been gifted in all appropriate ways:

For "in the church," it is said, "God has appointed apostles, prophets, teachers (1 Cor. 12:28)" and all the other working of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11), of which all those who do not unite with the church, but deprive themselves of life by their evil doctrines and their depraved conduct, are not partakers. For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace; and the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6).⁶⁰

What is of paramount importance for our purposes here, is to recognize that ultimately for Irenaeus the certainty of truth in the church is a matter of succession, "yet his strongest conviction, however difficult it may be to describe, was that it was a succession in the Divine Spirit."⁶¹ M. A. Donovan concurs. For her, in Irenaeus "the role of the Spirit must never be underestimated. In the Irenaean perspective the bishops succeed to the apostles through the gift of the Spirit."⁶² Yes, the church has its authori-

Gospels as followers of Paul and Peter, but were not apostles (*Adv. Haer.* 3.3.1; 3.9.1; 3.10.1; 3.10.6; 3.11.1; 3.12.1); (2) Others (presbyters) who had seen and heard the apostles but were not evangelists (Cf. *Adv. Haer.* 4.32.1; 5.5.1; 5.33.1; 5.36.2; W. C. van Unnik, "The Authority of the Presbyters in Irenaeus' Works," in *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honor of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, ed. J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks (Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 248–60); (3) followers of the apostles, also named presbyters, who learned from those who had seen and heard the apostles (Cf. 4.27.1); (4) the spiritual disciples, those who read Scripture along with the presbyters, but are not presbyters (Cf. 4.32.1–33.1). In 3.24.1 Irenaeus has 2, 3, 4 in mind, contra Rousseau, SC 210:388, who sees them as 1. Irenaeus goes on to cite 1 Cor. 12:28 in support of post-apostolic, i.e., post-New Testament, continuity within the church.

⁵⁹Cf. Rousseau, SC 210:390–93. This corrects E. Molland's interpretation that *Dei munus* in 3.24.1 (SC 211: 472.17) is to be read as the church's preaching" or "our faith." This interpretation contributed to his understanding of the *charisma veritatis* as the "deposit of faith" (26). He was following K. Müller, 218. Bentivegna concurs, "The Charismatic Dossier of Saint Irenaeus," 43.

⁶⁰*Adv. Haer.* 3.24.1 (SC 211:472.22–474.29).

⁶¹Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession*, 124.

⁶²Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville: Liturgical,

tative teaching presbyters, but this order does not supplant the Spirit in Irenaeus. This order is the Holy Spirit implementing his own government:

The governance of the Holy Spirit, given by the risen Christ to His church, is implemented through the working that the Spirit of God demonstrates in those whom God has placed in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers.⁶³

Ultimately, then, in the matters of governmental authority and truth one must think pneumatologically. After providing a survey of the Irenaeian images of the Spirit in the church in his discussion of *Adv. Haer.* 3.24.1, Bentivegna gives a pointed conclusion: “For all these reasons the Holy Spirit, that the Lord conferred upon the church, must be considered as the real governor of the church.”⁶⁴

Yet one cannot think pneumatologically, for Irenaeus, without thinking ecclesiological. His reading of Ephesians 4:15–16 makes this clear in complement to his reading of 1 Corinthians 12:28. His quotation of the Pauline word occurs in *Adv. Haer.* 4.32.1 in definition of the “spiritual disciple,” the accurate Bible reader. In contrast to the heretics, the spiritual Bible reader reads with a prejudice of faith: There is one God who created all things through the agency of his Word as is announced by Moses, John’s Gospel, and Paul (Gen. 1:3; John 1:3; Eph. 4:5–6). The reader with this faith confesses one head of the church, Christ, and the ultimate unity of the diverse testimonies to him. Such a disciple

holds to the head [of the body] from whom the whole body, joined and entwined by every joint with which it is furnished, according to the measure of each part, makes bodily growth for the edification of itself in love.⁶⁵

For Irenaeus “each part” refers to the Old Testament prophets. “Each one” (*unusquisque*) of them gave partial testimony to the One and only Christ in a unique manner. Each testimony when taken together with the

1997), 65.

⁶³Bentivegna, “The Charismatic Dossier of Saint Irenaeus,” 46.

⁶⁴Bentivegna, “The Charismatic Dossier of Saint Irenaeus,” 44.

⁶⁵*Adv. Haer.* 4.32.1 (SC 100.2: 798.24–27).

others forms a whole which proclaims Christ in type and anticipation.⁶⁶ But there is another referent for “each part”: Irenaeus intends the various members of the church whose gifted testimonies of unity are equally necessary to the unity and maturity of the church, namely the apostles, presbyters, and spiritual disciples (cf. Eph. 4:11–12).

The heretics divide the prophetic words and split and pervert the One God and the One Word. But the spiritual reader clings to the prejudice of unity, a prejudice delivered by the apostles to the presbyters. When such a person reads Scripture, all its parts will be understood as consistent with each other. Behind this confidence stands the framework of prophet, apostle, and ecclesiological presbyter, a framework of theological and Christological unity. The true disciple reads the Bible with an eye to the words of the presbyters because they have the doctrine of the apostles, which is in accord with the prophetic announcement.

But what is it that provides confidence in each of these parts which the head uses to nurture his body? Once again, we are back to the Spirit. The Spirit has been superintending the prophet, the apostle, and the presbyter; the prophecies of the future, the explanations of the present, and the interpretations of the past:

Such a disciple who is truly spiritual, because he has received the Spirit of God who was with humanity from the beginning in all the economies of God, predicted the future, declared the present and fully explained the past, “Judges all and himself is judged by no one [1 Cor. 2:15].”⁶⁷

The disciple who reads the Bible in accordance with the church’s reading, that of the presbyters, reads it in a manner continuous with the apostles (and prophets). Both have been given to the church as parts, which, within their measure, contribute to bodily growth. The spiritual disciple also makes contribution and is preserved from judgment, for his interpretation is true.

In this way, the spiritual disciple “holds to the head” by viewing things as the Lord himself did. The Lord, the Word, “united the beginning to the end, being the Lord of both.”⁶⁸ The continuity of revelatory history is

⁶⁶*Adv. Haer.* 4.33.9 (SC 100.2: 820.149–822.170). See esp. SC 100.2: 824.178, 186.

⁶⁷*Adv. Haer.* 4.33.1 (SC 100.2:802.1–5).

⁶⁸*Adv. Haer.* 4.34.4 (SC 100.2: 858.105–107).

a *sine qua non* of Christianity for the Bishop of Lyons. The church must imitate Christ, “the body following the head.”⁶⁹

Irenaeus is reading Ephesians 4:15–16 within the context of the chapter, particularly 4:5–6, 4:11, and 4:14 and in light of 1 Corinthians 2:15. The theological and Christological bias of unity is informed by Ephesians 4:5, 6 which he cites. When he thinks of the prophets, apostles, and disciples as the parts which contribute to the body’s growth, he is casting his eye upon Ephesians 4:11: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” And we are to understand that his attraction to the passage in a context where he is opposing the false doctrine of the heretics is influenced by Ephesians 4:14. This verse speaks of the protection the church receives from deceitful doctrine by virtue of the maturity gained through the gifted members referred to in Ephesians 4:11.

In unity with many patristic interpretations, Irenaeus takes the prophets of Ephesians 4:11 as Old Testament prophets. This view is largely rejected today. But Irenaeus’s main point is the importance of listening to the voice of the “gifted ones” within the church in one’s own Bible reading. Those attentive to the Spirit within the gifted community become spiritual themselves.

THE FREE CHURCH AND THE EARLY CHURCH

It is in the Irenaeian vision of the Spirit’s gift within the community led by the presbyters that I find a helpful, yes biblical, corrective to both individualistic and communitarian solipsism. Evangelicals in their Bible reading need the influence of the community past and present because there the Spirit resides. Christ has gifted the community with teachers who by the Spirit’s enablement see and proclaim the meaning of Scripture in continuity with the prophets and apostles.

Members of the free church may not wish to identify with Irenaeus’s episcopal or presbyterial confidence. But they must join him in his pneumatological–ecclesiological confidence. The evangelical’s optimism must never be in a method ancient or modern. The evangelical is not to be overcome with an anthropological confidence or confidence in a milieu. Any suspicion directed toward the results of ancient exegesis must also be directed toward contemporary method. I would hope evangelicals would return

⁶⁹*Adv. Haer.* 4.34.4 (SC 100.2: 860.117).

to the history of interpretation because to do so is essentially Christian.⁷⁰

To be truly evangelical, to be truly free, is to be pneumatologically oriented. This means to be absorbed with what the Spirit is bringing forth in his gifted ones now and in what he has set forth through his gifted ones in the past. The focus on the Spirit within his gifted ones defeats any notion of solipsism, for it is an interest outside of either “me, now” or “us, now.” Evangelicals within the free church must go to tradition in order to look for the gift within others. They must journey to the exegesis of the past in search of the Spirit’s fruit. And where is the gift of the Spirit? In the church. In the community, both of today and yesterday.

For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace; and the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6).

⁷⁰Cf. Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, 239; Michael Cahill, “The History of Exegesis and Our Theological Future,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 344–45.

THE BEBBINGTON QUADRILATERAL AND THE HOLY SPIRIT: APPROPRIATING THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF B. H. CARROLL

Allen L. Bramlett*

David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*¹ identifies the four defining characteristics of evangelicalism as "biblicism," "conversionism," "activism," and "crucicentrism." These four are now commonly known as the Bebbington Quadrilateral. Although scholars have variously modified and prioritized these characteristics, Bebbington's framework has achieved broad reception within evangelical scholarship.² In recent years, at least two evangelical scholars have pointed out an aspect of Bebbington's presentation they felt was lacking: a discussion of the central place of the Holy Spirit in the development of evangelical theology.

In *Who is an Evangelical?* Thomas Kidd defines evangelicals as "born again protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit."³ This definition, which draws on conversionism and biblicism, emphasizes a vital relationship with Christ, enabled by the Holy Spirit. For Kidd, the emphasis on the born-again experience and living in the Spirit were the key factors shaping the self-identity of evangelicals in the 1700s, particularly in relation to other Protestants.⁴

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¹David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

²See Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) where Larsen points to the Quadrilateral's use by two noted dictionaries of evangelicals: *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) and *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2003).

³Thomas S. Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

⁴See also Kidd's response as a panelist discussing the Bebbington Quadrilateral. Mark A. Noll,

In a similar vein, Timothy Larsen offers his own definition of an evangelical that includes an emphasis on “the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others.”⁵ When comparing Larsen’s emphases to Bebbington’s, it is clear that Larsen has added two characteristics to give greater clarification, while compounding conversionism and activism together due to the work of the Holy Spirit being central to both.⁶

Building on the contributions of Kidd and Larsen, this essay argues that each of Bebbington’s four characteristics of evangelicalism presupposes a robust and comprehensive commitment to the Holy Spirit—not only conversionism and activism, but biblicism and crucicentrism as well. This claim is advanced through the theological lens of B. H. Carroll, founder and first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. After briefly defining each component of the quadrilateral and tracing its historical development, the essay examines Carroll’s Spirit-centered approach in each characteristic. In doing so, it contends that a substantive doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not ancillary but central to evangelical theology. The essay concludes by reaffirming this thesis and offering final reflections on the pneumatological coherence of evangelical identity.

Why B. H. Carroll? Benajah Harvey Carroll (1843–1914) was a leading Southern Baptist theologian, pastor, and educator whose influence on evangelical theology extended well beyond his native Texas. A Civil War veteran and long-time pastor, Carroll emerged in the late nineteenth century as one of the most prominent Baptist ministers in the American South. In 1908, he founded and served as the first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he shaped generations of ministers through his emphasis on biblical authority, evangelistic fervor, and doctrinal clarity.

David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 136-141.

⁵Larsen develops his own “pentagon” to serve as the working definition of an evangelical, stating an evangelical is: 1. an orthodox Protestant, 2. who stands in the tradition of the global Christians networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield; 3. who has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice; 4. who stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross; 5. and who stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others, including the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people. Larsen, *Evangelical Theology*, 1.

⁶Larsen, *Evangelical Theology*, 10.

Deeply committed to revivalist piety and confessional orthodoxy, Carroll articulated a robust theology of the Christian life that stressed personal conversion, obedience to Scripture, and the active work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, sanctification, and ministry. His writings and sermons reflect a distinctly evangelical synthesis in which biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism are integrated through a strong pneumatological framework, making him a particularly illuminating interlocutor for evaluating the theological assumptions underlying the Bebbington Quadrilateral.

THE SPIRIT AND BIBLICISM

The first characteristic of the quadrilateral under consideration is “biblicism,” defined as a particular devotion to the Bible, holding it as the inspired Word of God and the central authority in doctrine and practice. Beyond simply developing a doctrine of Scripture, Bebbington argues that the emphasis on individual piety and transformation through the study and application of the Bible is a clear feature of early evangelicalism, though this would begin to change in the first half of the 19th century.⁷ The mounting liberal/fundamentalist controversies that boiled over in the early 20th century led more conservative evangelicals to tighten their convictions about the Bible, especially with regard to the issue of inerrancy. Though the debate concerning inerrancy has caused instances of division, Larsen believes that these cases cannot detract from the general evangelical consensus that the Bible is the unique, trustworthy, authoritative Word of God.⁸

Undergirding evangelical biblicism is the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This inspiration by God is understood to be a key activity of the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the divine Trinity who “breathes” out Scripture. Without a clear doctrine of inspiration, biblicism devolves into rationalistic proof-texting or worse. B. H. Carroll maintained a high doctrine of Scripture because, like other evangelicals, he was convinced of the Bible’s divine authorship. Treating the first article of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s statement of faith, which was based on the New Hampshire Confession of 1833, Carroll places great emphasis on the Greek phrase *theopneustos*, translated as

⁷“The overriding aim of early evangelicals was to bring home the message of the Bible and to encourage its devotional use rather than to develop a doctrine of scripture.” Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

⁸Larsen, *Evangelical Theology*, 8.

“God-inspired.”⁹ This term carries a specific theological meaning—to breathe on or to breathe into for the purpose of conveying the Holy Spirit, in order that those inspired may speak or write what God would have spoken or written.¹⁰

This inspiration by the Holy Spirit leads Carroll to make certain observations about the Bible. The first observation, taken from 1 Peter 1:10-11, is that the “books of the Bible are not by the will of man.”¹¹ Second, appealing to 2 Samuel 23:2 and Acts 1:16, the “propelling power” behind the writing of the prophets who spoke and the authors who wrote was the Holy Spirit.¹² Third, Carroll understands that the work of the Spirit in inspiration includes the selection of material by the biblical authors, even when they reference uninspired works.¹³

Fourth, inspiration entails the awakening of one’s mind so that one may accurately remember what was observed. This is especially important for Carroll when considering the long sermons recorded in the Bible, such as the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁴ The fifth observation concerns the completeness of Scripture, recognizing that the Holy Spirit’s inspiration enables the canon to be closed.¹⁵ If the authors were not inspired, the Bible would continue to be expanded. The sixth observation offered by Carroll addresses the existence of four Gospels. He argued that their inspiration enabled four distinct perspectives on Jesus to come together “to complete the view.”¹⁶

Carroll’s final two observations on biblical inspiration shift the focus from Scripture’s composition to the effects that inspired Scripture has on the reader. The Bible, as the inspired Word of God, has an accompanying power and sufficiency that enables the salvation of man and the making of one wise. This power is attributed to the Holy Spirit, who inspires the text that brings such transformation.¹⁷ Taken together, these observations provide the rationale for Carroll’s biblicism—the conviction that the Spirit of God inspired the Bible, and that as the inspired Word of God,

⁹B. H. Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible: A Discussion of the Origin, The Authenticity, and the Sanctity of the Oracles of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930), 15.

¹⁰Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 15.

¹¹Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 21.

¹²Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 22.

¹³Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 22.

¹⁴Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 22.

¹⁵Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 23.

¹⁶Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 24.

¹⁷Carroll, *Inspiration of the Bible*, 25.

the Bible is not just to be studied by clergy or theologians, but to be held as a perfect treasure.

In addition to affirming the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in the work of inspiration, Carroll explicitly argues that the Spirit's work does not cease with the production of the biblical text but continues in the interpretation of the text through illumination. For Carroll, inspiration and illumination are inseparably linked: the same Spirit who sovereignly superintended the revelation of God's Word must also be actively present if that Word is to be rightly understood. To separate the two is, in Carroll's view, to undermine the authority and efficacy of Scripture itself.

Carroll locates this doctrine of illumination within the pattern of Jesus's own ministry.¹⁸ A defining feature of Christ's earthly work was his role as an interpreter of divine revelation—one who patiently explained the meaning of God's Word to his disciples and corrected their misunderstandings. Jesus did not merely proclaim revelation; he rendered it intelligible. According to Carroll, this interpretive function does not terminate with Christ's ascension but is taken up by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus identifies as his "other self" and promises as the one who will guide the disciples "into all the truth" (John 16:13).

Thus, Carroll contends that the Holy Spirit assumes the ongoing interpretive role of Christ in the life of the church. By the Spirit's aid, human readers are enabled to apprehend the true sense of Scripture in accordance with God's intent. Illumination, therefore, is not the reception of new revelation, but the Spirit's enabling work that allows Scripture to be rightly understood and faithfully applied. For Carroll, this ministry of illumination is not optional but essential. Apart from the Spirit's active involvement, there can be no confidence in arriving at a true, authoritative interpretation of Scripture. Consequently, the interpreter must consciously depend upon and seek the Spirit's illuminating work, recognizing that faithful exegesis ultimately rests not in human skill alone but in the gracious activity of God himself.

THE SPIRIT AND CRUCICENTRISM

The second characteristic of Bebbington's Quadrilateral is "crucicentrism," or a theology of the cross as the fulcrum of evangelical theology.¹⁹

¹⁸B. H. Carroll, *The Holy Spirit: Comprising a Discussion of the Paraclete, the Other Self of Jesus, and Other Phases of the Work of the Spirit of God* (Solid Christian Books, 2015), 16.

¹⁹"To make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism." Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15.

Though evangelicals may disagree on issues such as the extent of the atonement, there existed a general consensus that the central message of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners. This conviction about Christ's substitutionary atonement was the distinguishing feature between evangelicals and others in its early years and continues to be so today.²⁰

Although crucicentrism rightly centers on the work of the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, in his incarnation and sacrificial death, it does not marginalize the role of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit plays an indispensable role in the economy of redemption by testifying to and effectually applying the saving work of Christ. For Carroll, any robust account of the atonement must therefore be pneumatologically informed, recognizing that the benefits of the cross for the redeemed are inseparable from the Spirit's activity.

Central to Carroll's understanding of Christ's atoning work is the Holy Spirit's role in attesting to the truth of Christ. Commenting on 1 Timothy 3:16, Carroll emphasizes the attesting work of the Spirit in Christ's ministry, pointing to Jesus's baptism and the Spirit's descent, as well as the Spirit's attestation to the proclamation of Christ as Savior.²¹ The authenticating work of the Spirit in the act of proclaiming the cross is essential for preaching to have any efficacy. This role of the Holy Spirit in confirming the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross takes on a particular importance for Carroll as he argues the reason the Spirit was not sent until after Christ's ascension is so the Spirit could witness to the offering of Christ in heaven and his subsequent enthronement.²² The Holy Spirit empowers the testimony of the cross that he witnessed on earth and in heaven.

Moreover, the Spirit's work extends beyond attestation to application. Not only does the Holy Spirit testify to the truth of the message of the cross as it is preached, but he also applies the redemptive effects of Christ's atoning death to the believer. Discussing the Trinitarian reality of redemption, Carroll states: "The Son is the Prophet, Sacrifice, Priest, King, and these four offices are not performed by the Father or by the Holy Spirit. Through His expiation made for sin Christ offered that expiatory blood in the Holy of Holies, but the Holy Spirit applies it. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and it is through the

²⁰Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15; Larsen, *Evangelical Theology*, 10.

²¹B. H. Carroll, *Christ and His Church* (Dallas: Helms Printing Co., 1940), 64.

²²Carroll, *The Holy Spirit*, 12.

Spirit that we are renewed.”²³

Apart from the Spirit’s regenerating and sanctifying work, the objective accomplishment of redemption at the cross would remain subjectively unrealized in human lives. According to Carroll, it is the Holy Spirit who bridges the gap between the historical event of Christ’s sacrificial death and its personal appropriation, ensuring that the saving benefits of the cross are effectually communicated to individual hearts.²⁴

THE SPIRIT AND CONVERSIONISM

The third characteristic is “conversionism,” which correlates with the evangelical emphasis on the necessity of being “born again” for salvation. Within evangelical theology, conversion entails repentance from sin and faith with spiritual regeneration through the power of the Holy Spirit. This experience of conversion may take the form of a dramatic, identifiable event or unfold gradually over an extended period, culminating in a decisive—if less emotionally marked—commitment to Christ. While evangelical history and popular piety have often privileged the former, more dramatic model, evangelical theology has consistently affirmed the legitimacy of both patterns as authentic expressions of conversion.

For Larsen, conversionism occupies a foundational place within his articulation of evangelical identity. It forms the first element of the fifth characteristic in his “Pentagon” model, which foregrounds the activity of the Holy Spirit as central to evangelical belief and practice. By situating conversionism within this pneumatological framework, Larsen underscores that evangelicalism is not merely defined by doctrinal assent or moral reform, but by an experiential encounter with divine grace that results in transformed lives.

The concept of being “born again,” or regeneration, is understood within evangelical theology as a supernatural work accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Carroll frames regeneration as a necessity arising from the reality of the Fall, emphasizing humanity’s total dependence upon divine initiative for salvation. As a result of human sinfulness, regeneration cannot be achieved through moral effort or religious observance. Regeneration must be accomplished entirely by the Spirit of God.

²³Benajah Harvey Carroll, “Foundations of Our Faith,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 51 (2009): 152.

²⁴“The Father’s love is the source of all spiritual life, and He gives the Son and the Son atones for sin, but it is the Spirit that applies the atonement and qualifies us for its enjoyment.” Carroll, “Foundations of Our Faith,” 184.

For Carroll, the locus classicus for this doctrine is John 3, particularly Jesus's dialogue with Nicodemus, in which the necessity of new birth is made explicit. The Lord's insistence that one must be "born from above" underscores the fundamentally supernatural character of salvation and the indispensability of the Spirit's work in bringing about new life.

At the same time, Carroll affirms that this divine act occurs in relation to faith in the proclaimed gospel, a dynamic he describes as the "human side of regeneration."²⁵ While regeneration remains ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, it is not detached from the hearing and reception of the gospel message. Carroll thus emphasizes the importance of the invitation as he discusses the "freeness of salvation."²⁶ As the Bible is filled with patterns of invitation, in both the Old and New Testaments, the call to conversion is a call to men and women to respond.

While Carroll acknowledges the inherent mystery of the new birth, he finds several discernible elements consistently accompany this process.²⁷ First, regeneration is preceded by the proclamation of the cross through preaching. Scripture and evangelical experience alike testify that cross-centered proclamation is the primary means by which God confronts individuals with the reality of sin and the offer of salvation. Second, this proclamation gives rise to conviction in the hearer. Under the agency of the Holy Spirit, the preached word penetrates the heart, producing an awareness of sin and a corresponding movement toward repentance. Conviction, therefore, is not merely psychological remorse but a Spirit-enabled recognition of one's need for divine grace. Third, faith itself is brought forth as a gift of the Spirit within the individual. This faith enables what Carroll and the Bible describe as the "washing of regeneration," marking the believer's incorporation into the family of God and signifying a decisive transition from spiritual death to life.

Taken together, these elements illustrate Carroll's conviction that every aspect of regeneration leading to conversion is supernaturally initiated and

²⁵B. H. Carroll, *Sermons with Life Sketch* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1893), 186.

²⁶Carroll, "Foundations of Our Faith," 176.

²⁷Commenting on the mystery of regeneration, Carroll states: "Human science has never been able to explain the origin of life. So our article rightly says of the imparting of the spiritual life: 'in a manner above our comprehension.' There need be no confusion of mind in distinguishing the parts of salvation performed by the several persons in the Godhead. The Father's love is the source of all spiritual life, and He gives the Son, and the Son atones for sin, but it is the Spirit that applies the atonement and qualifies us for its enjoyment. It is by the Holy Spirit. He is the author of regeneration." Carroll, "Foundations of Our Faith," 184.

sustained by the Holy Spirit. While human response is genuinely involved, the efficacy of conversion rests entirely upon divine action. In this way, Carroll's account preserves both the sovereignty of the Spirit and the central role of gospel proclamation in the evangelical understanding of salvation.

THE SPIRIT AND ACTIVISM

The fourth characteristic is "activism," the belief that a person whose life has been transformed by the Holy Spirit will seek the conversion of others to Christ. This notion of activism is guided by the conviction that "work" for the Kingdom of God is the best and most appropriate use of a Christian's time and efforts.

This work, which includes evangelism and mission endeavors for the salvation of souls, may also include activism centered on enforcing the ethics of the gospel through philanthropic means. A famous example of this type of activist impulse is William Wilberforce's campaigns against the slave trade.²⁸ Taken together with conversionism, Larsen sees activism, like Jonathan Edwards, as a natural overflow of the converted life due to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In his theology of Christian activism, Carroll consistently locates both the origin and sustaining power of Christian engagement in the work of the Holy Spirit. For Carroll, activism is not an autonomous human endeavor nor merely a strategic response to social conditions; rather, it is the outward expression of a life animated and directed by the Spirit of God. This Spirit-centered framework shapes his understanding of both evangelistic responsibility and moral engagement.

Carroll's commitment to evangelism stands at the forefront of his understanding of Christian activism. He regarded the salvation of the lost as a universal obligation binding upon all believers, not solely upon clergy or professional missionaries. This responsibility, however, could not be fulfilled through human effort alone. In preaching on the importance of Pentecost, Carroll emphasized that effective witness depends upon the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Without such empowerment, the church, in his view, remains institutionally active yet spiritually ineffective. Evangelistic activism, therefore, is not simply a function of obedience to the Great Commission but the result of Spirit-enabled participation in God's redemptive work.

²⁸Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

²⁹Carroll, *The Holy Spirit*, 50.

In addition to evangelism, Carroll extends this Spirit-centered framework to the realm of moral activism. His advocacy for prohibition offers a clear example of how theological conviction informed his engagement with contested public issues.³⁰ Operating within a political climate marked by intense debate over alcohol consumption, Carroll approached prohibition not primarily as a partisan or legislative concern but as a moral issue demanding Christian witness. For him, moral activism was neither optional nor peripheral to the Christian faith; rather, it was a natural outworking of a life shaped by obedience to Christ and submission to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in his view, plays a central role in enabling believers to recognize moral truth and to act upon it faithfully.

Bringing the two forms of activism together, Carroll offers a theological vision of this evangelical characteristic by rooting both evangelistic activism and moral activism in pneumatology. Christian activism, properly understood, is neither self-generated nor self-sustaining but remains dependent upon the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer and the church.

CONCLUSION

Bebbington's fourfold description of evangelicalism—biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism—emerged from his research into the revivalist currents of the eighteenth century. His approach has proven enduringly useful as a framework for identifying the movement's characteristic emphases. However, these categories, taken on their own, risk functioning merely as descriptors unless they are grounded in a more fundamental theological reality: the indispensable and persistent work of the Holy Spirit.

As the theology of Carroll makes clear, it is the Holy Spirit who animates each of these evangelical commitments from within. First, the Spirit inspires and illumines Holy Scripture, rendering biblicism more than a formal allegiance to texts. Second, the Spirit bears witness to the crucified Christ, making the atonement both intelligible and effective. Third, the Spirit effects regeneration through repentance and faith, giving substance to conversionism. And fourth and finally, the Spirit empowers and directs the church's active obedience, sustaining evangelical activism

³⁰See Lefever's treatment of Carroll's activity in the prohibition movement. Alan J. Lefever, "The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll" (PhD Diss. The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), 70-81.

as a genuinely gospel-centered vocation.

Seen in this light, the coherence and continuity of evangelical identity cannot be maintained apart from the inclusion of a robust pneumatology in the theological foundation of evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is not merely a constellation of doctrinal priorities or historical practices, but a movement constituted and sustained by the Spirit's ongoing work in the life of the church. As contemporary evangelicalism continues to grapple with questions of self-definition, fragmentation, and future direction, its theological integrity and missional vitality depend upon renewed attentiveness to the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit's agency gave rise to the movement, his presence unifies its diverse expressions, and his power alone can preserve its faithfulness in the generations to come.

CARL F. H. HENRY, BIBLICAL INERRANCY, AND THE PURSUIT OF A CONSISTENTLY EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

Nathan A. Finn*

Evangelicals have always been a people of the Book. In his much-discussed “quadrilateral” of evangelical distinctives, David Bebbington argues that biblicism, which he defines as “a particular regard for the Bible,” has been a defining characteristic of modern evangelicalism.¹ This evangelical commitment to Scripture actually predates the spiritual awakenings of the early 1700s.² Evangelicals are heirs of the Protestant Reformation and various post-Reformation movements, and as such we are committed to a bibliology that is rooted in the reformational principle of *sola Scriptura*. We care deeply for the Scriptures, believing that they are God’s written words for humanity.

Though all evangelicals profess a high view of Scripture, and nearly all sincerely mean it, the devil is in the details—some would say literally! Evangelicals debate the finer points of biblical inspiration, authority, perspicuity, sufficiency, and reliability, not to mention biblical translation, interpretation, and application. For purposes of this article, our focus is on the theme of biblical reliability. American evangelicals often convey our belief that the Bible is reliable, or truthful, or trustworthy with the terms “infallibility” and “inerrancy.” However, those terms are themselves the subject of considerable controversy. Some evangelicals view inerrancy and infallibility as near synonyms while others believe they represent two rival understandings of the Bible’s reliability. Furthermore, debates over how best to articulate the truthfulness of Scripture often overlap with the

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¹David S. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

²See Kenneth J. Stewart, “The Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture, 1650–1850: A Reexamination of David Bebbington’s Theory,” in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008), 394–413.

equally contested notion of evangelical identity.³

My purpose in this article is to engage this contested topic from a historical perspective. However, because I serve in contexts that are confessionally committed to a particular view, I think it appropriate to state my position up front. I affirm biblical inerrancy, and I do not pit that concept against biblical infallibility. In fact, I argue that infallibility is actually the stronger of the two concepts and is foundational to inerrancy. Scripture is without error, and thus inerrant, because Scripture is infallible, and is thus incapable of erring.⁴ I understand that some evangelicals who share a quite similar understanding of Scripture might be hesitant about the language of inerrancy. I agree with David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell: “While the term ‘inerrancy’ continues to be subject to misunderstanding, even after so many carefully stated works on the subject, it remains, when thoughtfully defined, a helpful and informative theological term to describe the results of biblical inspiration.”⁵ I do not feign some sort of value-neutral historical objectivity in this article. However, I do attempt to be as even-handed as I can by treating all parties with respect and framing their beliefs in such a way that they would recognize themselves in this historical narrative.⁶

Carl F. H. Henry offers an influential voice from the recent past who addressed the relationship between biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity. Henry was arguably the most consequential postwar evangelical theologian and was a key shaper of modern evangelicalism in America. Albert Mohler argues Henry’s influence “extended through his voluminous writings and public exposure, has shaped the evangelical movement to a degree unmatched by any other evangelical theologian of the period.”⁷ In 1977, the year following the “Year of the Evangelical,” TIME magazine

³Debating evangelical identity is a cottage industry among scholars, especially those nurtured in evangelical contexts. See Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

⁴See David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture*, Theology for the People of God (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025), 222.

⁵Dockery and Yarnell, *Special Revelation and Scripture*, 227. See also J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 126–31.

⁶This sort of historical empathy is rooted in the second greatest commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). In this case, our neighbors are historical actors and those contemporary individuals who resonate with their positions. See Nathan A. Finn, *History: A Student’s Guide*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 22.

⁷R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001), 291.

identified Henry as the leading theologian in the most influential Christian movement in America.⁸ After Henry's death in 2003, his obituary in the *New York Times* suggested he was "a theologian who helped move evangelical Christianity from the sidelines to a central place in American religion."⁹

Over the course of six decades, Henry wrote regularly and substantively about the doctrine of Scripture. He believed in the authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture, self-consciously framing his own views in continuity with the Princeton theological tradition represented by Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823–1886), and Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield (1851–1921).¹⁰ Many of Henry's most noteworthy writings on this topic were published in the quarter-century between 1960 and 1985, which is when intra-evangelical debates over biblical reliability were "running hot" in ways that continue to reverberate across the wider evangelical movement. This article contextualizes those inerrancy debates, summarizes Henry's articulation of inerrancy, and recounts how Henry understood the relationship between biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity. My hope is that greater familiarity with Henry's views will help contemporary evangelicals to navigate faithfully our own ongoing discussions about the same issues Henry and his contemporaries were debating a half-century ago.

"THE YEAR OF THE EVANGELICAL"

By the mid-1970s, the Gallup Organization had been polling Americans for four decades. In nearly all those years, Gallup pollsters had asked questions about religion, tracking such matters as belief in God, church attendance, and religious preferences. In 1976, George Gallup Jr. added a new question. The younger Gallup was the son of the organization's founder and a devout Episcopal layman. The poll indicated that 34 percent

⁸Richard Ostling, "Religion: Theology for the Tent Meeting," *Time Magazine* (February 14, 1977), <https://time.com/archive/6848576/religion-theology-for-the-tent-meeting/>.

⁹Laurie Goodstein, "Rev. Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, 90, Brain of Evangelical Movement," *New York Times* (December 13, 2003), <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/13/us/rev-dr-carl-f-h-henry-90-brain-of-evangelical-movement.html>.

¹⁰For more on the Princeton theological tradition, see David F. Wells, ed., *The Princeton Theology, Reformed Theology in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Bradley Seeman, "The 'Old Princetonians' on Biblical Authority," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 195–237.

of Americans—about half of the nation’s Protestants—claimed to have had a born-again experience. In response, Gallup Jr. famously dubbed 1976 the “Year of the Evangelical,” a claim that was echoed in a famous cover story for *Newsweek* about the growing influence of born-again Christianity.¹¹

Evangelicalism had been steadily increasing its profile in the wider culture since the end of World War II. The most famous example was Billy Graham, who had been a household name for decades and was a staple of Gallup’s Top 10 “Most Admired Men” list since 1948.¹² However, evangelical momentum was really starting to peak in the 1970s. The bestseller lists included books such as James Dobson’s *Dare to Discipline* (1970), Hal Lindsay’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), Marabel Morgan’s *The Total Woman* (1973), and Charles Colson’s *Born Again* (1976), all written by evangelicals. Noted entertainers such as Pat Boone, Anita Bryant, and Johnny Cash—all of whom were raised in devout homes—became more vocal about their personal relationships with Jesus Christ. Other noteworthy individuals, such as former Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, convicted Watergate conspirator Colson, and folk singer Bob Dylan, were all famous recent converts to born-again Christianity. But most importantly—and certainly the reason for Gallup’s interest in the question—was Jimmy Carter’s meteoric rise from former governor of Georgia to President of the United States. Carter was a lifelong Southern Baptist and the first President to self-identify as an evangelical.¹³

THE EVANGELICAL BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE

At exactly the same time that evangelicalism was becoming more mainstream in American culture, a controversy over the nature of Scripture was dividing evangelical clergy and scholars. Since at least the

¹¹See Kenneth L. Woodward et al., “Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals,” *Newsweek* (October 25, 1976): 68–78. The Gallup poll was also reported in other major news outlets, both secular and religious. For example, see Kenneth Briggs, “Gallup Poll Finds New Evidence of the Religious Character of U.S.,” *New York Times* (September 12, 1976): 26, and David Kucharsky, “The Year of the Evangelical ’76,” *Christianity Today* (October 22, 1976): 12–13.

¹²Frank Newport, “In the News: Billy Graham on ‘Most Admired’ List 61 Times,” Gallup (February 21, 2018), available online: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/228089/news-billy-graham-admired-list-times.aspx#:~:text=The%20Rev.,11>. Graham holds the record for most appearances on the list.

¹³For more on Carter’s evangelicalism and the wider cultural impact of evangelicalism during the mid-1970s, see Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9–31; Randall Balmer, *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic, 2014), 137–58; Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical*, 116–20; Daniel K. Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical: Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and the Presidential Contest of 1976* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 202–07.

fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s, most American evangelical biblical scholars and theologians had identified with the bibliology of the aforementioned Princeton theological tradition. Key claims included a plenary-verbal view of inspiration and belief that the original biblical autographs were without error. The latter view was called “inerrancy” or “infallibility,” and the two terms were used interchangeably by evangelicals who affirmed the Princeton bibliology.¹⁴

However, a minority of American evangelical scholars had always been uncomfortable, or at least ambivalent, concerning the Princeton position.¹⁵ By the 1960s, that minority was growing, especially among younger scholars who were more amenable to the views of British and Continental theologians who championed biblical authority but rejected both plenary-verbal inspiration and inerrancy. These evangelicals preferred to speak of the Bible’s infallibility rather than its inerrancy, and they tended to identify infallibility with Scripture’s message, especially pertaining to salvation and ethics, rather than the actual words of the biblical text.¹⁶

For the sake of space, I will focus on five key moments in the American evangelical inerrancy controversy that developed between the early 1960s and the mid-1980s. These moments were by no means self-contained disputes that were independent from the others. Rather, each subsequent controversy built upon one or more of its predecessors, resulting in a compounding effect. These inerrancy debates might be compared to a massive storm system that blew across American evangelicalism. Each of these moments constituted a single tornado that inflicted considerable damage in a particular locale. For those affected by each twister, it might seem like the storm was only impacting their ecclesial “neighborhood.” But if we zoom out, we see that the various funnel clouds eventually blew into one other, creating larger whirlwinds that multiplied the total damage

¹⁴John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations for Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 264–66.

¹⁵Molly Worthen argues that most evangelicals in Wesleyan, Holiness, Pentecostal, and Anabaptist contexts were ambivalent about Princeton bibliology (as well as Christian worldview language), except for scholars in those traditions who were influenced by fundamentalism and/or Reformed theology. See Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁶The British context was somewhat different because of the influence of Romanticism on British Christianity. Evangelicals long preferred infallibility to inerrancy, except in contexts influenced by American fundamentalism, even though many British evangelicals who used the term “infallible” meant the same thing as their American counterparts who preferred the term “inerrancy.” See Stephen R. Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture in Transatlantic Perspective,” in *Evangelical Quarterly* 81.1 (2009): 38–63.

across the evangelical landscape.

The first moment finds us at Fuller Theological Seminary in the decade between 1962 and 1972.¹⁷ Fuller Seminary was founded in 1947 as postwar evangelicalism's flagship theological institution. The early faculty included a mix of established evangelical scholars and younger theological luminaries. The founding president, the respected Boston pastor-theologian Harold John Ockenga, led the school *in absentia*. Carl Henry agreed to serve as the interim academic dean, a position he held for two years. Though the faculty was denominationally diverse, in their understanding of Scripture they self-consciously taught within the framework of the Princeton theological tradition. The seminary's first statement of faith was drawn up in 1949 by Edward John Carnell, who later served as the seminary's second president. According to that statement, "the original Scriptures are plenary inspired and free from error in the whole and in the part." Interestingly, this statement was adopted because earlier that same year Fuller had hired a European theologian named Bela Vassady whose views of Scripture were more influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy than Old Princeton.

By the mid-1960s, Fuller no longer had a consensus on the trustworthiness of Scripture. Many newer faculty hires believed the Bible to be trustworthy in matters of faith and practice but also claimed Scripture includes errors related to history, geography, and science. Notably, the more progressive faction included Daniel Fuller and David Allan Hubbard. Fuller was the son of the seminary's founding benefactor, the famed evangelist Charles Fuller, and became academic dean in 1962. Hubbard became the school's third president in 1963. Tensions ran high throughout the 1960s, with several of the older, more conservative faculty members departing, and some alumni raising alarms about theological drift among the faculty. During this time, the seminary made several minor adjustments to its statement of faith and catalog revisions in an effort to accommodate the diversity of views among faculty. In 1972, Fuller adopted a revised confession that deleted the reference to plenary inspiration and replaced the earlier phrase "free from error" with the word "infallible," the latter of which was a rule for faith and practice rather than an affirmation concerning the actual text of Scripture.

¹⁷My discussion of Fuller Seminary draws upon George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Reformed Theological Seminary, 1995), 172–219, and Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox, 1998), 95–101.

Our second moment takes us to the “Year of the Evangelical” itself, 1976. Harold Lindsell, who was the editor of *Christianity Today* magazine, published a bombshell of a book titled *The Battle for the Bible*. Prior to coming to *Christianity Today*, where he replaced Carl Henry as editor, Lindsell had been a founding faculty member at Fuller Seminary and part of the faction that wanted to retain the language of biblical inerrancy. He dedicated a chapter in *The Battle for the Bible* to “The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary,” wherein he provided a narrative recounting of the debate from an inerrantist perspective.¹⁸ He also warned that the faculty was already moving in a more liberal direction that contradicted even the revised confession.

Lindsell did not limit his criticisms to his former employer. He also raised concerns about other instances of evangelical scholars either rejecting or redefining biblical inerrancy, most notably within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention. *The Battle for the Bible* provoked considerable controversy. Lindsell was editor of arguably the most influential evangelical periodical which aspired to represent the consensus of mainstream evangelicalism. Furthermore, Lindsell did not make vague accusations, but he named names and outed institutions where he believed historic evangelical bibliology was being undermined. Published reviews of *The Battle for the Bible* proved mixed, even from his fellow evangelicals.¹⁹

The third moment was the publication of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978. Evangelical scholars had long been concerned with liberal and even Neo-Orthodox understandings of Scripture, and they regularly produced works intended to buttress evangelical bibliology, including inerrancy. A number of noteworthy books were published in the two decades between 1958 and 1978, including: J. I. Packer’s *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958); E. J. Young’s *Thy Word Is Truth* (1963); John Gerstner’s *Biblical Inerrancy Primer* (1963); W. A. Criswell’s *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True* (1969); Clark Pinnock’s *Biblical*

¹⁸Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106–21.

¹⁹For examples of positive reviews, see Charles C. Ryrie, review of *The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133.532 (1976): 356–57, and David H. Linden, review of *The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell, *Presbyterion* 3.1 (1977): 46–48. For negative reviews, see Bernard Ramm, “Misplaced Battle Lines,” review of *The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell, *Reformed Journal* 26.6 (1976): 37–38, and Donald W. Dayton, “‘The Battle for the Bible’: Renewing the Inerrancy Debate,” review of *The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell, *Christian Century* (November 10, 1976), 976–980. For his part, Lindsell published a follow-up title three years later. See Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance: A Further Look at the Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

Revelation (1971); Laird Harris's *Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* (1971); and Francis Schaeffer's *No Final Conflict* (1975). Evangelical scholars also published at least four important compilations: *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, edited by Ned Stonehouse and Paul Wooley; *Revelation and the Bible* (1958), edited by Carl F. H. Henry; *God's Inerrant Word* (1974), edited by John Warwick Montgomery; and *The Foundations of Biblical Authority* (1978), edited by James Montgomery Boice.

Following informal conversations among concerned evangelicals, a group of about fifteen scholars formed the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1977.²⁰ They subsequently invited another fifty or so scholars and pastors to join an advisory board. In 1978, the ICBI held a summit in Chicago, which resulted in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which was subsequently affirmed by 330 leaders from across the denominational spectrum. The key architects of the statement and subsequent commentary included Presbyterians R. C. Sproul and James Montgomery Boice, Anglican J. I. Packer, Baptists Roger Nicole and Norman Geisler, and Lutheran Robert Preus. The Chicago Statement included a short summary of biblical inerrancy, followed by nineteen affirmations and denials to help provide appropriate scholarly nuance. The Chicago Statement soon became the dominant understanding of inerrancy among most evangelical theologians committed to continuity with the Princeton theological tradition, especially in North America, resulting in a coherent Princeton-Chicago tradition that continues to endure.²¹

The fourth moment came just one year later with the 1979 publication of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim's book *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*.²² Both men were evangelical scholars who also moved within mainline Presbyterian circles, and Rogers was a

²⁰For historical reflections on ICBI and the Chicago Statement, see Woodbridge, "The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: A Fundamentalist Gambit?" *Presbyterion* 48.1 (Spring 2022): 37–59. For a collection of primary source documents from the ICBI and commentary, see R. C. Sproul and Norman L. Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: The Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy, Hermeneutics, and Application with Official ICBI Commentary* (Arlington, TX: Bastion Books, 2013).

²¹I make this case more fully in Nathan A. Finn, "Inerrancy and Evangelicals: The Challenge for a New Generation," *The Gospel Coalition* (August 21, 2020), available online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/inerrancy-evangelicals/>.

²²For a helpful summary of this controversy, see Kenneth Ortiz, "Inerrancy, Infallibility, and the Rogers/McKim Proposal," *Theology for the Rest of Us* (January 15, 2023), available online: <https://www.theologyfortherestofus.com/inerrancy-infallibility-and-the-rogers-mckim-proposal>.

faculty member at Fuller Seminary. In 1977, Rogers had previously edited a collection of essays titled *Biblical Authority* wherein the contributors, all of whom were infallibilists rather than inerrantists, responded to Lindsell. The Rogers and McKim volume built on that earlier work in the aftermath of the Chicago Statement. The authors argued that plenary-verbal inspiration and inerrancy—as understood in the Princeton-Chicago tradition—are not faithful expressions of the historic Christian consensus, but rather are rationalistic innovations developed by the Princeton theologians.²³ What became known as the Rogers-McKim Thesis was representative of many evangelicals who emphasized the truthfulness of Scripture’s teachings related to salvation and ethics rather than the reliability of the actual words themselves. The Bible’s message is infallible, but the biblical text is errant.

The Rogers-McKim Thesis received a number of critiques throughout the 1980s from inerrantist scholars who affirmed the Chicago Statement. Three book-length responses bear mentioning. John Woodbridge, a church historian at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (1982) to critique the historical narrative put forward by Rogers and McKim. A year later, Woodbridge and his Trinity colleague D. A. Carson, a New Testament scholar, edited *Scripture and Truth* (1983), which offered a comprehensive defense of the Princeton–Chicago tradition over against the Rogers-McKim approach to Scripture. In 1984, Dallas Theological Seminary theologian John Hannah edited *Inerrancy and the Church*, which focused on the place of inerrancy historically within various ecclesial traditions.

The final moment also overlapped chronologically with the publication of the Chicago Statement and the debates over the Rogers-McKim Thesis. The year 1979 marked the beginning of the Inerrancy Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).²⁴ Tensions had been growing for many years. During the decade between 1961 and 1971, roughly the same timeframe as the Fuller Seminary conflict, the SBC was enduring periodic controversies in response to progressive views of Scripture being advanced

²³Ernest Sandeen made a similar argument in his groundbreaking study *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For a thorough critique of Sandeen, see John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer, “The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal,” in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983): 251–79.

²⁴For an overview of the SBC Inerrancy Controversy and its historical precursors, see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025), 398–418.

within the convention's seminaries and in denominational publications. As noted previously, Lindsell's *Battle for the Bible* dedicated a chapter to these matters.²⁵

In 1979, a group of conservative activists put a plan into place to gain control of the convention's ministries by electing a series of inerrantist presidents, who in turn would appoint inerrantist committees to fill vacancies on the various trustee boards with committed inerrantists. The plan worked, and by the early 1990s the conservative faction was firmly in control of the denomination. Southern Baptist moderates, who either denied inerrancy or argued it should not be required for faithful cooperation, increasingly disengaged from the convention between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. The controversy was never merely a debate over inerrancy; but it was never less than an inerrancy debate, either.²⁶ Interestingly, during the very same years that conservatives were seeking to gain control of the SBC, many were also abandoning the convention's historic isolationism by developing closer ties with inerrantists within the wider evangelical movement.²⁷ One noteworthy example was Carl Henry. Though Henry was a member of a Southern Baptist church in Washington DC, he had identified more as an American Baptist evangelical throughout his career.²⁸

²⁵Though he identified more with various evangelical parachurch ministries throughout his career, Lindsell himself was a longtime Southern Baptist, including when he wrote *The Battle for the Bible*. See Art Toalston, "Harold Lindsell Dies at 84; Authored 'Battle for the Bible,'" Baptist Press (January 22, 1998), available online: <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/harold-lindsell-dies-at-84-authored-battle-for-the-bible/>.

²⁶See Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), and Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

²⁷For more on the relationship between Southern Baptists and evangelicalism, see James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982); David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993); Glenn T. Miller, "Baptists and Neo-Evangelical Theology," *Baptist History and Heritage* 35.1 (2000): 20–39; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals? A Second Decadal Reassessment," *Ecclesiology* 2.2 (2006): 195–212; David S. Dockery, Ray Van Neste, and Jerry Tidwell, eds., *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011); see also the contributions to the themed issue "Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 65.2 (Spring 2023).

²⁸Mohler, "Carl F. H. Henry," 292–93. The name of the church when Henry joined was Metropolitan Baptist Church, which remained the church's name until 1963, when it became Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church. In 1995, the name was changed again to Capitol Hill Baptist Church. See Caleb Morell, *A Light on the Hill: The Surprising Story of How a Local Church in the Nation's Capital Influenced Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), 5.

CARL HENRY AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

The doctrine of Scripture was a central theme in Carl Henry's thought and his wider ministry. He wrote widely on the topic, and he was involved in numerous initiatives that promoted what he believed to be the historic evangelical understanding of Scripture. Across his many writings on this subject, Henry's major focus was normally the nature of divine revelation. His view of revelation is best summarized in his tenth Thesis, found in volume III of *God, Revelation and Authority*: "God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words that is, in conceptual-verbal form."²⁹ Henry argued that God reveals propositional truths through the very words of Scripture. Because those words are not just the words of men but also the words of God, they are fully trustworthy and without error. For Henry, inspiration was a form of revelation, and inerrancy was an implication of inspiration.

Henry held these views throughout his career. In one of his earliest academic books, *The Protestant Dilemma* (1948), Henry devoted a chapter to an extended critique of Emil Brunner's view of divine revelation, including his bibliology. Henry took Brunner to task for rejecting verbal inspiration, defaulting to the conclusions of higher criticism, downplaying any significant unity across the Scriptures, rejecting biblical infallibility, claiming Scripture is only a witness to divine revelation rather than a form of revelation itself, and identifying the historic evangelical position with an idolatrous posture towards the Bible. In a forerunner to later debates over the Rogers-McKim Thesis, Henry rejected Brunner's claim that the Protestant Reformers also affirmed an errant biblical text. He also dismissed as insufficient the view of turn-of-the-century evangelical James Orr, which limited inerrancy to the message of Scripture.³⁰ Orr's position also anticipated later evangelical debates. At every point along the way, Henry explicitly sided with the Princeton tradition in commending plenary-verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture, and he ended the chapter with an apologetic defense of a trustworthy biblical text. Though Henry used the term "infallibility" to describe the historic evangelical position, it is clear he meant by this that the text of Scripture is without error.³¹

A year later, in 1949, Henry attended the inaugural meeting in Chicago

²⁹Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1976–1983; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 3:248.

³⁰James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 212–18.

³¹Carl F. H. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 43–121.

of what became the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). During the gathering, Henry both suggested the name for the society and delivered the post-banquet plenary address.³² ETS adopted a brief statement of faith that was to be affirmed annually by all members. Notably, the statement focused on evangelical bibliology: “The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.”³³ From early in his career, Henry was committed to biblical inerrancy personally, willing to defend inerrancy against its critics, and engaged in efforts to promote the scholarship of evangelical inerrantists.

In 1956, Henry left his faculty post at Fuller Theological Seminary to become the founding editor of *Christianity Today*. For the next dozen years, he limited most of his academic writing to shorter articles (many revised from public lectures) and to editing collections of essays. Some of this material focused on Scripture. Space precludes more than just a few examples.³⁴ In 1957, Henry contributed a substantive chapter on “Divine Revelation and the Bible” to a collection of essays titled *Inspiration and Interpretation*. In that chapter, he echoed many of the same arguments he first advanced in *The Protestant Dilemma*. But notably, he also spoke of both inerrancy and infallibility, treating the concepts as synonyms, and applied them to the original autographs of the Scripture. He also critiqued common objections to the evangelical view of biblical reliability.³⁵

Three years later, in 1960, Henry contributed the entry on biblical inspiration to the *Baker Dictionary of Theology*. Though inerrancy was not his focus, Henry affirmed the trustworthiness of the biblical text on the basis of God’s verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.³⁶ Under the auspices of

³²Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Dallas: Word, 1986), 123.

³³This statement was updated in 1990 to include an affirmation of the Trinity. In 2006, a bylaw was approved that referred ETS members to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy as an interpretive guide to the ETS statement of faith. The change followed years of internal debate over the society’s boundaries. See Ray Van Neste, “The Glaring Inadequacy of the ETS Doctrinal Statement,” in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8.4 (Winter 2004): 74–81.

³⁴Some of Henry’s writings on Scripture during this time were either eventually incorporated into *God, Revelation and Authority*, or they summarized his arguments in the larger work. For example, see Carl F. H. Henry, “Interpretation of the Scriptures: Are We Doomed to Hermeneutical Nihilism?” *Review and Expositor* 71.2 (1974): 197–216; Carl F. H. Henry, “Theology and Biblical Authority: A Review Article of *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* by D. H. Kelsey,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19.4 (1976): 315–323; Carl F. H. Henry, “The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 3–35.

³⁵Carl F. H. Henry, “Divine Revelation and the Bible,” in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 253–78.

³⁶Henry’s entry has been included in all three editions of this dictionary. For the most recent

Christianity Today, Henry also edited a five-volume series of collected essays titled “Contemporary Christian Thought.”³⁷ Four of the volumes included one or more chapters on Scripture, and one entire volume, *Revelation and the Bible* (1959), was dedicated to the topic. Henry noted in the preface to *Revelation and the Bible* that all the contributors affirmed “the fact that the Bible is a God-breathed book is the foundation of scriptural trustworthiness and reliability.”³⁸

After Henry left *Christianity Today*, he was able to focus again on his own academic writing. He began working in earnest on what would eventually become *God, Revelation and Authority*, a six-volume magnum opus published in three parts between 1976 and 1983. Henry wrote extensively about the truthfulness of Scripture in volume IV of *God, Revelation and Authority*, which was published in 1979. Two points are worth noting. First, in terms of its historical context, the book appeared a year after the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was drafted. In fact, Henry reproduced the entirety of the Chicago Statement as a supplemental note following two chapters that focused on inerrancy.³⁹ Henry understood that inerrancy was a timely topic among evangelicals. Second, within the context of volume IV itself, Henry did not discuss inerrancy until after he had written on biblical authority and inspiration. This ordering indicates how Henry thought about inerrancy in relation to other aspects of bibliology. Henry argued early in the volume that “The first claim to be made for Scriptures is not its inerrancy, or even its inspiration, but its authority.”⁴⁰

As noted at the beginning of this article, Henry self-consciously identified his own bibliology, and that of historic evangelicalism, with the Princeton theological tradition. Henry regularly referenced Charles Hodge and especially B. B. Warfield throughout volume IV, particularly

edition, see Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, eds., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), s.v. “Bible, Inspiration of.” Henry’s entry followed Paul Feinberg’s entry on biblical inerrancy.

³⁷Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (New York: Channel Press, 1957), Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Basic Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Christian Faith and Modern Theology* (New York: Channel Press, 1964), and Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

³⁸Henry, *Revelation and the Bible*, 9. Interestingly, several of the contributors, including Paul Jewett and Bernard Ramm, would later identify with the more progressive evangelical faction that preferred infallibility as an alternative to inerrancy.

³⁹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:211–219.

⁴⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:24.

concerning the relationship between plenary-verbal inspiration and inerrancy.⁴¹ Henry's most frequent recurring foils included James Barr and Karl Barth, both of whom were critiqued throughout the volume.⁴² Henry also interacted with numerous evangelical scholars who represented a variety of perspectives related to inerrancy and related topics within the doctrine of Scripture.

In chapter 7, Henry began to focus sustained attention on inerrancy. He surveyed a range of views among evangelicals on such matters as whether Scripture teaches inerrancy, is an implication of inspiration, or is theological speculation; whether inerrancy is complete or limited; whether "inerrancy" or "infallibility" is the best term to use for the reliability of Scripture; whether inerrancy applies to the text of Scripture or its teachings; and how best to reconcile the trustworthiness of Scripture with the historical-critical method. Henry was critical of those whom he considered mediating theologians who professed evangelical faith but were overly influenced by critical views of Scripture and/or Neo-Orthodox bibliography. These revisionists were well-represented within recent evangelical scholarship, but they were out-of-step with historical evangelicalism. Henry maintained that "The prevailing evangelical view affirms a special activity of divine inspiration whereby the Holy Spirit superintended the scriptural writers in communicating the biblical message in ways consistent with their differing personalities, literary styles and cultural background, while safeguarding them from error."⁴³ For Henry, inerrancy "is implicitly taught, is logically deducible, and is a necessary correlate of Scripture as the inspired Word of God."⁴⁴

In chapter 8, Henry advanced his own understanding of inerrancy via

⁴¹George Coon agrees that Henry was an heir to the Princeton tradition, but he makes a distinction between the "Old Princeton" views of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield and the later views of J. Gresham Machen. While Machen agreed with his predecessors concerning both plenary-verbal inspiration and inerrancy, he thought the latter view was less central to bibliography than the former. Coon argues Henry followed Machen in this regard, leading Henry to both champion inerrancy and deemphasized the place inerrancy holds within evangelical bibliography. See George Michael Coon, "Recasting Inerrancy: The Doctrine of Scripture in Carl Henry and the Old Princeton School" (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2009), 187–99.

⁴²Henry also included a supplemental note critiquing Barth's view that the Bible is inspired even though the original autographs included errors (196–200). For an extended discussion of Henry's interactions with Barth over the years, including in *God, Revelation and Authority*, see Richard Albert Mohler Jr., "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 107–34.

⁴³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:166–67.

⁴⁴Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:168.

a series of denials and affirmations. He offered the following five denials.

1. Inerrancy does not imply that modern technological precision in reporting statistics and measurements, that conformity to modern historiographic method in reporting genealogies and other historical data, or that conformity to modern scientific method in reporting cosmological matters, can be expected from the biblical writers.⁴⁵
2. Inerrancy does not imply that only nonmetaphorical or nonsymbolic language can convey religious truth. Scripture employs a wide range of figurative language and many literary forms, such as parable, poetry and proverb. All are capable of serving appropriately as vehicles to communicate truth.⁴⁶
3. Inerrancy does not imply that verbal exactitude is required in New Testament quotation and use of Old Testament passages.⁴⁷
4. Inerrancy does not imply that personal faith in Christ is dispensable since evangelicals have an inerrant book they can trust.⁴⁸
5. Scriptural inerrancy does not imply that evangelical orthodoxy follows as a necessary consequence of accepting this doctrine.⁴⁹

Henry then provided a list of four positive implications concerning inerrancy, which were followed by the text of the Chicago Statement.

1. Verbal inerrancy implies that truth attaches not only to the theological and ethical teaching of the Bible, but also to historical and scientific matters insofar as they are part of the express message of the inspired writings.⁵⁰
2. Verbal inerrancy implies that God's truth inheres in the very words of Scripture, that is, in the propositions or

⁴⁵Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:201.

⁴⁶Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:202.

⁴⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:202.

⁴⁸Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:203.

⁴⁹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:204.

⁵⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:205.

sentences of the Bible, and not merely in the concepts and thoughts of the writers.⁵¹

3. Verbal inerrancy implies that the original writings or prophetic-apostolic autographs alone are error-free. The theopneustic quality attaches directly to the autographs, and only indirectly to the copies.⁵²
4. Verbal inerrancy of the autographs implies that evangelicals must not attach finality to contemporary versions or translations, least of all to mere paraphrases, but must earnestly pursue and honor the best text.⁵³

In Chapter 9, Henry made the case that while the original autographs were inerrant, subsequent copies of those texts are infallible. Here Henry makes his own distinction between these terms, albeit not the same as the mediating theologians. In a footnote, he suggested that inerrancy means “without error” whereas infallibility means “not prone to error.” This linguistic distinction allows for minor errors that found their way into biblical manuscripts over time as texts were copied, but without resorting to the language of “partial inerrancy,” which Henry believed to be as incoherent as “partial virginity.”⁵⁴ Henry wanted to defend the trustworthiness of Scripture, including modern translations, without claiming more about extant manuscripts than is warranted. For Henry,

The original manuscripts have a theopneustic quality because of their divinely given rational and verbal content and because of the Spirit’s superintendence of the prophets and apostles in the process of writing; copies of the originals, and copies of the copies, on the other hand, share in the theopneustic quality of the originals only to the extent that they faithfully reproduce the autographs.⁵⁵

In chapter 10, Henry further elaborated on the meaning of infallibility,

⁵¹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:205.

⁵²Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:207.

⁵³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:209–10.

⁵⁴Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:220. John Feinberg notes that Henry’s distinction between inerrancy and infallibility in this section is novel. See Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 268–69. It is also a departure from his earlier use of the terms as synonyms to describe the errorless character of the original scriptural autographs.

⁵⁵Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:233.

in dialogue with a variety of scholars from both within and outside of evangelicalism. For Henry, “The efficacy of Scripture is a consequence of the inerrancy of the autographs and an implicate of the infallibility of the transcripts.”⁵⁶

Subsequent chapters further fleshed out Henry’s understanding of the reliability of the Scriptures. Chapter 14 made the case that affirmation of biblical inerrancy and infallibility do not guarantee accurate exegesis because no student or scholar of the Scriptures is infallible. Most of this chapter is an extended critique of James Barr, who savaged conservative views of Scripture in his influential 1977 book *Fundamentalism*. Henry did not see this concession of fallible interpretation as undermining an evangelical view of Scripture. He argued,

Judeo-Christian religion sets the exegete’s fallibility in a revelatory framework that brackets the epistemic consequences of human revolt, even if finite and sinful man can and does in some respects cloud the content of revelation. Scripture, moreover, not only gives us divine revelation in objective propositional-verbal form, but also sets before us the normative prophetic-apostolic explanation and proclamation of that very revelation.⁵⁷

Unlike higher critics, evangelicals believed divine inspiration entailed the historicity of the Scriptures. That affirmation did not assure correct exegesis and interpretation, but it was a safeguard against the “hermeneutical nihilism” that Henry critiqued in the previous chapter.⁵⁸

In chapter 15, Henry addressed the reality of so-called problem passages that are often considered defeaters for biblical inerrancy. He offered plausible responses to many of the most common criticisms advanced by higher critics, and he took those critics to task for their outdated, exaggerated, inaccurate, or simplistic critiques about the biblical text. Henry argued that “Evangelical scholars do not insist that historical realities conform to all their proposals for harmonization; their intent, rather, is to show that their premises do not cancel the logical possibility of reconciling

⁵⁶Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:249.

⁵⁷Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:351.

⁵⁸Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:296–315.

apparently divergent reports.”⁵⁹ Notably, Henry also pushed back on how some evangelicals treat inerrancy, which is the topic of the next section. In Chapter 16, Henry argued that inerrancy was not a recent invention of the Princeton theologians but rather is consistent with the majority view throughout church history that God inspired the biblical text and thus the text is without error. In making his historical case, Henry anticipated the later work of John Woodbridge in critiquing Rogers and McKim; Rogers had already advanced an earlier version of their view in a chapter in *Biblical Authority*.⁶⁰

Henry was clearly a strong advocate for biblical inerrancy and a critic of mediating evangelical views that shifted the reliability of Scripture away from the text itself. Thus, it should come as no surprise that many conservative evangelicals have continued to resonate with his views.⁶¹ In a 1990 chapter on Henry’s thought, Albert Mohler argued that “Henry’s defense of biblical inerrancy is one of the most thorough treatments in the evangelical literature.”⁶² In a 2004 journal article, Paul House commended Henry’s theological vision, including his strong commitment to biblical inerrancy, to a new generation of evangelicals, some of whom were embarrassed by inerrancy.⁶³ In a 2013 book-length engagement with Henry’s thought, Gregory Thornbury suggested that Henry’s commitment to inerrancy should be recovered among evangelicals who were still waffling on whether or not the Bible is fully trustworthy.⁶⁴ In a 2015 monograph, William Roach commended Henry’s faithful evangelical bibliology as representative of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy as well as a wider “Chicago School” that champions propositional revelation,

⁵⁹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:364.

⁶⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:368–84. See also Jack Rogers, “The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority,” in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Dallas: Word, 1977), 15–46. Both volume IV of *God, Revelation and Authority* and Rogers and McKim’s *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* were published in 1979, but the books appeared too close to one another for Henry to interact with the latter.

⁶¹Evangelicals who do not share Henry’s commitment to biblical inerrancy have been appreciative of Henry’s scholarly gifts while remaining more critical of his bibliology. For two representatives of this posture, see Bob Patterson, *Carl F. H. Henry, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 123–24, and Roger Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 629–630.

⁶²Mohler, “Carl F. H. Henry,” 289.

⁶³Paul R. House, “Remaking the Modern Mind: Revisiting Carl Henry’s Theological Vision,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8 (2004): 4–24. See especially pages 19 and 21.

⁶⁴Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 116–58.

plenary-verbal inspiration, and grammatical-historical hermeneutics.⁶⁵

BIBLICAL INERRANCY AND EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

The conservative evangelical praise for Henry's scholarly defense of inerrancy is noteworthy for at least one other reason. While Henry was deeply committed to biblical inerrancy, and he believed other evangelicals ought to share his views, he also did not consider consensus on inerrancy to be essential to evangelicalism. This represented an important distinction between the respective views of Henry and Lindsell. While both men affirmed biblical inerrancy and lamented the growing popularity of mediating positions among evangelical scholars, they had differing opinions about where inerrancy fit into the cluster of beliefs that should define evangelical identity. Lindsell believed inerrancy was a test of evangelical authenticity, while Henry believed the doctrine to be a matter of evangelical consistency.

Henry first wrote about his views of this matter in 1976, the "Year of the Evangelical" and the same year the *Battle for the Bible* appeared. Henry wrote a series of monthly columns for *Christianity Today* between January and October 1976 that were subsequently collected into a small book titled *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*. Henry was concerned that the evangelical movement was beset by internal tensions related to two themes: concerns that the movement was too conservative politically and debates over the doctrine of Scripture.⁶⁶ Our concern in this article is with the latter issue.

Henry dedicated a chapter to the inerrancy controversy, lamenting that the issue was dividing evangelicals into competitive camps. He referenced recent tensions at conferences, controversial publications, and denominational disputes. Younger scholars were distancing themselves from inerrancy, especially the so-called domino theory that inerrancy was a necessary bulwark against wider doctrinal drift. Henry referenced the recently published *Battle for the Bible* and noted that both Lindsell and Francis Schaeffer considered affirmation of inerrancy to be a mark of genuine evangelicalism. Henry's approach was different. He affirmed biblical inerrancy and conceded that its loss can certainly lead to other doctrinal errors. However, he also warned against weaponizing inerrancy

⁶⁵William C. Roach, *Hermeneutics as Epistemology: A Critical Assessment of Carl F. H. Henry's Epistemological Approach to Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

⁶⁶Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Dallas: Word, 1976), 46.

and thus refusing to neglect the legitimate contributions of mediating scholars who had a somewhat looser understanding of biblical reliability.⁶⁷ Henry also believed the debates could be a distraction. He warned, “The somewhat reactionary elevation of inerrancy as the superbadge of evangelical orthodoxy deploys energies to this controversy that evangelicals might better apply to producing comprehensive theological works so desperately needed in a time of national and civilizational crisis.”⁶⁸

Henry further developed his views in chapter 15 of volume IV of *God, Revelation and Authority*. Henry began by noting that “some evangelicals are focusing all discussion of divine revelation almost entirely on the inerrancy issue; some writers have declared biblical inerrancy to be the one criterion for distinguishing true from false evangelicals.”⁶⁹ He clearly had Lindsell in mind. Henry’s verdict? “Unbalanced preoccupation with inerrancy can be a costly evangelical diversion.”⁷⁰ Henry suggested that some institutions treated inerrancy as a marketing tool to solicit funds and engaged in polemics to question the evangelical *bona fides* of other institutions. Ironically, evangelicals with a disordered commitment to inerrancy frequently ceded the ground of serious scholarly inquiry to the very mediating scholars they were so quick to criticize. For Henry, “Whenever unbalanced preoccupation with inerrancy preempts the energies of evangelical institutions to the neglect of comprehensive exposition of the Christian revelation, and of a powerful apologetic addressed to the world, sub-evangelical and nonevangelical spokesmen take over and objectionably fill these theological vacuums.”⁷¹

Henry argued that inerrancy was not a first-order doctrine in apostolic preaching. Rather, the heart of the Christian message was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, adherence to which is the true mark of evangelical authenticity. But this does not mean that bibliology is a matter of indifference. The apostles taught the full authority and inspiration of God’s in-scripturated words, and to deny these beliefs betrays an unbiblical bias. For Henry, inerrancy is a necessary corollary of inspiration. Thus, his concern was not to downplay inerrancy, but rather to put inerrancy in its proper place within the hierarchy of evangelical doctrines.

⁶⁷Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*, 48–56.

⁶⁸Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*, 67.

⁶⁹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:365.

⁷⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:365.

⁷¹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:365.

To say that biblical inerrancy is not the first thing to be declared is not to deny its importance; it is integral to a Christian apologetic that presents evangelical theology in its totality. The search for a biblical authority that accommodates errancy has tragically eroded theological energies, and has been as fruitless and even more so than has a fixation on inerrancy.⁷²

Henry contrasted his posture with that of Lindsell. For Lindsell, an affirmation of errancy necessarily leads to apostasy. Henry thought this slippery slope argument lacked appropriate nuance. He conceded that some who had first rejected inerrancy later rejected other more central doctrines. He also noted that belief in inerrancy is no guarantee of orthodoxy in other matters. Thus, evangelical authenticity should not be determined solely on the basis of one's view of inerrancy; not all who reject inerrancy are enemies of evangelicalism. After all, Henry observed that "The term evangelical as used historically has designated commitment to justification by faith alone and to the authority of Scripture alone."⁷³ Biblical authority is thus more foundational to evangelical identity than inerrancy. However, Henry's moderate posture toward non-inerrantists should not be confused with indifference toward their position. Evangelicals who believe in an errant text "are left with an unstable religious epistemology that is difficult to reconcile with the teaching of both Jesus and the biblical writers."⁷⁴ Though inerrancy is no guarantee of sound hermeneutics, errancy fosters an unhealthy interpretive pluralism.

Henry also observed that some evangelical scholars had not necessarily conceded errancy but were nevertheless non-committal towards inerrancy. In some cases, these scholars simply did not believe that the Bible explicitly teaches its own inerrancy, and so they were hesitant to say anything more than inerrancy is an inference from inspiration. Henry considered this position, which described some of the infallibilists, to be far better than assuming the biblical text has errors. However, Henry also believed there were too many weaknesses with this ambivalent posture toward inerrancy to commend it. But his response to evangelicals in this camp was not to write them out of the movement like Lindsell had done. Ever

⁷²Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:366.

⁷³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:366.

⁷⁴Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:367.

the apologist, Henry believed that the better response “is to prod them toward an inerrancy commitment by means of rational considerations.”⁷⁵ After all, “Inerrancy is the evangelical heritage, the historic commitment of the Christian church.”⁷⁶ As such, while not all evangelicals affirmed inerrancy, the most consistently faithful evangelicals were biblical inerrantists.

Scholars have advanced a variety of perspectives on Henry’s understanding of the relationship between inerrancy and evangelical identity. Gary Dorrien suggests Henry opened the door for mediating and even revisionist theology to flourish. He contends that “Henry’s posture gave comfort and legitimacy to a theological perspective that he otherwise described as mistaken, contrary to historic orthodoxy, and harmful to evangelicalism.”⁷⁷ Mohler’s view is more descriptive, observing that “A reading of Henry’s writings on inerrancy, and especially the relevant sections of *God, Revelation and Authority*, reveal the depth of Henry’s passionate commitment to the concept—and indeed to the Word itself—and yet also indicates that Henry is unwilling to allow the Word to become a weapon of theological warfare.”⁷⁸ Ryan Reed offers three reasons for Henry’s posture. First, Henry argued evangelicals should be chiefly concerned with biblical authority. Second, he wanted to build a coalition of evangelical intellectuals who were committed to a biblical world-and-life view, and he knew some of evangelicalism’s sharpest scholars were not committed to verbal inerrancy. Finally, Henry doubted whether inerrancy could meaningfully unite evangelicals beyond a common affirmation of that doctrine.⁷⁹

For Henry’s part, *God, Revelation and Authority* was not his final word on this topic. In his 1986 autobiography, Henry returned to the relationship between inerrancy and evangelicalism. He did not mince words. He referenced the “amazing short-sightedness” of an intra-evangelical war over inerrancy at the very moment the mainstream press was attuned to the “Year of the Evangelical.” This should have been an opportunity to rally all evangelicals to engage the culture for the sake of the kingdom. Instead, “evangelicals indulged in the luxury of internal conflict and channeled theological energies” into the inerrancy controversy—to the great delight of the skeptical secular media. To be clear, Henry believed evangelicals

⁷⁵Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:367.

⁷⁶Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:367.

⁷⁷Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, 120.

⁷⁸Mohler, “Carl F. H. Henry,” 289.

⁷⁹Ryan Reed, “The House Divided: An Assessment of the American Neo-Evangelicals’ Doctrine of Scripture,” *Themelios* 49.1 (April 2024): 152–53.

must remain committed to the comprehensive reliability of Scripture, for the sake of ensuring orthodoxy and fulfilling the Great Commission. But he believed that internal evangelical debates were best left out of the public eye, lest evangelicalism's cultural witness be hindered.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

In a grand historical irony, the “Year of the Evangelical” was also a moment when evangelicalism was fracturing over how best to articulate biblical reliability. As anyone who is an observer of American evangelicalism will readily concede, debates over this doctrine and its implications have only heightened over the past five decades. Every theological perspective that was present among evangelicals in the mid-1970s remains part of the movement in the mid-2020s. At times, these differences fly under the radar. However, the fault lines become evident whenever controversy erupts over whether or not certain hermeneutical strategies or doctrinal commitments are compatible with inerrancy or undermine biblical reliability.⁸¹

My goal in this article has not been to settle these debates, but to remind evangelicals that such tensions are not of recent vintage and to commend Carl F. H. Henry as a thoughtful conversation partner in our ongoing disputes. Some contemporary evangelicals, like Jack Rogers in a previous generation, believe older views of biblical reliability need to be rejected, or at least revised, in light of observable phenomena within Scripture and the best of modern scholarship.⁸² Most of these evangelicals avoid the term “inerrancy” to describe their views. Others, in the spirit of Harold Lindsell, believe that inerrancy remains a core feature of evangelicalism, and they are committed to policing the boundaries for the sake of evangelical purity.⁸³ These scholars insist on the language of inerrancy and default to the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy (and subsequent

⁸⁰Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 389.

⁸¹See J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2013), and Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 1–18.

⁸²See Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 10th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), and Michael R. Licona, *Jesus, Contradicted: Why the Gospels Tell the Same Story Differently* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024).

⁸³See Gregory K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

related statements) as the definitive interpretation of the concept. Still others, much like Henry, affirm biblical inerrancy, commend it to others, and even defend it against its critics, yet also conceive of evangelicalism as a big enough tent to accommodate some diversity of opinion.⁸⁴ These scholars desire a more expansive rather than restrictive definition of inerrancy, but unlike Henry, they prefer inductive rather than deductive defenses of the doctrine.

I close by acknowledging my own sympathies, which very much lie with Henry, at least in spirit. However, I also believe that some self-confessed evangelicals champion methodologies and advance interpretations that so stretch the truthfulness of Scripture so as to render the concept virtually meaningless. While inerrancy does not always require a particular interpretation of a text, surely it rules at least some interpretations out of bounds. The hard task of faithful evangelical scholarship is determining when there is room for debate among those who affirm biblical reliability and when an interpretation cannot be reconciled with a full-throated affirmation that Scripture is a trustworthy word from the Lord. Biblical inerrancy is an important part of our evangelical heritage, and the Princeton-Chicago tradition of bibliology has deeply shaped evangelical faith and practice. We cannot be afraid of controversy when truth really is at stake. Our rightly ordered pursuit of evangelical consistency should always be in service to greater evangelical authenticity. I believe that Carl Henry would agree.

⁸⁴See Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014), and Daniel B. Wallace, "My Take on Inerrancy," Bible.org (August 10, 2006), available online: <https://bible.org/article/my-take-inerrancy>. This is not to suggest that Henry would necessarily affirm all the conclusions, or draw precisely the same boundaries, as Blomberg or Wallace.

BAPTISTS AND EVANGELICALS TOGETHER: HOW DAVID DOCKERY HELPED SOUTHERN BAPTISTS BECOME EVANGELICALS

Blake O. McKinney*

There was a time when Southern Baptists were not evangelicals—at least there was a time when many Southern Baptists rejected the title.¹ This rejection was not the contemporary temptation to eschew the title “evangelical” because of mass media’s politicization of the term to mean little more than people who watch NASCAR, listen to country songs about Jesus, and vote for the Republican Party. Rather, forty years ago when “evangelical” was more clearly a theological identifier, some Southern Baptists spurned the designation altogether.² Most famously, Foy Valentine, head of the SBC Christian Life Commission, emphatically declared to

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¹In the spring of 2023 the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* published an issue entitled “Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals” in honor of the fortieth anniversary of the publication of James Leo Garrett and Glenn Hinson’s *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* I was tasked with writing an article answering the question “Who are Southern Baptists?” In order to do my due diligence, I read Garrett and Hinson’s volume as well as David Dockery’s follow-up, *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*. To be honest, I was surprised by the debate over Southern Baptists’ relation to evangelicalism. To me, the answer to “Are Southern Baptists evangelicals?” was as self-evident as “Is the pope Catholic?” Or as my family in middle Tennessee says, “Has a cat got climbing gear?” The fact that the relationship between Southern Baptists and evangelicals was a live question in the 1980s–1990s intrigued me. David Dockery’s work intrigued me further. I began to look into his publication record concerning the question of Southern Baptist–evangelical relations and thought it worth exploring. Disclaimer: I am a graduate of Union University and teach at Southwestern Seminary. I am a historian who is used to writing about dead people. Writing about someone I know, and who is my boss, feels odd. The argument for this article is very limited. David Dockery did not make Southern Baptists evangelicals, but he did take significant steps towards achieving his mentor James Leo Garrett’s vision of Southern Baptists as “denominational evangelicals.” Also, apologies to Dr. Timothy George. When I first titled this, I didn’t realize that he already had a piece entitled, “With David Dockery Among Baptists and Evangelicals.” Trevin Wax has made the same wordplay as well.

²Defining “evangelical” is itself a whole field of scholarship. While David Bebbington and George Marsden have more nuanced definitions, I prefer Thomas Kidd’s: “Evangelicals are born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.” Thomas Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

Newsweek, “We are *not* evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word . . . We don’t share their politics or their fussy fundamentalism, and we don’t want to get involved in their theological witch-hunts.”³ In the 1970s and 1980s, Southern Baptist identity was a live question. A cacophony of voices offered different opinions on the SBC’s reason for being and its relationship to its past. William Estep said in 1976 that Southern Baptists were in the “throes of an identity crisis.”⁴

In 1983, James Leo Garrett, Glenn Hinson, and James Tull published *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”*?⁵ This work was commendable for the collegial discourse amidst sharp disagreement. Tull provided an introductory framework to the debate at hand, Garrett argued that Southern Baptists are “denominational evangelicals,” and Hinson argued for a strong distinction between Southern Baptists and evangelicals rooted in Baptist voluntarism. It should be noted that Hinson largely understood “evangelical” as synonymous with “fundamentalist.” *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”*? emerged four years into what is now remembered as the Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention (or remembered as the “Fundamentalist Takeover” by others, demonstrating that debates about Southern Baptist identity are far from academic).⁶

During this period, Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings exhibited growing controversy with every election for convention president. In the midst of the rancor of denominational life in the 1980s, one of Garrett’s students emerged as an irenic bridge-builder marked by convictional civility. His name was David Dockery, and he would help shape internal Southern Baptist conversations about their relations to evangelicalism by modeling, convening, and encouraging Southern Baptist/evangelical dialogue that transformed the terms of the debate. He helped develop relational networks and scholarship that aided in the

³Kenneth L. Woodward, John Barnes, and Laurie Lisle, “Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals,” *Newsweek* 88 (25 October 1976), 76.

⁴W. R. Estep, “Southern Baptists in Search of an Identity,” in *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in honor of Robert A. Baker*, ed. William R. Estep (Fort Worth: TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976), 164.

⁵James Leo Garrett, Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”*? (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).

⁶For a brief history of the controversy see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 285–92. For larger works see David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969–1991* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996) and Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2000).

transformation of Southern Baptist perceptions of the role of the SBC within broader evangelicalism.

AN EVANGELICAL SOUTHERN BAPTIST IN CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

David S. Dockery's career has demonstrated what it means to be an evangelical Baptist. He earned a Master of Divinity from Grace Theological Seminary in 1979 and a second Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1981. While at Southwestern, he gleaned much from James Leo Garrett. He confesses that he entered Garrett's patristic theology course with "fear and trembling," but he came to learn many things from Garrett, including "the importance of Christian orthodoxy and the need to clarify Baptist distinctives," "the importance of church history and historical theology in formulating one's theology," and "how to think about Christian unity and Christian cooperation."⁷ He also completed an M.A. at Texas Christian University before earning a Ph.D. in the University of Texas system, demonstrating an academic and theological engagement beyond parochial Southern Baptist life. He pastored for three years in Brooklyn before returning to Texas to teach theology and New Testament at Criswell College in 1984.⁸

By the mid-1980s the Conservative Resurgence was gaining steam in the SBC, which led the six Southern Baptist seminary presidents to issue the Glorieta Statement in 1986 that, among other things, pledged to bring more theological balance to seminary faculties. Roy L. Honeycutt invited Dockery to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to teach a summer course in the summer of 1987. Dockery taught a course on "Early Christian Worship." He remarks that "everyone was intrigued that this fundamentalist was on campus and teaching this course."⁹ Timothy George praises Dockery's irenicism and ability to interact charitably with divergent viewpoints, which won him the esteem of faculty and students at Southern, saying, "Everybody liked David—even those who hated his guts liked him."¹⁰ After impressing the Southern faculty academically and

⁷David S. Dockery, "Editorial," *SWJT* 65, no. 1 (Fall 2022): 6.

⁸Biographical information from James Leo Garrett Jr., "David Samuel Dockery: Evangelical Baptist and the Doctrine of the Bible," in *Convictional Civility: Engaging the Culture in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of David S. Dockery*, ed. C. Ben Mitchell, Carla Sanderson, and Gregory A. Thornbury (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 3–10.

⁹David S. Dockery and Timothy George, interview by Blake McKinney, March 19, 2024, Fort Worth, TX.

¹⁰Dockery and George, interview.

interpersonally, Dockery joined the faculty in 1988. Thus, within five years of *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, Garrett’s protégé David Dockery became a faculty colleague of Glenn Hinson.

During that summer of 1987, Dockery and Timothy George became close friends. They had met in passing at an earlier Evangelical Theological Society meeting, but their friendship blossomed over Dockery’s three weeks in Louisville. George wrote about their friendship and the divisions of SBC life at the time, “Our personal friendship had emerged through tentative efforts to reach out to each other across the boundaries of divergence which had placed us (without asking us) on opposite sides of the polemical divide in what was then a raging denominational quarrel.”¹¹ In that summer, they walked together through Cave Hill Cemetery where many significant Southern Baptists are buried and conceived of a book reintroducing the legacy of these departed Baptist leaders, which became *Baptist Theologians*.¹² Dockery and George would continue to collaborate but never served on the same faculty as George left Southern for Birmingham to assume the inaugural deanship of Beeson Divinity School months before Dockery came onto Southern’s faculty. George invited Dockery a number of times to address summer pastors’ conferences at Beeson, and they co-authored numerous works over the decades. Their friendship has far-reaching implications for Southern Baptists and evangelicals and deserves further study.

Dockery taught at Southern Seminary until 1990 when he took a leave of absence to serve as the general editor of the *New American Commentary* (NAC) for the Sunday School Board of the SBC (now Lifeway). In addition to his work on the NAC series, he worked to publish new books by Carl F.H. Henry with the Baptist Sunday School Board. Henry was the most visible theologian of the evangelical movement in the twentieth century. Henry provided two unfinished manuscripts, which became *The Identity of Jesus of Nazareth* (1992) and *Gods of this Age or... God of the Ages?* (1994) under the editorship of Dockery and Al Mohler respectively. Dockery returned to the SBTS faculty in 1992 as the dean of the School of Theology and then also as the vice president of academic administration.

In 1996, Dockery left Southern Seminary to become the president of

¹¹Timothy George, “With David Dockery Among Baptists and Evangelicals,” in *Convictional Civility: Engaging the Culture in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of David S. Dockery*, ed. C. Ben Mitchell, Carla D. Sanderson, and Gregory A. Thornbury (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 12

¹²Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990).

Union University in Jackson, TN. His time at Union continues to send ripples throughout Christian higher education with many administrators who served under him now serving as provosts and presidents of evangelical educational institutions across the country.¹³ While at Union, Dockery positioned a regional school for West Tennessee Baptists to be—as Nathan Finn describes it well—a “national Christian university on par with a Wheaton College or Calvin College, deeply rooted in its Baptist identity and aligned closely with conservative Southern Baptist thought, but also more broadly evangelical in its ethos and priorities.”¹⁴ Finn has traced well Dockery’s impact as a “bridge figure between Southern Baptists and the wider evangelical world” in terms of his influence in Christian higher education.¹⁵

After twenty-eight years in Baptist institutions of higher learning, Dockery transitioned to the influential evangelical Trinity International University. He served as president until 2019. In 2019, he retired and relocated to Fort Worth, TX, as distinguished professor of theology and theologian-in-residence at his alma mater, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The reports of David Dockery’s retirement, however, were greatly exaggerated. In the same year, Dockery launched the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE), an evangelical global education network. In 2020, he was pressed into service as interim provost at Southwestern, and then in 2022, after significant institutional instability, Dockery accepted the invitation to serve as Southwestern’s tenth president. His leadership in returning Southwestern to a place of institutional stability has already attracted much notice and is sure to be long remembered.¹⁶

Dockery currently serves as both the president of Southwestern and the president of the IACE. He embodies Garrett’s description of Southern Baptists as “denominational evangelicals.” It is safe to say that no other

¹³For more on this see the forthcoming Andy Pettigrew, *Steadfast: The Leadership Journey and Model of David S. Dockery* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2026).

¹⁴Nathan Finn, “Evangelical by Conviction, Baptist by Tradition: David Dockery’s Vision for Southern Baptist Higher Education,” in *Baptists, Gospel, and Culture: Papers from the Eighth International Conference on Baptist Studies*, ed. William L. Pitts Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2021), 287.

¹⁵Finn, “Evangelical by Conviction,” 281.

¹⁶See, Warren Cole Smith, “Editor’s Notebook: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Back from the Abyss,” *Ministry Watch*, March 14, 2025. <https://ministrywatch.com/editors-notebook-southwestern-baptist-theological-seminary-steps-back-from-the-abyss/>; and Bob Smietana, “After years of crisis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary finds its path,” *Religion News Service*, June 2, 2025, <https://religionnews.com/2025/06/02/after-years-of-crisis-david-dockery-has-southwestern-baptist-theological-seminary-looking-to-the-future/>.

Southern Baptist has had as wide-ranging impact on Christian higher education, and this article is inadequate to even begin a meaningful analysis of it.¹⁷ The next section examines how Dockery helped further Garrett's vision of Southern Baptist evangelicals through the development of relational networks and the encouragement of scholarship on Baptist identity.

BRINGING EVANGELICALS AND SOUTHERN BAPTISTS TOGETHER

Beginning in 1979 and continuing into the 1990s, theological conservatives committed to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy enacted a plan to take control of SBC bureaucracy in order to rid SBC seminaries and entities of those who denied inerrancy.¹⁸ This successful campaign that achieved consecutive SBC presidential elections for over a decade brought about an institutional transformation within the Southern Baptist Convention. This era was contentious. Theological denunciations and attacks on personal character became common in Southern Baptist circles. The title of one publication about this era gives a sense of the tensions: *Going for the Jugular*.¹⁹ Opponents tarred one another as "liberals" or "fundamentalists," but this dichotomy was overstated. Dockery and James Emery White provide a helpful four-fold breakdown of the spectrum within the inerrancy debate, listing "(1) fundamentalists, (2) conservatives, (3) moderates, and (4) liberals." Although all were present to varying degrees, the SBC by the early 1990s was "composed primarily of conservative and moderate evangelicals."²⁰

Beginning in 1989, Dockery helped orchestrate a last-ditch effort at conciliation in which Baptist scholars representing the full spectrum of theological positions in the SBC met at Southern Seminary, Samford University, and the University of Richmond over a three-year stretch. Dockery worked with Robison James to put together a group that included Dockery, James, Walter Harrelson, John Newport, Al Mohler, Paige Patterson, Molly Truman Marshall, and Timothy George. Dockery and

¹⁷For those interested in reading further, see Finn, "Evangelical by Conviction," and Pettigrew, *Steadfast*. This article dovetails with Finn's analysis and focuses on Dockery's influence of Southern Baptist self-identification with evangelicalism.

¹⁸Material in this section draws from my earlier work on Southern Baptist identity, "Who are Southern Baptists?", *SWJT* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 41–56.

¹⁹Randy Shepley and Walter Shurden, eds. *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

²⁰David S. Dockery and James Emery White, "Introduction," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 4, 9.

James co-edited a volume of collected essays and responses from these meetings, which they published as *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life*.²¹ Originally there was no question mark in the title, but as the meetings progressed, it became clear that this chasm was too wide to bridge. George remarks, “As we got into issues like Scripture and hermeneutics and miracles in the Bible...it became clear to me (and probably to all the conservatives in the room) this was a price we could not pay. And that’s why we ended up with a question mark.” Dockery agrees but recalls it as a “good faith effort” which he considers a “great privilege” to have engaged.²² By the time the book appeared in print, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship had splintered from the SBC. While the rifts of the SBC Inerrancy Controversy were too wide to bridge, *Beyond the Impasse?* exhibited a worthy effort at conciliation and demonstrated Dockery’s dual commitment to “conciliation and conviction.”²³

The victory of conservatives in the Inerrancy Controversy only partially clarified questions of Southern Baptist identity. During the same time span of the *Beyond the Impasse?* meetings, Dockery organized meetings of Southern Baptists and evangelicals at Southern Seminary. Dockery edited the conference proceedings into a book entitled *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, which released ten years after Garrett and Hinson’s *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*²⁴ This volume featured seventeen authors, including Southern Baptists from SBC seminaries and Baptist colleges and influential evangelical scholars from a variety of evangelical (and non-evangelical) institutions. Mark Noll provided a forward that was optimistic about Southern Baptists emerging from isolation.²⁵ George Marsden, Robert Johnston, Stanley Grenz, and Leon McBeth wrote chapters on evangelical and Baptist identity. Grenz declared, “I had never entertained the thought that Southern Baptists could be anything but evangelicals,” but McBeth protested, “I do not want to be either an evangelical or a fundamentalist, at least not as I understand the terms. I am weary of other people defining who I am.”²⁶ Joel Carpenter,

²¹Robison B. James and David Dockery, eds., *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).

²²Dockery and George, interview.

²³George, “With David Dockery Among Baptists and Evangelicals,” 15.

²⁴David S. Dockery, ed. *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: B&H, 1993).

²⁵Mark Noll, “Foreword,” in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals*.

²⁶Stanley Grenz, “Baptist and Evangelical: One Northern Baptist’s Perspective,” in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals*, 52; and Leon McBeth, “Baptist or Evangelical: One

Dockery, Newport, and Richard Melick Jr. analyzed interactions between Southern Baptists and northern evangelicals with the dominant takeaway being that distinctions had more to do with geography, culture, and institutions than theology. Richard Mouw, Stanley Grenz, Bill Leonard, Danny Akin, and David D'Amico compared beliefs and practices of Southern Baptists and evangelicals.

The book closed with retrospective essays by Hinson and Garrett and a chapter by Mohler, "A Call for Baptist Evangelicals and Evangelical Baptists: Communities of Faith and a Common Quest for Identity." Mohler proclaimed, "The best hope for the recovery of the Southern Baptist Convention lies in the rediscovery and reclamation of an authentic and distinctive Southern Baptist evangelicalism—*genuinely Baptist*, and *genuinely evangelical*."²⁷ While *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* included a variety of Southern Baptist and evangelical voices, the overall tone of the volume was clearly in line with Garrett's definition of Southern Baptists as "denominational evangelicals." Mohler's call for Baptist evangelicals and evangelical Baptists complemented Garrett's vision and Dockery's bridge-building character.

Dockery became president of Union University in 1996 and he worked to further integrate Southern Baptists into evangelicalism. During his tenure, Union played host to a number of significant evangelical scholars (and Baptist scholars invested in broader evangelicalism) through both its Scholar in Residence program (including James Sire, James Leo Garrett, Millard Erickson, John Woodbridge, Gerald Bray, and Timothy George) and conferences through the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies (including Gordon Fee, Dan Block, Grant Osborne, Paul House, and D. A. Carson).

Under Dockery's leadership Union opened the Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Intellectual Discipleship in 2002 with a symposium titled, "Remaking the Modern Mind: A Symposium on Evangelical Foundations." This symposium featured addresses by Erickson, Anthony Thiselton, Grenz, and Mohler.²⁸ In the fall, Dockery and Gregory Thornbury's co-edited *Shaping a Christian Worldview* came out with B&H with a Chuck Colson foreword.²⁹ That same year Prison Fellowship endowed the Charles Colson

Southern Baptist's Perspective," in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals*, 70.

²⁷Al Mohler, "A Call for Baptist Evangelicals and Evangelical Baptists: Communities of Faith and a Common Quest for Identity," in *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals*, 238.

²⁸"Conference examines legacy of Christian leader and future of evangelicalism," Union University. <https://www.uu.edu/news/release.cfm?ID=289>.

²⁹David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds., *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The*

Chair of Faith and Culture at Union.³⁰ In 2012, Dockery was named to the Carl F. H. Henry Chair on the Prison Fellowship Board, succeeding his friend Timothy George as the leading theologian on the board. This theological chair of the Prison Fellowship is a veritable who's who of evangelical figures. The chair passed from Carl F. H. Henry to R. C. Sproul to J. I. Packer to Timothy George to David S. Dockery. Union would play host to a conference in Colson's memory in 2013 with Robert George, Timothy George, Garland Hunt, and Russell Moore serving as keynote speakers.³¹ It is noteworthy that both Carl F. H. Henry and Chuck Colson were Southern Baptists more readily recognized as evangelicals.

Not only did Dockery make Union University a site of Southern Baptist evangelical engagement, but he also made it the place for conversations on the nature of Southern Baptist identity. In 2004, Union University hosted a conference called "Baptist Identity: Is There a Future?" The conference began with a lecture by James Leo Garrett on "The Pre-1609 Roots of Baptist Beliefs," which connected Southern Baptists to historic Christian orthodoxy and Protestant theological emphases. Russ Bush followed with an address on the role of Scripture in Baptist life. Dockery delivered a powerful lecture on "The Rebirth of Baptist Orthodoxy," tracing modern Southern Baptist theological controversies and calling for a robust commitment to "authentic Baptist orthodoxy" through careful theological reflection and confession.³² Greg Wills and Stan Norman gave a historian's and a theologian's perspective on the question "Are Southern Baptists in Danger of Losing Their Identity?" Wills grounded Southern Baptist identity in faith, not merely in participation in "a powerful Baptist subculture in the South."³³ Richard Land addressed the importance of religious liberty to Baptist identity, and Mohler declared in his lecture titled "Baptist Identity: Is There a Future?" that "this is a great time to be a Baptist. We now have the opportunity to recover our nonconformist roots."³⁴

Foundations of Christian Higher Education (Nashville: B&H, 2002).

³⁰"Colson Chair announced at Union University," Union University, <https://www.uu.edu/news/release.cfm?ID=290>.

³¹"Salt and Light in the Public Square: Charles Colson's Legacy and Vision," Union University, <https://www.uu.edu/events/colsonlegacy/>.

³²David S. Dockery, "The Rebirth of Baptist Orthodoxy," April 5, 2004, <https://www.uu.edu/audio/baptistidentity/DavidSDockery.mp3>.

³³Gregory Wills, "Southern Baptist Identity: A Historical Perspective," in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 77.

³⁴Al Mohler, "Baptist Identity: Is there a Future?" April 6, 2004, <https://www.uu.edu/audio/baptistidentity/RAlbertMohlerJr.mp3>.

In 2007, Union hosted a second conference on Baptist identity, which demonstrated its Baptist-ness both in the title (“Baptist Identity II”) but also in the wonderfully Baptist threefold alliteration in the subtitle (“Convention, Cooperation, and Controversy”). This conference brought in a whole new slate of speakers drawn from Southern Baptist seminaries, institutions, and churches. Dockery lectured on “The Southern Baptist Convention since 1979.” This conference was decidedly more forward-looking with more prescriptive emphases than the first Baptist Identity Conference. Ed Stetzer called Southern Baptists “Toward a Missional Convention,” George extolled retrieval for renewal, Michael Day opined on “The Future of State Conventions and Associations,” and Jim Shaddix discussed “The Future of the Traditional Church.”

These two Baptist Identity Conferences contributed to the production of two books. Dockery edited a volume of selected papers from the Baptist Identity Conferences (plus two commissioned chapters by Finn and Akin). This book, *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, was published with Crossway in 2009. The choice of Crossway is significant. Every contributor was a Southern Baptist, the papers originated at a Baptist university in Tennessee, yet Dockery opted for the evangelical press Crossway. Thirty-six years after Garrett and Hinson published their in-house Southern Baptist debate through a Baptist press, Dockery shared contemporary Southern Baptist conversations with a broader evangelical audience. Aside from a short preface and introduction, Dockery offered very little of his own analysis, and he omitted his own two lectures from the publication.

Dockery shared his own thoughts on Southern Baptist identity and the future of the Southern Baptist Convention in his 2008 *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (published with B&H Academic). This book drew from his addresses at the two Baptist Identity conferences as well as a booklet he co-wrote with George titled *Building Bridges* that was distributed to all registered messengers at the SBC annual meeting in San Antonio in 2007.³⁵ In this articulate and challenging work, Dockery called on Southern Baptists, which he described as “the largest evangelical denomination in the country,” to greater biblical faithfulness and global cooperative efforts for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ. Dockery called on Southern Baptists to renewal and consensus around the gospel and Baptist distinctives. Paraphrasing Carl F. H. Henry,

³⁵George, “With David Dockery among Baptists and Evangelicals,” 15.

he declared, “We must settle the identity issue, and in doing so, coalesce; otherwise we will become by the twenty-first century a wilderness cult in a secular society, with no more public significance than the ancient Essenes in their Dead Sea caves.”³⁶ He called Southern Baptists to unite around the faith once for all delivered to the saints, saying that Southern Baptist identity “must be more than a merely sociological matter,” and “we need a historically informed, Christ-centered, church-focused, biblically based theology to move forward in the days ahead.”³⁷

In 2009, Dockery (with the aid of Ray Van Neste and Jerry Tidwell) oversaw one more conference on Southern Baptist identity at Union University. This conference coincided with the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Baptist movement. The theme of the conference, “Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism,” drew together various streams of Baptist identity and concerns shared within broader evangelicalism. The conference brought together Southern Baptists and evangelicals. It continued many of the trajectories from Baptist Identity II and Dockery’s *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*. This conference, too, resulted in a book, *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (published by B&H Academic). A perusal of the essays within the volume demonstrates a shared assumption of Southern Baptists as denominational evangelicals. The authors argue for what some have called “thick denominational” cooperation within evangelicalism.

CONCLUSION

Dockery and his chosen interlocutors in the Baptist Identity conferences represent the continuation of James Leo Garrett’s identification of Southern Baptists as “denominational evangelicals.” Gone are the Southern Baptists like Hinson and Valentine who found evangelicalism too doctrinally restrictive and fraught with “fussy fundamentalism.” Now criticisms of evangelicalism from within the SBC usually come from the Right with concerns about “Big Eva” and a lack of doctrinal clarity in para-church/inter-denominational cooperation. Trevin Wax has addressed this well (in a volume edited by Dockery and Malcolm Yarnell, two Garrett protégés). He writes, “The question forty years ago was this: would evangelicals be part of the renewal of the Southern Baptist Convention? The question

³⁶David Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 2

³⁷Dockery, *Consensus and Renewal*, 195, 211.

today is: will Southern Baptists be part of the renewal of evangelicalism?"³⁸ If Southern Baptists continue to engage more broadly in American evangelicalism, Dockery has helped immensely in laying the intellectual, institutional, and relational foundations for continued Southern Baptist/Evangelical cooperation.

David S. Dockery did not make Southern Baptists evangelicals; neither did Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry, Chuck Colson, James Leo Garrett, or Al Mohler. The vast majority of Southern Baptists had always been theologically evangelical—whether they knew about it (or cared to know about it) or not. Yet, it is apparent that Southern Baptists are more comfortably evangelical today than they were forty years ago. One example may show the emergence of Southern Baptists from their regional and denominational isolation. For the first fifty years of its existence, the Evangelical Theological Society had one Southern Baptist president. In the following twenty-five years, eight Southern Baptists served in that role.³⁹ The relationship of Southern Baptists and Evangelicalism deserves far more attention than this article can address. It is but an initial sketch of Dockery's academic career, conference organization, and selected publications relating to Southern Baptists' relation to Evangelicalism. Dockery's contributions to Southern Baptist theology, identity, and cooperation far exceed this narrow study. Yet, it is worth noting how David S. Dockery helped produce relational networks and scholarship that transformed Southern Baptist perceptions of the role of the SBC within broader evangelicalism.

³⁸Trevin Wax, "Denominations and the Hope of Evangelical Renewal," *SWJT* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 110.

³⁹L. Russ Bush (1994), John Sailhamer (2000), Craig Blaising (2005), Bruce Ware (2009), Eugene Merrill (2010), Tom Schreiner (2014), David S. Dockery (2018), Al Mohler (2021), and Timothy George (2023).

EVANGELICALISM AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Robert B. Sloan*

Given the outstanding presentations on evangelicalism that we have had thus far, I do not need to spend much time defining what an evangelical is. But to summarize, I like the definition that David Dockery gave as a chapel address at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on January 14, 2015, as revised and published in *Trinity Journal*: “Evangelicals are men and women who love Jesus Christ, love the Bible, and love the gospel message. They are gospel people. A hallmark of the movement is a willingness to cooperate together in evangelism, missions, and educational efforts.” Dockery goes on to say that evangelicalism, a cross-denominational movement emphasizing classical Protestant theology, is best understood today as culturally engaged and historically shaped in response to both mainline liberalism and reactionary fundamentalism.¹

Dockery continues by saying a lot more to fill out this definition historically, but I especially note—and enjoy—his use of the old saw about Billy Graham and evangelicalism: If you love Billy Graham, you are an evangelical. If you are a liberal, you think Billy Graham is a fundamentalist. If you are a fundamentalist, you think Billy Graham is apostate.

I will give you one more quote from Dockery’s speech that I really like. It says a lot historically in just a few words: “While we can connect the evangelical movement with the teaching of the apostles, with the early church consensus, as it developed through the great church councils, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century, evangelicalism is perhaps best traced to the revivals of the eighteenth century.”²

Dockery, along with historians like Thomas Kidd, agrees that following the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the Puritan and Pietist influences of the seventeenth century, evangelicalism as a movement is

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¹David S. Dockery, “Evangelicalism: Past, Present, and Future,” *Trinity Journal* 36NS: 4-5.

²Dockery, “Evangelicalism,” 5.

connected formally to the revivals of the eighteenth century and especially to significant figures like George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards.³ Under the widespread influence of these preachers and theologians, evangelicalism became known doctrinally and experientially for its emphases upon the preaching of the gospel, the new birth and conversion, the felt presence of the Holy Spirit, and what David Bebbington calls an activist faith. And, in good Reformation tradition, these well-known features were grounded with exegetical and expository arguments on the authority of the Bible as the final word for theology, faith, and spiritual experience.

My central topic, however, is not “What is evangelicalism?” Rather, I have been challenged to speak on evangelicalism and Christian education, an experience and practice that is at the heart of not only the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) but every person and institution it represents.

I begin with one very obvious fact: Christian education in general—whether in a church, a school, a special purpose group, an agency, or a parachurch ministry—cannot be separated from the proclamation of the gospel, the *evangelion*, which is central to the evangelical movement and of course the very basis of our name, “evangelical.” The preaching of the gospel is not the only tenet of evangelicalism, but it is a foundational point, and I bring it to the fore here because it connects almost by definition with the work of our institutions. In other words, we should remember that the gospel itself is an announced message, a venture in education.

The gospel is a good news message designed for telling. It is a revelation intended to communicate what a messenger knows to an audience that does not yet know. It is not advice. In Scripture, it is a proclamation of the dawning of a new day not heretofore experienced, though long awaited. The gospel involves a herald. The message? That the prophesied day of restoration has come.

“Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news.
Lift up your voice mightily, Jerusalem, bearer of good news.
Lift it up, do not fear
Say to the cities of Judah, behold your God!” (Isaiah 40:9).

³Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), especially chapter 1.

“How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news; who announces peace, and brings good news of happiness; who announces salvation; and says to Zion, your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).

It is what major characters at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke celebrate. Mary exalts the Lord because “he has given help to Israel, his servant, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever” (1:54–55). Zacharias, the father of John, “was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited us and accomplished redemption for his people, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David, his servant—as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from old’” (1:67–70).

Or consider Simeon, the man in Jerusalem who was waiting for the “consolation of Israel,” having been divinely promised that he would not die until he saw Messiah. When Mary, Joseph, and the baby entered the temple, the Holy Spirit was upon him. And when he saw the child, “he took him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ‘Now, Lord, let thy bondservant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples’” (2:25–31). Or the 84-year-old widow by the name of Anna, from the tribe of Asher, who at the same moment saw what Simeon saw and “began giving thanks to God and spoke of the baby to all those who,” as she, “were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:36–38).

The gospel is a long hoped for message of good tidings that has a significant backstory and many implications, and for all those new hearers who embraced with joy the glorious news of the divinely incarnate, crucified, risen, and enthroned Messiah, it needed to be unpacked. And so it was. The very existence of the New Testament is a testimony to the earliest records of the apostolic and authoritative efforts to interpret, elaborate, spread, and preserve the exciting new spoken message and the implications of it.

The earliest assemblies of Jesus’s followers heard the message over and over, and when, after not too many years, they had documents, they preserved them and listened to them read aloud regularly in their assemblies and carefully made copies for other assemblies as well. Within a historically short period of time, these interpretive documents came to be used in worship alongside the *Tanak*—what we call the Old Testament—as the

apostolic witness and teaching basis of the fulfillment of the ancient scriptural longings for restoration, the kingdom of God that had now dawned in the person of Jesus and was confirmed by the presence of the Spirit.

Preaching and teaching the gospel were largely the same thing in content, though of course the context of the audience influenced the style and level of the teaching. From the very first day, the followers of Jesus had authoritative teachers, the apostles and their wider circle of disciples, who elaborated orally the background of the gospel message, its scriptural justification and basis in the teachings and story of Jesus. And then as the oral traditions were displaced by written documents, various bodies of recognized teachers emerged to explain them—secretaries, readers, and communicators. As Timothy was instructed to be, they were zealous to guard the gospel (1 Tim. 6:20).

So, it only makes sense that, over time, the good news teachings would become inextricably linked with and even give rise to educational institutions of all kinds, whether for ministers or laypersons.

There were, of course, famous institutions established by Christian influences in Paris, Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge, and around the world. And then following the great revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was natural for other institutions to emerge that would reflect the theological character and the spiritual experience of those great evangelical movements—that is, the centrality of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the new birth and conversion, and the experience of the Spirit—core theological beliefs that were all grounded in biblical authority.

This view of what constitutes a Christian institution is consistent with what Richard John Neuhaus says in his Eleven Theses “on the possibility of a Christian university.”²⁴ That is, he insists that a Christian university is grounded in its *theological* convictions, especially as those core governing beliefs orbit around the lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus, Neuhaus argues, rightly I think, that the Christian character of an institution is not properly described by its history, its denominational affiliation, its board of trustees, or even being like other universities in degree programs and curriculum, but with chapel or a few Bible courses. Nor, I would add, by having an atmosphere that is “nice.”

For Neuhaus, and I think every evangelical can agree, Christian higher education is grounded first of all in its core theological convictions.

²⁴Richard John Neuhaus, “The Christian University: Eleven Theses,” *First Things*, 59 January 1996.

Neuhaus and others have reminded us that it does help to have an ecclesiastical tradition that can hold a Christian institution accountable, but an ecclesiastical tradition is not in the end what constitutes a Christian university. All of us have seen that an ecclesiastical tradition, if it loses its moorings, is unlikely to hold Christian institutions accountable.

The challenge I want to address is, how do we advance our educational institutions, enable them to flourish, and indeed, at a very basic level, preserve them as faithful evangelical entities? The last more than hundred years have seen a serious decline in the character and even existence of historically Christian institutions. How can we prevent that decline and preserve our witness for generations to come? Make no mistake: maintaining our identity and witness is a struggle. We did not come by our theological confessions without struggle, and we do not maintain them without intentionality. We are, after all, wrestling not against flesh and blood. For such a battle, we need the full armor of God and the courage to stand (Eph 6:10–20). The influences we all feel from our culture do not typically lead us toward Christian faith but pressure us to be conformed to this present evil age (Rom 12:1–2).

I want to suggest several theses for preserving the generational longevity of Christian institutions. As an homage to Richard John Neuhaus, I have eleven to present, with one proviso—these theses and my experience are more grounded in higher education, but I think they have general applicability, whatever your institutional or ministry-related entity may look like.

**THESIS I: EMBRACE WITHOUT APOLOGY THE FACT
THAT THE CHARACTER OF OUR INSTITUTIONS—
IN KEEPING WITH THE HISTORIC NATURE OF
EVANGELICALISM—IS THEOLOGICALLY GROUNDED**

The emphases of the earliest evangelicals are a good place to start—the preaching of the gospel, the new birth and conversion, the felt presence of the Holy Spirit, and an activist faith, all of which stand on biblical authority. But, of course, evangelicalism is broader now than those core features of the eighteenth-century revival movements; still, all of us as evangelicals confess the authority of Scripture and the centrality of the divinely incarnated, crucified, risen, and enthroned Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel. So whatever shape you give to the evangelicalism of your tradition, you must recognize the theological character of your institution or ministry—and defend it.

It is not too dogmatic, or too particular—nor should it be embarrassing—to recognize that the gospel (which Paul, of course, maintained is “according to the Scriptures”) involves a body of teaching and furthermore brings with it historical content that must be maintained and taught. Preserving and passing on all those traditions is the work of discipleship, the overarching function of our institutions.

To declare the centrality and lordship of Jesus Christ is to commit yourself to a significant backstory that contextualizes and defines what we mean when we refer to the gospel.

That story begins with Creation and the Fall, the deterioration of the humans made in God’s image, and the corruption of the whole creation, until God’s plan of rescue emerges. The story of Abraham, Moses, Israel and the Exodus, and of course the subsequent failures of Israel and Judah that led to the Exile and an age of wrath, with the prophetic promises that one day God would restore them by changing the inclination of their hearts and establishing a new covenant through a son of David who would rule the nations, these are the bare essentials of the scriptural story that reaches its initial fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, who began his ministry by announcing, as did his kinsman and forerunner, John, the near and imminent arrival of the kingdom of God.

Though the story of Jesus takes some surprising turns, especially with his rejection and death, it is nonetheless the fulfillment of the ancient scriptural story, and even now that story remains incomplete. In another surprising turn, the apostles learned from Jesus that, following his resurrection, he would depart and return again to complete his work, to restore and judge the earth and its peoples, to raise the dead, and heal the nations with leaves from the tree of life (Rev 19:11–22:5).

Evangelical Christian higher education has core convictions and deep biblical roots, and we ignore them to our own peril.

All of us must commit to lifelong learning and to a regular internal curriculum of professional development, whereby we continue to discuss and refine our biblical worldview and the implications of it for all of our disciplines. It is a theological task. Any Christian who confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord of all things visible and invisible (Col 1:15–20) must reckon with the all-encompassing reach into all areas of life and thinking of that confession.

By the way, I think one of the finest things that IACE does in addition to these conferences is the faculty development gathering, when faculty

from our institutions have concentrated time to press forward on issues relating to faith and learning. We have had thirty-five faculty from Houston Christian University (HCU) attend these conferences, and they are the best thing we have done externally for professional development on these topics.

**THESIS II: GRASP THE NETTLE OF THE FOUNDATIONAL
ETHICAL TRADITIONS THAT ARE INEXTRICABLY
WOVEN INTO THE TAPESTRY OF THE GOSPEL
AND MAKE THEM PART OF THE CHARACTER AND
TEACHING CONTENT OF OUR INSTITUTIONS**

This is a particularly hard reality to face up to, because when it comes to “ethics,” we are inclined to separate it from “theology” and then allow for a little more latitude. Certainly, there are difficult moral questions for which there is not a clear “thus saith the Lord” answer. But that is also true of abstract theology, and the existence of difficult issues should not prevent us from speaking clearly where Scripture speaks clearly, whether the subject is classical doctrine or traditional ethics.

The sexual revolution, which goes back at least as far as the 1950s, has accelerated dramatically in the last twenty years and threatens to make cowards of us all. The sexual habits of many of our own evangelical students is surprising, to say the least. And what they are willing to tolerate as an ethical practice, and even justify within their own theological frame of reference, for themselves and others, is equally as distressing. Theology and ethics do not live in separate categories. Both are very experiential and have a mutual influence upon one another.

I am sure all of us have seen it, the case of staunch evangelicals who have changed their theology based upon tragic family issues. We need to make sure that the revolutionary changes and prevailing ethical compromises in sexual behavior regarding life, marriage, and gender in our culture are not allowed to undermine the strength, quality, and character of our historic, biblical, and theological commitments.

Biblically, we must face the fact that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate the proclaimed gospel from all of the moral teaching that undergirds it, surrounds it, and is deeply embedded within it. I fear that we have drawn too sharp a distinction between theology and ethics, or between the gospel as a bare plan of salvation and obedience, as if the latter were an additional course of action for special disciples. “Making disciples” according to Matthew 28:19–20 involves “teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you."

Foundational theology in Scripture, and by "foundational theology" I am including the gospel, carries with it a body of ethics. Are we not exhorted to repent as a first step in believing the gospel? Are not Gentiles from the first moments of belief required to give up their idolatries? As believers, are we not exhorted to confess our sins to the great high priest, whose ongoing heavenly function is to make intercession for us (Heb 4:14–16; cf. 1 John 1:8–2:2)? Of course, believing the gospel still requires a lot of unpacking in all dimensions, including moral issues, but moral teaching is not optional and is frequently and precisely what is being further unpacked in the pastoral letters.

When Paul exhorts the readers of Ephesians 4:17ff not to walk as the unbelieving Gentiles walk, "in the futility of their mind," he goes on to describe their calloused, sensual behavior, practicing "every kind of impurity with greediness."

But when he comes to reminding the Ephesians of how they learned Christ, a reference to the initial phases of their conversion (cf. Col 1:6–7), he contrasts that lifestyle with the gospel they were first taught. He says about their former patterns of behavior, "but you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard him, and have been taught in him, just as truth is in Jesus." Their former manner of life must be laid aside, because they have learned Christ, the truth that is in Jesus. Put another way, using Paul's language, "the old self, which was being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit," is inconsistent with the body of truth they were taught when they first learned about the Christ. Thus, the alternative to that life of corruption and deception comes from the gospel, the truth that they learned in Jesus, whereby they are renewed in their minds by the Spirit (Eph 4:17–24).

To reinforce this connection between gospel and discipleship, both of which are overlapping bodies of content taught and learned, it should be noted that the teaching that involves how Jesus followers are to live is often, as here in Ephesians 4, based on a cross–resurrection pattern. That is, the blending of gospel and teaching is seen in the fact that the New Testament writers teach what we could call a gospel-shaped ethic. Here, dying to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, and putting off the old self and its habits of anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech are grounded on the self-denial epitomized by the cross, while putting on the new self and living a life of compassion, kindness,

humility, gentleness, and patience, loving and forgiving each other are characteristic of the new life empowered by the Spirit and are associated with the resurrection (see Col 3:1–14).

The whole ministry of the Spirit also reinforces the connection between the gospel and ethics. The gift of the Spirit is best understood as being at its core a work of holiness and righteousness. The Spirit guides and leads, and gives gifts with empowerment, and it must be remembered that all of these are enabling tokens, initial experiences here and now, of living in God's presence, of his work of making us holy, transforming us as his children toward and into the completed newness of life that will come on the last day, when we are resurrected by the power of the Spirit who indwells us (Rom 8:9–11) and we are made fully like Christ. The resurrection is both a physical and a moral transformation.

I do not want to get too far afield exegetically, but it is important for us, particularly in these days of extreme moral laxity, which is a terrible threat to the integrity of our institutions, to take seriously the moral practices that are the everyday stuff of the gospel that we believe. Let me point to one more set of texts that reinforces this important biblical notion, specifically, that moral transformation is a core element of biblical theology and the new birth.

I call our attention to an often overlooked but very significant scriptural expectation predicted explicitly in Deuteronomy 30:6, Ezekiel 36:25–27, and Jeremiah 31:31–33. These Old Testament texts were often connected in later Jewish literature, and there may even have been some intertextual echoing between and among them.⁵ Employing different metaphors, they all refer to a restorationist promise pertaining to moral renewal and cleansing. Israel will go into exile because of her sins, but she will one day be not only forgiven but cleansed and enabled to walk in obedience to the commandments of the Lord.

These Scriptures are often linked together rather explicitly, and the harmonized promise is that one day the Lord will overcome the moral inabilities of his people and he will, by changing the inclinations of their hearts, by writing his Torah on their hearts, or by giving them his Spirit and inaugurating a new covenant, enable his people to fulfill the requirements they have previously been unable to obey, transforming them to

⁵Jason A. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel: Jews, Former Gentiles, Israelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), see the excellent treatment of these texts, especially in chapters 2–4.

live lives of righteousness and faithfulness.

These scriptural promises are collectively activated in 2 Corinthians 3, where the Spirit writes not on tablets of stone but on human hearts, instituting a new covenant, leading to liberation from darkness, and the transformation of life into Christ-likeness, which comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

The same eschatological hope that God's people will one day have their hearts inclined to obedience is also reflected in Romans, where the justified "doers of the law" give evidence of "the law written on their hearts" (2:13–15). Or, note the transition from the wretched man of Romans 7:24 to the man of Romans 8:13, who is putting to death the deeds of the flesh. The cry for rescue at the end of Romans 7 is answered by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus in 8:1–2. This work of the Spirit for those in Christ reflects a thematic connection with the aforementioned Old Testament passages. In Romans 7, the will is incapable of obedience, just like the heart of Israel in Deuteronomy 29:4, which is subsequently changed and reoriented in Deuteronomy 30:6. The heart of God's people is not inclined to obedience until the circumcision of heart takes place and/or the gift of the Spirit is given, which enables those who are in Christ to fulfill the requirement of the law (8:4). The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus transforms those in Christ, so that those whose mind is set on the Spirit can do the things of the Spirit, submit to the law of God, and put to death the deeds of the body (see 8:5–14).

This is no counsel of perfection, because the following text in Romans 8 makes it clear that the curse will not be fully lifted until our final adoption as sons and daughters, the resurrection of the body (8:20–25). But neither should our ongoing brokenness deny the already inaugurated reality of the heart changing, new covenant gift of the Spirit. We cannot excuse ourselves from the greater faithfulness to which we are both called and enabled. "Shall we sin more that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1–2).

The transforming presence of the Spirit, one of the clear distinctives of historic evangelicalism, growing out of the German and Puritan pietistic movements of the seventeenth century and the revival movements of the eighteenth century, is one of the great means of preserving the integrity and character of our institutions.

First of all, such deep devotional experiences promote a greater effectiveness when we pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:20) and call upon the Lord

to help us.

Second, teaching ourselves, as administrators, faculty, and staff, thereby also mentoring our students in the ways of discipleship, will make a difference in the preservation of the evangelical traditions of our institutions. Our students of today are the trustees of tomorrow. It matters what kind of experience they have, what kind of university they come to love and appreciate, and therefore what kind of theological/ethical traditions they will with integrity uphold when one day the baton is handed to them. Experiences now of renewal and revival, habits of discipleship and Bible study, community worship, and the disciplines of the Spirit taught, practiced, and witnessed make a difference in the theological worldview these future trustees will bring to bear when their day comes to have fiduciary responsibility over the mission of the university.

THESIS III: THE HIRING PROCESS IS A CRUCIAL MOMENT WHEN IT COMES TO HAVING AND PRESERVING THE CHARACTER AND MISSION OF A CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION

Later I will refer to written documents and their importance for our confessional continuity, but day in and day out it is the people, faculty and staff, who carry the tradition and character of the institution. All of the brochures in the world, declaring in glossy print the Christian claims of an institution, cannot overcome the failures of personnel to embrace, expound, and affirm the Christian identity of the institution. If the recruiting materials and fundraising newsletters do not match what really goes on in the classroom or in student life, you may expect not only disappointment but cynicism and, eventually, conflict.

When you hire someone, you should never accept their mere consent, no matter how good their credentials are academically, to “appreciate” or “be sensitive to” your culture and character. I used to know of a situation where an interviewer would refer to the “expectations of our constituents” and then ask, “Are you all right with that?” You do not want people who merely tolerate your history and tradition. You want people who embrace it.

The interviewing process is never perfect, but an intentional process with clear doctrinal expectations is a major step in the right direction.

And the doctrinal and ethical questions in an interview process must never be relegated only to a provost or president—as if the faculty and staff are there to check out the candidate’s academic and professional credentials, while the higher administration will ask the awkward “spiritual” questions.

Every level of screening and conversation in the interviewing process must include the full profile of expectations, not only professional credentials, work experience, and job descriptions but the candidate's good faith embracing of the Christian identity, mission, and core convictions of the institution. Does the candidate want to be at an institution like yours? Does he or she want to share in the project of an evangelical Christian university? Or do they simply want a job?

And if you are in a situation where there has been slippage from your historic theological and spiritual core, then you as president or chief executive officer must interview every candidate until you have rebuilt throughout the organization the walls of trust and commitment to the mission and character of your institution. This means building a mission-committed team to lead the university is absolutely crucial. More on this point later.

THESIS IV: MAINTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE CORE CONVICTIONS OF THE INSTITUTION

The trustees/directors, administrative leadership, departmental leaders, and every individual in the institution must embrace the core identity of the institution. This does not mean that everyone has the same level of theological sophistication, or even the same ability to articulate the nuances of your historic confession, but every person must in good faith support the identity and mission of the institution.

As Christian leaders and administrators, most of us will admit that in addition to financial stresses, personnel matters are the most challenging aspect of our jobs. But if you make a mistake, face up to it. The hiring process is never perfect, and you will make mistakes. If you know you have to make a hard decision, the sooner you can responsibly make it, the better. Avoid tenure. If you have it, develop a long-range plan to grandfather yourself out of it.

THESIS V: OFFICIALLY DOCUMENT THE CORE CONVICTIONS THAT ARE CENTRAL TO YOUR INSTITUTION'S EMBRACING OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

I am referring to more than an appeal to biblical authority or even the creeds or the great councils. Those are of course foundational. Those are the convictions that C. S. Lewis would have called "mere Christianity," and surely those are part of any authentically Christian university. And there are also other convictions that perhaps belong to certain denominational

traditions but may not be as important to others. However, if they are important to the continuity of your institution, write them down and be transparent about them.

Whatever is important to your institution to maintain its identity, put it in writing. Be clear about it, and make it part of hiring and accountability. We can no longer take it for granted that our appeals to Scripture or creeds and long-standing historical traditions are sufficient when it comes, as indeed it has, to litigating whether you can refuse to hire people outside your faith and practices, or not allow coeducational, opposite gender roommates in your dormitories.

At our institution, we have documents that affirm historic Christian doctrines, but we have also developed something that we call “Ten Core Convictions,” which I would be happy to share with anyone. Or you can find them on our website.⁶ They pertain to ethical traditions and largely relate to life, marriage, gender, sexual practices, race, and other ethnic relations.

For us, these core convictions are biblical responses to the cultural hotspots that change as key issues from generation to generation. But because these major questions change—who could possibly have guessed twenty years ago that we would be facing and fighting the kinds of legal practices and proposals that we encounter today—we must be adaptive, ready to give a documented justification for our historic convictions.

We require the annual reaffirmation of our Foundational Documents, which include the Ten Pillars and all our confessional documents, on the part of everyone, including trustees.⁷ It is a simple reaffirmation issued with a contract or annual letter of engagement. And with regard to our Foundational Documents, a super majority of trustees is required to change them.

One last word on this matter. It is not just the threat of litigation that mandates these kinds of written documents. It is also the importance of having explicit convictions that each generation is not only shaped by but is beholden to throughout the years. All of us have seen churches, and I

⁶Editor’s note: Houston Christian University, “The Ten Pillars 2030: The Core Convictions of HCU,” <https://hc.edu/about-hcu/ten-pillars/pillars/>, accessed February 10, 2026.

⁷Editor’s note: Houston Christian University, “Preamble,” <https://hc.edu/university-policies/preamble/>, accessed February 10, 2026.; Houston Christian University, “Statement of Mission and Vision,” <https://hc.edu/university-policies/statement-of-mission-and-vision/>, accessed February 10, 2026; Houston Christian University, “The Ten Pillars 2030: Scripture and a Christian Worldview,” <https://hc.edu/about-hcu/ten-pillars/scripture-worldview/>, accessed February 10, 2026.

would add corporations and institutions, that have changed drastically and dramatically, but not for the better, with the change of leadership. You have to have theological affirmations and practical policy traditions of compliance that no simple change of leadership can wipe away with a memo or a simple majority vote.

THESIS VI: FINANCIAL STABILITY

Every chief executive officer and leadership team must be clear-eyed about the sources of revenue. For Christian higher educational institutions, probably eighty-five to ninety percent of your annual income comes from student related numbers—room, board, books, tuition, and fees. Then, there is endowment, fundraising, and auxiliary enterprises. In our institutions, endowment is a blessing, but unless you are hugely endowed, you probably derive something like five to seven percent of your annual income from the endowment, if that.

Obviously, student numbers matter, so recruiting and retention are major operations for evangelical institutions—or should be. If you are a special purpose group or some other form of nonprofit evangelical agency, annual fundraising is likely a much more significant percentage of your annual budget. But the principles I am suggesting here will apply to you as well.

The immediate cause of virtually all closures and failures of evangelical institutions is financial, but in many cases, there is more to the story. The immediate cause of my father's death almost 40 years ago was heart failure. But the truth is, it was smoking, emphysema, and lung cancer that killed him. Similarly, other causes often interact with financial instability. The loss of mission distinctiveness can quickly lead to declining student numbers and that in turn to financial decline.

Making money is not our mission, but we have no mission if we do not have financial margin. I cannot overstate the importance of having a mission-driven chief financial officer who can understand the financial complexities of an institution, look for ways to prioritize financial matters with respect to the overall mission of the institution, and serve as a close colleague who will give you bad news early on when it is necessary.

The sense of vocation and mission of our people is always an extra value, but it can never be an excuse for inefficiency. Pay your people well and expect excellence.

Remember: No margin, no mission. Every evangelical leader must pay

careful attention to the efficient and faithful use of financial resources. It is mandatory.

All of which means that it is often tempting to compromise our mission integrity to gain the favor of a wealthy donor, or perhaps, we think, to increase our student numbers. All of us know those temptations. They must be resisted. We might be financially benefited in the short run if we cut confessional corners, but in the long run, not only are we called no matter the cost to be faithful to the Lord, but our student numbers and our donor support will benefit if we hold fast to the distinctiveness of our convictions. At least that is my experience.

THESIS VII: THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR AN EXECUTIVE TEAM COMMITTED TO MISSION

The first obligation of a Christian leader is to build a mission-faithful team around himself or herself. Here it is also tempting to trade competence for faithfulness, but those should never be a zero-sum game. Every organization, no matter how flat it is, has some verticality, and starting at the top, the entire profile of mission faithfulness and professional expertise must be honored. If you find yourself trading one for the other, I promise you, you're making a mistake.

THESIS VIII: PRODUCE A WRITTEN VISION

Many years ago, when I was a new college president, I was pestered by a good colleague to produce a vision statement. Frankly, I did not at that time see the benefit of it. I thought the vision was clear. We are going to be a Christian university with academic excellence. What more needed to be said? Well, it turns out that a lot more needs to be said. Vision documents and strategic plans can often become tedious and time-consuming, especially when they are simply put on the shelf and not utilized. But when they are well done, they make a huge difference. Never underestimate the intelligence of your people, but do not overestimate the quality of the information they have received about the institution and its direction.

I think it is beneficial to have these kinds of aspirational and strategic documents, not only for your own trustees, but for your entire internal cohort of stakeholders and for external audiences to know who you are and what you are trying to accomplish.

A comprehensive document that defines who you are by your confessional statements and beliefs, including a vision narrative that inspires

your team and others as to where you want to go, as well as a strategic plan that explains how you want to get there, can be of immense value. Such a comprehensive document keeps everyone on the same page, prioritizes spending, gives focus to your operations, and inspires diligence, connecting what you believe with where you want to go and how you are going to get there.

THESIS IX: NEVER FORGET THE EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC MISSION OF YOUR INSTITUTION

With all the compliance demands, financial requirements, and even confessional challenges, it is easy to forget that providing a biblically grounded, Christ-centered education for our students is our number one responsibility. You must have people who are great teachers, who love students, and who in years to come will be thought of by alumni as the professor or staff member who changed their lives. You must have faculty and staff who do more than fill up a classroom spot or occupy a desk. They must be mentors, counselors, friends, and even at times parents and Dutch uncles.

And, among the faculty—not every faculty member, of course—but among your faculty, you must have those of serious academic reputation outside the university. Platforms for distributing research and academic work have changed from the older patterns of publishing, but by whatever platform is in vogue, every evangelical institution needs to have a few scholars of national and international reputation in their chosen academic field.

The last word has not been said in every imaginable discipline: whether it is history, psychology, political science, biology, engineering, philosophy, health and gender studies, pedagogy, or anything else under creation. I can tell you that in my own field of New Testament studies, the discovery of new texts and the more inclusive use of other ancient documents have led to new questions pertaining, for example, to Jew–Gentile relations. New theological schools and specialties, such as the “within Judaism” studies of both Paul and Jesus, have emerged and need engagement by evangelical minds. The tragic re-emergence of antisemitism on many secular college campuses makes it all the more important to ask questions about supersessionist views of the church with respect to biblical Israel. Further, the questions raised by well-known evangelical pastors about the modern state of Israel and its relationship (if any) to those whom Paul calls his “kinsmen according to the flesh” need to be addressed. The evangelical pastors and

laypeople who listen to them deserve help from evangelical scholars.

THESIS X: WORK FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF STUDENT LIFE AND THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Time and space prevent a lengthy discussion here, but I will simply say that several years ago I began noticing a disconnect between the directions taken in student life and the desired direction of the university. It was nothing sinister; it was just different. The truth is the student is faced with two important curricula—the classroom curriculum and the student life curriculum. And these need to be coordinated and mutually supportive.

A lot of synergy can be gained with better alignment between academics and student life. One of the things we have done—and I simply mention it as an idea—is that I asked student life leadership to report to the Provost instead of to me. That move gave student life leadership a much closer connection to academic goals and aspirations, and it also helped to involve faculty more in the workings of student life. I think it has been an outstanding move for us operationally, and I simply commend it to you. But whatever you do, realize how important student life is to the Christian formation of your students and work to coordinate the goals and aspirations of student life and its leadership with the goals and aspirations of academic leadership.

THESIS XI: CULTIVATE MORAL COURAGE

When you've done all—stand (Eph 6:13). This virtue is an outgrowth of our activist history. I sometimes read criticisms of evangelicals for their “political involvement,” but I disagree. We may at times be on the wrong side of an issue, but engagement itself is not the problem. Our witness in the world cannot avoid the policies and practices of our social contracts, whether local, state, national, or international. We must have the courage to stand and pay the price for what we believe. I think the very founding of IACE is a reflection on moral courage. There's a lot more to that story, but I have no doubt of the truthfulness of what I have just maintained.

“Moral courage” is not just courage; it is also moral. It is a courage that is engendered and activated by a deep sense of what is right, and what is right is the determinative factor in shaping such zeal. Moral courage is another way that a Christian institution distinguishes itself from others. We believe in the truth of what we confess, and we are willing to engage the powers for it. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the

principalities, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

Our evangelical forefathers contended for the faith and knew full well that the battle lines could break out at any number of points, whether it was religious liberty, Sabbatarian struggles, the temperance movement, women’s suffrage, or the struggles for life, liberty, and justice for all. And while as institutions we typically fight a defensive struggle, we do have some offensive weapons. Our teaching and publishing must reflect our willingness to engage. The weapons of our warfare are not earthly; rather we must “destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God...bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).

Watch and pray, and “be on the lookout, for your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). God bless you as you “fight the good fight of faith...contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (1 Tim 6:12; Jude 3).

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.* Edited by Tremper Longman III and Mark L. Strauss. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023, 1159 pp., \$54.99.**

Editors are Tremper Longman III, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Westmont College, and Mark L. Strauss, University Professor of New Testament at Bethel Seminary (L and S). The explanatory articles in the dictionary were written by twenty Old Testament and twenty-three New Testament scholars.

In the introductory article, the editors point out that different versions of the Bible translate differently. This expository dictionary aims to help a reader (not familiar with Hebrew and Greek) understand the meanings of original Hebrew and Greek words and to determine, from their contexts, the most likely meanings.

The recommended way to use this dictionary is given by editors as, first, to find out a word's Strong number (according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*) or another number developed by Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III (in the *NIV Complete Concordance*). The ways to find out a word's Strong number are either to look up the word in a concordance, in an interlinear Bible (Hebrew or Greek text with English word underneath and its Strong number), in a reverse interlinear Bible (English text with a Greek or Hebrew word underneath and its Strong number), or to use a Bible computer software.

After one has the Strong number, one can use two simple dictionaries in the back of this book: Hebrew-English (931–1035); Greek-English (1037–1159) dictionaries, to find the English word to look for in the main expository dictionary (21–930).

The entries in Hebrew-English and Greek-English dictionaries have the following information: 1. the Strong number; 2. the Goodrick and Kohlenberger number, in parentheses and italics; 3. the Greek or Hebrew

word; 4. the Greek or Hebrew word transliterated with English letters in italics; 5. the part(s) of speech; 6. the various possible meanings of the word (its semantic range); 7. the number of times the word occurs in the Old or New Testament; and 8. the English word where one can find an article on that word in the main expository dictionary.

Not every word in the Bible has an article. An explanatory article is provided for Hebrew nouns, adjectives, and verbs that occur twenty-five times or more in the Old Testament and for Greek nouns, adjectives, and verbs that occur ten times or more in the New Testament. The main dictionary has English word entries ordered alphabetically. Under a word entry, the same information from the Hebrew-English and Greek-English dictionaries is repeated before the expository article.

Looking at the word “evil,” there are eleven different Hebrew words under the entry, but one explanatory essay covers them all, and there are four different Greek words, each has an explanatory note. If one uses *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, under the word “evil” or “evildoer,” one finds three words as adjectives, five words as nouns, two words as verbs, and one word as an adverb. The explanation in Vine’s is not as detailed as in Longman’s and Strauss’s book. One can use Vine’s to supplement this book. If one uses the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Kittel and Friedrich, and abridged by Bromiley, one needs to search each Greek word to get extensive information.

There are also other similar expository dictionaries available, including Lawrence Richards (1985), Stephen Renn (2005), and William Mounce (2006). In these volumes, the explanatory notes are written by the author. The strength of Longman’s and Strauss’s is that the articles were contributed by more than forty experts, and they are evangelicals.

This dictionary has a transliteration guide (17–18), but no reference notes for further studies. There is a summary of key issues in determining the meaning of a word (10–12). It contains an overview of the different Hebrew verbal stems and their significance (12–13). Overall, this expository dictionary is very suitable for students to do word studies and for pastors to prepare for sermons.

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***A Judeo-Christian Appraisal of Major Theories of Truth.* By Joseph B. Onyango Okello. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2025, 206 pp., \$28.00.**

What is truth? This question, famously uttered by Pontius Pilate as he questioned Jesus in the Gospel of John, has been a fixation within philosophical circles since long before Jesus was born. In his new book, *A Judeo-Christian Appraisal of Major Theories of Truth*, Joseph B. Onyango Okello attempts to clarify what he thinks is the proper question: *who* is truth? Okello is a professor of philosophy at Asbury Theological Seminary, having earned a PhD at the University of Kentucky. Thus, he is well situated to engage his chosen topic richly. Beginning with the notion that truth is a property of propositions, he attempts to expose deficiencies in major theories of truth that have been advanced over the centuries as well as to demonstrate how the very notion of truth points us toward the infinite existence of the Christian God. The book is at the same time accessible enough for the non-specialist to understand the major theories Okello engages and technical enough to offer substantial philosophical questions about those theories.

The introduction of Okello's book throws the reader immediately into philosophical waters. He assumes that truth is a property of propositions, and that propositions exist only contingently. That is, a proposition only exists if it has been uttered by a proposition-maker. Okello, then offers a sort of ontological argument for the existence of an infinite being by showing that an infinitely long proposition exists and is true. He intends to use this argument to demonstrate the need for a "personalistic view of truth" (15).

The next seven chapters walk systematically through alternative theories of truth in forms posited by specific thinkers. For relativism, his main point of contact is Gordon Kaufman. His two chapters on pragmatism engage the similar thoughts of William James and C. S. Pierce (chapter three) and then of Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam (chapter four). A brief excursion into the postmodernism of Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault is followed by a philosophically technical response to Alfred Tarski's correspondence theory. Harold Joachim's coherence theory dominates chapter seven as the final major theory Okello assesses before he gives his own perspective in chapter eight. In that final chapter, Okello walks through New Testament and patristic uses of *logos* as a title for Christ as well as passages from those sources pertaining to the notion of truth. Finally,

he settles on divine omniscience as the only suitable basis for a theory of truth, rooting the concept of truth in the nature of God.

The title of the book may be a bit misleading; readers will not find in each chapter a biblical or theological response to major theories of truth. Okello focuses his efforts on more generally applicable, philosophical arguments against the six theories he addresses. For this reason, his assessments would be challenging regardless of the reader's presuppositions about Christianity or God's existence. This feature should be viewed as a positive aspect of the work, for it does not relegate the book only to readers who already agree with its conclusion that God grounds truth.

Certain chapters are more helpful than others regarding their assessments of the major theories therein. Okello's engagement with Tarski on the correspondence theory of truth is detailed and technical, which is fitting since Tarski himself presented a detailed and technical theory. However, chapter five on postmodernism does not fully develop the complicated and fluid theories that its target figures weaved, largely because Okello only engages a single primary work for each of Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida.

The most interesting, and potentially incorrect claim in the book, comes first in the introduction and then again in the final chapter explaining a theocentric view of truth. Assuming the foundational premise that propositions exist only contingently, Okello attempts to construct an infinite set of propositions of the form "the number N exists" for every whole number N . He then claims that the conjunction of every element in that infinite set of propositions is a single, infinitely long proposition that is demonstrably true but unutterable by any human being (9). Hence, through an ontological-argument-type move, Okello claims that an infinite, omniscient mind must exist. He uses this conclusion throughout the book to demonstrate deficiencies in the various major theories and then in the last chapter to argue that God must ground truth in his knowledge—in his own nature. However, while the set of propositions Okello creates may be *potentially* infinite in size, it is not guaranteed to be *actually* infinite in size as formulated because someone would need to utter all infinitely many propositions of the form "the number N exists," something Okello cannot demonstrate has happened. While one might conceive of this infinite set using the procedure Okello describes, one cannot actually show that the infinite set or infinite proposition exists. If Okello could demonstrate either the set's or proposition's existence, then he has proven that a finite mind can bring such things into existence by conceiving of

the general procedure for creating them, which undermines his whole argument for truth grounded in omniscience. For this reason, Okello's argument needs further work, though his conclusion in the book is one with which Christians of all stripes can agree.

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***What God Would Have Known: How Human Intellectual and Moral Development Undermines Christian Doctrine.* By J. L. Schellenberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024, 216 pp., \$40.00.**

In his 2015 work, *The Hiddenness of God*, J. L. Schellenberg argues that a God of maximal love would also be maximally open in such a way that no humans would be willing to believe in God and yet fail to believe. His challenge rests on the theistic concept of God's goodness, and it has sparked no small conversation among theists about how to respond. In his newest book, *What God Would Have Known*, Schellenberg moves from the broad realm of theism to specifically Christian doctrines about God and humanity. He develops twenty distinct arguments against belief in the God of the Bible and believe in Christian doctrines, each one individually sufficient to make belief in Christianity irrational. His hope, as he puts it, is to birth a new field of study called "the philosophy of Christianity" to investigate more critically the believability of Christian ideas (x).

While Schellenberg presents a plurality of arguments across the book, they all tie together under a similar theme: errors exist in Christian doctrine that are only now realizable due to human developments in intellect and morality over the past two millennia. If central Christian doctrines are demonstrably fallacious, then the God of Christianity does not exist. Across the book's ten chapters, Schellenberg attacks the doctrines of sin, salvation, Jesus's divinity, the Holy Spirit, revelation, theology proper, and Christianity wholesale. In each case, the general argumentative form Schellenberg uses is the following: 1) Christian doctrine teaches *x*; 2) some contemporary human development has shown that *x* is false; 3) therefore, Christian doctrine about *x* is false.

As an example, on the doctrine of sin, Schellenberg claims that, "If the Christian doctrine of sin is true, then the worst problem faced by humans

today is constituted by a pattern of bad, self-oriented human actions and moral dispositions in which all ordinary human beings are implicated” (39). He argues against the consequent of this implication through a combination of factors like the general selflessness that can be observed among non-believers as well as a supposed consensus view that the world is either mostly or entirely deterministic, greatly reducing the amount of moral responsibility people have for their actions. Space is too short in this review to go over all twenty of his arguments, but they follow this general form, arguing against some implication of Christian doctrine using current human perspectives about reality.

Readers should note up front that Schellenberg does not intend to present fully developed criticisms of the Christian doctrines he attacks. He hopes to start a conversation. Each chapter gives a sketch or direction by which a critic could undermine the truthfulness of those doctrines, and thus undermine the rationality of belief in the Christian God. To this end, the book gives Christian philosophers and apologists a lot to chew on. Schellenberg shines a spotlight on how out of step Christian doctrine is with current majority positions in the hard sciences, medicine, psychology, and sociology. Regarding the doctrine of sin, he points to developments in human understanding of mental illness and environmental factors in human behavior. On salvation, he points to the lack of biblical interaction on things like social justice as well as new discoveries about ailments like epilepsy, which may explain what Christians long considered to be demon possession. Historically, Schellenberg claims, Christians have harmed people when they misdiagnose a medical disorder as a spiritual disorder, undermining the positive impact of Christian belief on human life. None of these accusations means that the respective Christian doctrine is wrong, but Christian ministers and thinkers should have a good response to them.

At the same time, the book carries much less bite than it seems Schellenberg intended. Many of his definitions for doctrines appear engineered to allow his particular criticisms, and they differ dramatically from what most Christians actually mean by those doctrines. His definition of salvation is almost fully based on societal betterment and has nothing to do with atonement for sin or metaphysical renewal of human will. His attack on the divinity of Jesus relies on the supposed knowledge humans now have that homosexual relationships can be morally good. Regarding revelation, he leverages the assumption that acknowledging the dignity of women would require God to use female authors for some components of

Scripture. He gives no rigorous demonstration that these claims are true; he simply assumes them as the standard position.

Ultimately, while Schellenberg has given readers much to consider, he has provided little in terms of meaningful counterargument. His claims rely on current societal norms being objectively correct. Yet, today's progressivism is often tomorrow's barbarism. What humans claim to be true on any given day is likely to be viewed a century hence to be just as obviously wrongheaded as are many consensus views from a century past. The majority western position on reality at any time will always be shaky ground for disproving universal claims like God's existence.

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***The Nicene Creed: A Scriptural, Historical, and Theological Commentary.* By Jared Ortiz and Daniel A. Keating. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2024, 240 pp., \$24.99.**

Are contemporary Christians still interested in putting their faithful journey in the declarative statements that are considered as far-removed from real life? What is the meaning of finding truth and keeping one's conviction within the context of ongoing change in the world? Ever since the first century, the Christian faith has demonstrated the mystery of God the Trinity from which the fundamental framework of Christianity has been revealed in various doctrines. The Nicene Creed functions as an introduction to the mysterious realm of the Triune God according to the authors of the book: "That God is one and three at the same time means that we are dealing with a reality not of this world. That Christ has two natures at the same time means we are dealing with a transcendent reality that goes beyond our common and even advanced ways of thinking" (11). Ortiz and Keating are not just leaving the mysterious narrative of the Nicene Creed in the first century. Rather, they are orienting the central mysteries toward real life in the twenty-first century.

Made up of six chapters, the book, focusing on both internal and external characteristics of each person of the Trinity, deserves the subtitle in elaborating on God himself. The mystery of God the Trinity revealed in the Nicene Creed does not know how to compromise regarding who

God is: “Only because God is not a part of the whole, but the transcendent creator of the whole, is it possible to say that one God can also be three. In the world, each thing is its own thing. . . . But God is not a part of the world, so it is not a contradiction to say that each person of the Trinity is fully God and yet there is only one God” (71). The same logic of the mystery is to be applicable to each person of the Trinity, especially to the Son and the Spirit. Some from the perspective of Arius argue that the Father is the only true God, which implies the Son and the Spirit are considered as “having a subordinate divinity, sharing in the Father’s divinity but in a lesser way” (88). However, the mystery of the Trinity confirms the principle in eternity, “to be born or begotten communicates a sharing in the same nature” (83).

The mystery of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed also clearly makes an emphasis on the redemption through the incarnate Son. The Trinitarian interpretation of the Nicene Creed reminds us that “the core of the gospel is the story of our salvation” (106). It is because the redemption can only be possible by two descents of Jesus Christ who lived and accomplished the mystery on earth: descending to assume our “sin-impacted nature” and descending to die on a cross (116).

With the mystery of the Holy Spirit, the authors lead the narrative of the Nicene Creed to the final station. “Why does the Bible call the Third Person of the Trinity by the name ‘Holy Spirit,’ a name that seems equally applicable to the Father and the Son?” (145). Two reasons are provided: first, the Spirit is the “breath” of God that can make people animated; the second point or reason why the “Holy Spirit,” with the concept of the Filioque, delivers the lofty work of the Holy Spirit that causes the body of believers to be holy through his effective indwelling within us (146). God’s ultimate goal toward us is that “we should be brought into the very communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit” because “God is a communion of persons who created us for communion with himself and with each other” (162, 189).

Contemporary Christians might be hungry for stories, which perhaps insinuates they are casting themselves into the cultural trend or atmosphere of drifting apart from the truth expressed in statements or declaration, as the authors are concerned. Where are the doctrines that we believe as fundamental and on which we can rely? Do we live the mystery of the essential teachings of the Bible in reality? This book guides us on a faithful journey on which we can hold through our lives.

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***Spurgeon: A Life.* By Alex DiPrima. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2024, 312 pp., \$35.00.**

Spurgeon: A Life is a biography of Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) that details his preaching and pastoral ministry. It provides a thematic overview of Spurgeon’s life, using major biographical markers to analyze key contributions. It seeks to “provide a new portrait of Spurgeon that makes some improvements over previous accounts of his life and also takes into view many of the new studies and new data now available to historians and researchers” (15). This updated biography draws heavily on academic sources but makes the material accessible to laypeople. DiPrima shares, “I have aimed at a warm, accessible, and edifying introduction to Spurgeon’s life. I intend it not primarily for the academy, but for the church” (16).

DiPrima identifies three primary motivations for writing the book (16). First, he desires to present both a chronological narrative and an interpretive account of the major events of Spurgeon’s life. Second, he seeks to present him as a human with strengths and needs with whom the reader can empathize. Third, he analyzes Spurgeon’s life and draws out lessons for the Christian. The focus on applying important lessons from Spurgeon’s life makes this book a distinctive blend of biography and exhortation as seen in the thesis: “This biography, then, aims to help readers look through Spurgeon to behold the Lord Jesus in His matchless perfection, His all-sufficiency, and His tender love toward needy sinners” (17).

The introduction provides an overview of Spurgeon’s contributions and impact, distinguishing between Spurgeon the pastor-theologian and Spurgeon the man, and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of previous Spurgeon biographies. In the first four chapters, DiPrima covers the key elements of Spurgeon’s upbringing, salvation, early pastorate, and his call to New Park Street Chapel. In chapter one, DiPrima gives an overview of Spurgeon’s childhood, highlighting the significance of his grandfather and his introduction to Puritan theology. The second chapter covers his conversion and the early foundations of his Christian faith, especially his struggles with doubt and despair that led him to trust in Christ. In chapter three, DiPrima tells of Spurgeon’s decision to forgo college and

offers an interpretation of his success as a young preacher, including his extraordinary brightness, emulation of great preachers, and the activity of the Holy Spirit (60–61). Chapter four tells of Spurgeon’s invitation to pastor the New Park Street Chapel, detailing the church’s history and his prioritization of prayer.

The content moves from a chronological timeline to a more thematic emphasis in chapters five through twelve. The fifth chapter explores the harsh criticism that Spurgeon faced early in his pastorate, which continued throughout his ministry. DiPrima shares how God used criticism in Spurgeon’s life for sanctification, maturity, and refinement. His marriage to Susanna is covered in chapter six, including their meeting, engagement, family life, and health. The focus shifts in chapter seven to the church and its transition from the New Park Street Chapel to the Metropolitan Tabernacle, covering the construction of the new building and an analysis of the first sermon in the Tabernacle. Chapters eight through ten examine Spurgeon’s preaching style, the founding of the Pastor’s College, and the expansion of his ministry through publications, church planting, and the opening of the Stockwell Orphanage. DiPrima summarizes, “His was a ministry both in word *and* deed” (207). Spurgeon’s weaknesses and struggles receive attention in chapter eleven, detailing their effect on his ministry and their contribution to his relatively short life span. DiPrima shifts in chapter twelve to analyze Spurgeon’s leadership and the distinctives of worship at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, including the order of worship and the intensity of congregational worship.

DiPrima closes the book by centering on Spurgeon’s final days in chapters thirteen and fourteen. Chapter thirteen examines the importance of the downgrade controversy, which “in many ways still shapes his legacy today” (251). This chapter synthesizes his speeches, writings, and the events that led to his censure by the Baptist Union. It also provides an analysis of his limits in partnering with those with whom he disagreed. Chapter fourteen, titled “Final Days,” covers his last sermon, final writings, and death. DiPrima ends the book with a strong five-page analysis of Spurgeon’s life and impact (284–88).

DiPrima’s *Spurgeon: A Life* is an excellent introduction to the life and faith of C. H. Spurgeon. Its engaging style, poignant examples, clear analysis, and applicational focus accomplish the author’s intent and thesis. DiPrima frequently draws practical lessons from Spurgeon’s life, including insights on handling criticism, preaching, worship, and gospel

partnership. It is a worthwhile study that focuses attention on Christ's work in Spurgeon's life. The final phrase in the book sums up DiPrima's goal of shining a light on Christ through Spurgeon: "He was, indeed, a burning and shining lamp. May many more come to rejoice in his light" (288).

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***Drawn by Beauty: Awe and Wonder in the Christian Life.* By Matthew Z. Capps. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025, 172pp., \$22.99.**

Over seven centuries ago, Aquinas noted the connection between philosophy and beauty: "Now the reason why the philosopher is compared to the poet is that both are concerned with wonders."¹ Part of philosophy is to wonder and muse about one's life and the world in which he inhabits—what induces wonder more than something beautiful? Beauty has both an analytical and a phenomenological approach: not only can we measure and quantify phenomena, but we also experience it as subjective beings. Matt Capps is the lead pastor of Fairview Baptist Church in Apex, NC. In *Drawn by Beauty*, Capps argues that the existence of beauty is an indispensable element of Christian discipleship. He writes, "The goal of this book is to connect the topics of beauty and aesthetics to spiritual formation" (10). There is a bidirectional relationship between God and beauty: one's understanding of God directly affects how he experiences beauty. In this way, our theology shapes our understanding of aesthetics.

In Chapter 2, Capps discusses some of the reasons why Protestants typically are devoid of a serious appreciation of beauty. He lists six: 1) we avoid idolatry, but this tends to go too far into rejecting any sort of physical representation; 2) we have historically seen beauty and engagement with it as a pathway to idolatry; 3) there has been rise of asceticism along with a rejection of all things "earthly"; 4) there has been a deconstruction of the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty; 5) there has been a rise of consumerism here and functionality (or efficiency) is prioritized over beauty; and 6) we are generally reluctant to accept natural theology and general revelation in favor of special revelation.

¹Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan, vol. 1, Library of Living Catholic Thought (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 24.

Later, Capps notes how the two books of God (general and special revelation) are traditionally understood to point to a greater reality, something even supernatural. However, in our post-Enlightenment age where the presence of scientific and methodological naturalism is ubiquitous, the modern world works to “unweave the rainbow,” ridding all beauty of metaphysical significance. To this, Christian theology offers a powerful rejoinder, showing how the presence of beautiful things hints at a greater reality. Christians also recognize the metaphysical foundation of beauty, as Scripture speaks to God’s aseity: God’s self-existence is the source of all contingent beings, and therefore all beautiful things (64). Further, the reality of beauty is inherent in God’s being both transcendent and immanent (68). However, we live in a fallen world where beauty is not only often distorted but is also at times seemingly nonexistent (79–81). Christians, again, are well-equipped to explain such discord, whereas secular alternatives are ultimately inadequate to provide existential support. Capps rightly points us to the horridness of the cross—the ugliness of Jesus’s death paradoxically provides the grounds for the believer to be clothed in righteousness (i.e., beauty) (85).

What difference does this relationship between beauty and discipleship make in the life of the believer? Capps writes the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is important here: not only are Christians to represent God to a dark world, but Christians are especially to resemble God in beauty. He writes, “Because we are beings created in the image of God, beauty is a call to resemble, represent, and reflect God in the world not only in adornment but also in artistry” (106). Moreover, the more time we spend with Scripture, the more we will be able to see the beauty in the world; one’s attunement to special revelation enlarges his vision of general revelation (127). Capps concludes with a brief examination on the role of art as a vehicle for transcendence, as well as how to properly enjoy art as a Christian.

This is a wonderful book, helpful for both pastors and laymen. Capps shows how the discussion of beauty and aesthetics is far from an ivory tower debate; it has real implications for our lives. Beauty enlarges and enlivens our flattened world. He writes, “Beauty and aesthetics serve as effective servants to our spiritual formation, making us aware of God’s presence in our world and in our lives” (129). When we have a greater awareness of

God's presence in our lives, we will better reflect it to others (Matt 5:16).

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