INTRODUCTION

THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

John Wiseman

One evening in the closing months of the year 1949 an obscure itinerant evangelist by the name of Billy Graham was preparing for what was to have been the final night of his Los Angeles crusade. As he made his way to the revival tent that evening Billy did not know that earlier in the day newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst had instructed his editors to "Puff Graham".[1] Front-page coverage of the crusade in the Hearst newspaper chain the next day focused international attention upon this young evangelist who was soon to become the most visible symbol of the growing evangelical movement. Due to this unexpected media coverage, the crusade continued for another five weeks. Many years later, in slight understatement, Graham referred to the 1949 crusade as "a major turning point in my ministry".[2]

Evangelicals, however, look back to the 1940's and remember more than just the beginning of Graham's recognition as a national figure. This was an inaugural time when many contemporary evangelical institutions were founded — the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), Youth for Christ (1942), Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), World Vision International (1947), and of course the Evangelical Theological Society (1949).

Formation of the ETS

In an interesting coincidence of chronology, just over a

---

[1]Louis Gasper, The Fundamentalist Movement 1930-1956 (The Hague: Mouton, 1963; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 131.

[2]Russell Chandler, "Los Angeles Honors Billy Graham," CT 27 (16 December 1983): 35.

month had passed since Graham's pivotal crusade had closed in Los Angeles when about sixty evangelical scholars from all points of the compass began arriving at the Y.M.C.A. in downtown Cincinnati for the organizational meeting of the ETS. The place and the date, December 27 and 28, 1949, were set by a faculty committee of Gordon Divinity School in Boston consisting of Edward R. Dalglish, George Ladd, and Burton Goddard.[3] This committee had been appointed by the School's President in February of 1949 to take whatever steps necessary to facilitate the perceived need of evangelical material produced by group effort.[4]

> After some preliminary inquiries to a number of evangelical institutions to ensure their interest was shared by others, the Gordon men sent out invitations on November 28. They explained the goal of forming an association of evangelical scholars and included the following list of individuals endorsing the new venture:
>
> Oswald T. Allis
> Nelson B. Baker, California Baptist
> Harvey J. S. Blaney, Eastern Nazarene
> Clarence Bouma, Calvin Seminary
> J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., Natl. Bible
> Alfred A. Cierpke, S. E. Baptist
> Gordon H. Clark, Butler Univ.
> Terrelle B. Crum, Providence Bible
> Ralph Earle, Nazarene Seminary
> Milton E. Fish, L. A. Baptist
> R. Laird Harris, Faith
> Carl F. H. Henry, Fuller
> Earl S. Kalland, Western Baptist
> Marchant A. King, Westmont
> Harold B. Kuhn, Asbury
> Allan A. MacRae, Faith
> Walter A. Maier, Concordia
> William W. Paul, National Bible
> Carlyle B. Roberts, N. E. School of Theology
> Samuel Schultz, Bethel
> Merrill C. Tenney, Wheaton
> Merrill F. Unger, Dallas

---

[3] Burton L. Goddard, "The Evangelical Theological Society is Born," paper presented to the 30th annual meeting of the ETS, Minneapolis, Minnesota, December, 1979, p. 1.

[4] Ibid.

Charles J. Woodbridge
Kenneth S. Wuest, Moody
Edward J. Young, Westminster[5]

This list is illustrative of the wide base of support available at the time for the prospect of an academic evangelical society. This wide base was also evident at the first meeting. For instance, the ETS press release, authored by Carl Henry, stated: "Those who came to the organizational meeting were from approximately twenty institutions and represented as many different denominations but were one in their view of the Scriptures and in the desire to foster true evangelical scholarship."[6] Furthermore, a simple perusal of the list of past ETS Presidents and meeting locations provided in the index appendices reveals that the Society has continued to enjoy a large institutional and denominational constituency over the years.

Having noted the events which occasioned the original formation of the ETS, what of its accomplishments over the past thirty-five years? It is interesting that the Society chose "Evangelicals: Heritage and Rediscovery" as the theme for the thirty-sixth annual meeting in December of 1984. In light of this current interest in evangelical roots and for the benefit of those ETS'ers whose memories do not stretch back as far as Dr. Goddard's and the other founding fathers still with us, it seems appropriate to ponder two historical questions. First, what were the original purposes and goals of the ETS, and second, how have subsequent developments in the Society reflected these original goals?

---

[5] Ibid., p. 2.

[6] ETS News Release, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 7, Folder: Correspondence 1950-1963, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

The Original Purposes and Goals of the ETS

Clarence Bouma, past editor of the Calvin Forum and first President of the ETS, delivered a keynote address to the 1949 formational meeting which outlined why, in light of the already existing Society for Biblical Literature and American Theological Society, he thought there was a need for a distictive evangelical society:

> The deepest and ultimate reason for this need, as I see it, is found in the radical divergence between the basis, presuppositions, and consequent methodologies of a sound evangelical theology on the one hand, and that of the prevailing types of theology (which may with a general term be designated as modernist) on the other.[7]

After a brief discussion of the historical origins of the prevailing American theological trends, Bouma again based the need for the ETS in the radical difference he perceived between modernist and evangelical theological thought:

> The ultimate source and authority for Theology is no longer sought in the objective divine revelation of Scripture, but in the religious consciousness of man. Theology thus becomes anthropocentric instead of theocentric.... This divergence between historic Christian Theology and the currently prevalent modernist Theology - of whatever shape or hue - is so great that the organization of separate scholarly societies for the evangelical theologians is so desirable.[8]

Thus, with the need sufficiently acknowledged, Bouma went on to emphasize that he felt the main purpose of the new Society should be to provide a platform for evangelicals to strengthen one another and work together at the scholarly level pursuing the theological task. This should be accomplished mainly upon the basis of their mutual faith in the primary authority of Scripture - a process not possible in the liberal-dominated societies. These sentiments were obviously shared by most of those present because the formal state-

---

[7] Clarence Bouma, "Orthodox Theological Scholarship," Calvin Forum, 15 (February, 1950): 131.

[8] Ibid.

ment of purpose adopted into the constitution the next day read:

> The purpose of the Society shall be to foster conservative Biblical scholarship by providing a medium for the oral exchange and written expression of thought and research in the general field of the theological disciplines as centered in the Scriptures.[9]

Another purpose the Society set for itself may be found, implicitly, in article three of the constitution - the doctrinal basis. It reads, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." Gordon H. Clark, who was involved in drawing up the statement, explains the thinking that led to this formulation:

> Note that the statement was deliberately cast in the logical form of an implication. The premise of the implication is the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God written. Therefore the conclusion follows that the Bible is inerrant. God cannot lie.... In a day when the main attack against Christianity is centered on the truthfulness of God's Word, and when the liberals loudly claim that no scholarly defense of the Bible can be made, this Society of college and seminary professors was organized for the purpose of propagating the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility.[10]

By choosing this view, that because the Bible claims to be the Word of God it is by necessity inerrant, as its sole doctrinal basis the framers of the ETS constitution did not mean to imply that other evangelical doctrines were unimportant. Rather, it was felt that such a brief statement would allow proper theological latitude in the membership for evangelicals holding to different denominational distinctives. Also it would insure a general consensus of agreement to the other essential evangelical doctrines because, presumably, only those holding to these major beliefs would subscribe to such a statement.

The first article in the Bulletin put out by the Society (the 1957 Presidential address by Ned Stonehouse) also reflected

---

[9]Article II, Evangelical Theological Society Constitution, adopted December 28, 1949.

[10]Gordon H. Clark, "The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow," BETS 9(Winter, 1966): pp. 3,4.

this purpose of propagating the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility. In it Stonehouse admitted, "We know that the doctrine of the Infallibility of Scripture is widely regarded as an egregious error, reflecting obscurantism and inevitably leading to further obscurantism."[11] But he also affirmed, "... in my judgment there is a very intimate connection between the maintenance of the infallibility of Scripture and the attainment of any significant progress so far as the evangelical cause is concerned."[12] Maintenance of a solid stand on the inerrancy of Scripture and a commitment to full exploration of all the hermeneutical issues that it involves has continued to be as much a purpose of the Society as the formal one stated in the second article of the constitution.

Although wide agreement existed toward the general purposes, initially there was a difference of opinion regarding the specific goals and scope of activity the new society should pursue. Some wanted a narrow focus upon matters of biblical exegesis only, others desired a broader approach including theological and historical concerns. However, Burton Goddard recalls that agreement was possible upon the broader focus because "...all were united in the conviction that the focus of the society should be on matters directly related to the study of the Bible, whether the emphasis be exegetical, historical or theological."[13] Thus the corresponding entry in the minutes of that first meeting read: "Since the Bible is the basis upon which evangelical theology is built, the work of the Society must always be in relation to the Biblical revelation."[14]

---

[11] Ned Stonehouse, "The Infallibility of Scripture and Evangelical Progress," BETS 1 (Winter, 1958): p. 9.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Goddard, "The ETS is Born", p. 3.

[14] Ibid.

With the general purposes decided upon and a comprehensive scope of activity set, attention was turned to other details. The major question of future Society publications generated a wide variety of opinion. Clarence Bouma had earlier counselled sobriety on this matter in his keynote address—his main concern being that the new Society not undertake too much at once.[15] Burton Goddard recalls the reactions of others, as well as how the issue was settled:

> John Murray urged the importance of presenting and discussing papers as over against any publishing program. Earl Kalland and George Ladd favored the issuing of a journal at the earliest time possible. And Carl Henry, somewhat dubious about the value and need of a journal, suggested instead the publication of an annual bound volume of papers read at the annual meeting. The assembly resolved the matter by voting "that the Editorial Committee be instructed to work toward the publication of a journal or a volume of papers at the earliest possible convenience."[16]

Once the editorial issues were behind them, full attention was devoted to the main concern of any scholarly society—the presentation of papers. The high quality of the papers presented to the formational group served to encourage optimism about the future prospects of the new Society. They were, in the order presented, as follows:

"The Achilles Heel of Humanism"
by Gordon Clark of Butler University.

"Fifty Years of American Theology and the Contemporary Need"
by Carl Henry of Fuller.

"The Active Obedience of Christ"
by John Murray of Westminster.

"The Influence of Syrian Antioch in the Apostolic Church"
by Merrill Tenney of Wheaton.

"Hezekiah's Tribute to Sennacherib"
by Alexander Heidel of the Oriental Institute.

"Aims and Methods in the Teaching of Hebrew to Undergraduates"
by G. Douglas Young of Trinity.

"Some Textual and Archaeological Notes on Genesis 15:2-3"
by Merrill Unger of Dallas.

"Old Testament Textual Criticism and New Testament Quotations"
by R. Laird Harris of Faith.[17]

---

[15]Bouma, p. 132.

[16]Goddard, p. 4.

[17]Ibid., pp. 2-5.

Therefore, in just two short days, this seminal group accomplished an astonishing amount. With the exception of one minor amendment passed the next year, the Constitution was completed. The formal purpose was set: "to foster conservative Biblical scholarship by providing a medium for the oral exchange and written expression of thought and research...." Membership requirements were defined and the Society's scope of activity was determined to include comprehensive exegetical, historical and theological concerns so long as they pertained to matters directly related to the study of the Bible. Furthermore, to provide leadership for the new Society the following officers were elected:

President	-Clarence Bouma	
Vice President	-Merrill C. Tenney	
Secretary	-R. Laird Harris	
Treasurer	-George Turner	
Executive Members at Large	-George Ladd -Alva McClain	-Gordon H. Clark -Harold Kuhn
Membership Committee	-R. B. Kuiper	-Kenneth Kantzer
Editorial Committee	-Burton L. Goddard -Julius R. Mantey	-Carl Henry -Alexander Heidel
Standing Committee on Program and Arrangements	-W. C. Mavis	-Frank T. Littorin[18]

In addition to all this, time was found for a fellowship banquet, the reading of papers, and a final worship service, led by Charles Woodbridge.

When the organizational meeting was over, most of the purposes and goals of the Society had been set, with the exception of questions on the form and timing of Society publications, which were left to the editorial committee named previously. Their

---

[18] ETS News Release, Acquisition 82-34, Box 7, Folder: Correspondance 1950-1963, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

work completed, the "founding fathers" of the ETS returned to their respective institutions, tired but optimistic about the prospects of the newly formed Society.

Subsequent Developments of the Society

Often when a group or society forms around a set of definite goals and purposes it finds that, with the passage of time and growth of membership, pressures will usually arise to challenge those original precepts. Moreover, there is a natural tendency for any group's activities to stray into different directions unless a strong focus upon the original agenda is maintained. These observations have been particularly true of theological societies recently, which is not surprising when one considers the different winds that have swept the American theological landscape over the past half-century.

In attempting to answer how subsequent developments in the Society have reflected its original goals, no doubt a whole volume could be written surveying the activities of the ETS over the past thirty-five years. This essay, however, will just briefly focus upon some developments in respect to the three general areas of purpose found in articles two and three of the Constitution. These are: first, to provide a medium for oral exchange and written expression of thought for evangelicals; second, to foster scholarship centered in the Scriptures; and third, the purpose of defending an inerrant view of the Bible implicit in the succinct doctrinal basis.

I. Providing a Medium for Oral Exchange and Written Expression of Thought and Research

As mentioned before, the question of Society publica-

tions raised at the formational meeting met with such a wide variety of opinions that the matter had to be resolved by appointing an Editorial Committee to work toward the publication of a journal or a volume of papers at a later date. As things turned out, both were accomplished. During the years 1953-1956 papers read at the annual meetings were printed and bound for distribution to the membership. Subsequently, The Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society began publication in 1958, changing its name to the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society to enlarge its publication opportunities in 1969.

To further facilitate the goal of providing for written expression of evangelical thought and research the Society undertook a program of sponsoring the publication of monograph and symposium volumes by its members. The following is a list of these works:

Symposia

John F. Walvoord, ed., Inspiration and Interpretation, 1957.
Merrill Tenney, ed., The Bible - The Living Word of Revelation, 1968.
J. Barton Payne, ed., New Perspectives on the Old Testament, 1970.
R.N. Longenecker and M.C. Tenney, eds., New Dimensions in New Testament Study, 1974.
K. Kantzer and S. Gundry, eds., Perspectives on Evangelical Theology, 1979.
Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood, eds., Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel Schultz, 1983.

Monographs

Paul K. Jewett, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, 1954.
Merrill Unger, Israel and the Arameans of Damascus, 1957.
John Whitcomb, Darius the Mede, 1959.
Gordon H. Clark, Karl Barth's Theological Method, 1963.
R. N. Longenecker, Paul, Apostle of Liberty, 1964.
W. Ward Gasque, A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles, 1975.

As for providing a medium for oral exchange among evangelical scholars, the ETS currently has seven regional groups throughout the United States and Canada which meet annually. In addition to these smaller gatherings, a major conference is also held on an annual basis for the entire Society. These conferences are characterized by the reading of papers, prepared debates, and panel discussions. They also

provide opportunity for informal discussion, mutual encouragement, and fellowship.

In testimony to its success in implementing this first goal, throughout the years the ETS has been in existence many have called attention to the fact that it is the leading platform for evangelical theological thought. As early as 1958, liberal scholar Arnold Hearn singled out the publications of the Society as a recent development in conservative theological circles deserving the attention of liberals.[19] Later, in the mid-sixties, an editorial in Christianity Today proclaimed that, although it had yet to marshal its forces, "There is presently no better framework than the Evangelical Theological Society to enlist conservative resources in a coordinated theological offensive."[20] Writing in the late seventies to "help secular and nonevangelical religious leaders understand the evangelicals,"[21] Richard Quebedeaux stated: "Since 1949 the Evangelical Theological Society has provided the major forum for the critical discussion of scholarship by the evangelical right and center."[22]

Recognition of the hegemonic nature of the Society as a medium for evangelical scholars has also come from outside the protestant tradition. For instance, when seeking to initiate a Jewish - Evangelical academic colloquium, Rabbi Tanenbaum turned to the ETS:

> ... we would very much like to develop discussion involving a cross-section of the Evangelical Protestant community. Since the Evangelical Theological Society

---

[19] Arnold Hearn, "Fundamentalist Renascence," Christian Century 75 (April 30, 1958): 529.

[20] "American Evangelicals and Theological Dialogue," Christianity Today 9 (January 15, 1965): 27.

[21] Richard Quebedeaux, The Worldly Evangelicals (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. XII.

[22] Ibid., p. 33. For a critique of Quebedeaux's artificially neat taxonomy of evangelical left-center-right categories, consult Martin Marty, "A Taxonomy of the Born Again," Christian Century 95 (October 4, 1978): 924-930.

> is the professional body whose membership would be representative of the evangelical scholarly community, I would ask if it would be possible for the Society to join with the Inter-religious Affairs Department - American Jewish Committee in co-sponsoring an academic colloquium.[23]

But in assessing the fulfillment of its purpose to provide a medium for evangelical scholarship we must admit that the Society has had its critics as well. Old Testament scholar Gerald T. Sheppard states:

> The Evangelical Theological Society has for several years been dominated by the more conservative scholars within the evangelical seminary complex. Full participation by evangelical scholars has fallen off and the quality of the journal has diminished.[24]

Similarly, Donald Dayton claims that the Institute for Biblical Research was founded by evangelical biblical scholars who found the ETS too confining and that the Evangelical Theology Consultation (1979) within the American Academy of Religion provides for theologians who are no longer at home in the ETS.[25] The dramatic removal of Robert Gundry at the 1983 Annual Meeting in Dallas certainly illustrates the dominance of the more conservative element within the Society's constituency.[26]

But whether these recent critiques reveal an actual decline in the quality of the Society or simply show a shift in the composition and theological agendas of those scholars claiming the term "evangelical" should be a matter of concern to the ETS leadership in the near future.

---

[23]Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum to Dr. Robert Cooley, February 24, 1970, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 1, Folder - 1970 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[24]Gerald T. Sheppard, "Biblical Hermeneutics: The Academic Language of Evangelical Identity," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 32 (Winter, 1977): 92.

[25]Donald Dayton, "The 'Battle for the Bible' Rages On," Theology Today 37 (April, 1980): 84.

[26]Leslie R. Keylock, "Evangelical Scholars Remove Gundry for His Views on Matthew," CT 28 (February 3, 1984): 36-38.

II. Scholarship Centered in the Scriptures

As mentioned before, the debate over the proposed scope of activity for the ETS at Cincinnati in 1949 had polarized into those wanting a narrow focus upon matters of biblical exegisis and those desiring a broader scope including theological and historical concerns. We saw how a compromise was reached which allowed the Society to pursue the broader scope as long as the focus remained on matters directly related to the study of the Bible. This commitment has been upheld over the years in the Society's activities and editorial policy. Furthermore, as a reminder, this purpose of fostering conservative scholarship which is centered in the Scriptures is reprinted on the inside cover of every issue of the Society's journal.

By way of contrast to this emphasis, an article providing an analysis of the Catholic Congress on the Theology of Renewal in the Church for JETS readership made the surprising observation that out of 44 major papers given at the Congress, "not one was in the field of Biblical exegesis either from the Old or New Testament. Most were oriented to philosophy, history or tradition."[27] It is just this sort of Biblical anemia that the ETS seeks to avoid in its theological endeavours. That it has in fact done so is partially illustrated by the following five-year sampling, which reveals the high percentage of interaction with Scripture that is manifest in JETS articles:

YEAR	JOURNAL VOLUME-NUMBER	ARTICLE PAGES	SCRIPTURE CITATIONS	AVERAGE CITATIONS PER PAGE
1968	11 1	37	95	2.57
	11 2	50	58	1.16
	11 3	41	177	4.32
	11 4	37	69	1.86
	TOTAL	165	399	2.42

[27]Charles A. Tipp, "An Analysis of the Roman Catholic Congress on the Theology of Renewal in the Church," JETS 12 (Winter, 1969): 28.

1969	12	1	37	5	0.14
	12	2	50	56	1.12
	12	3	55	255	4.64
	12	4	42	95	2.26
	TOTAL		184	411	2.23
1970	13	1	61	111	1.82
	13	2	49	134	2.73
	13	3	47	45	0.96
	13	4	51	169	3.31
	TOTAL		208	459	2.20
1971	14	1	48	163	3.40
	14	2	46	66	1.43
	14	3	58	258	4.45
	14	4	46	124	2.70
	TOTAL		198	611	3.09
1972	15	1	51	284	5.57
	15	2	55	288	5.24
	15	3	55	257	4.67
	15	4	41	32	0.78
	TOTAL		202	861	4.26

In addition to the Scriptural focus of JETS, the monographs and symposia sponsored by the Society have been predominantly on matters directly related to the study of the Bible as well.

The Society's first President, Clarence Bouma, postulated in his keynote address at Cincinnati that only upon the basis of faith in the Word of God as the source and norm of all Theology will theological criticism and construction among scholars have the desired criterion and principle of unity."[28] So far, the ETS has remained true to the Biblical focus it originally proposed. The continued faithfulness of the Society to centering its scholarship in the Scriptures will ensure proper theological criticism and construction in the future.

III. The Doctrinal Basis of Inerrancy

The Society's doctrinal basis reads, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." This particular affirmation of inerrancy, and its hermeneutical corollaries, have occasioned more discussion and debate within the Society

[28]Bouma, "Scholarship", p. 132.

over the years than any other single issue. This is not surprising considering the prominence of the Biblical authority debate in evangelicalism as a whole.

We need not outline the parameters of the particular problems and different approaches taken in the ongoing debate; this is adequately done elsewhere in JETS.[29] However, in assessing subsequent developments in the Society stemming from the doctrinal basis we will survey some of the controversial events the statement has caused, then discuss two needs that have been brought into sharper focus by these controversies. These are, first, the need for the Society to work towards clarification of the inerrancy concept as debates surrounding it become more complex; and second, the need to adequately explore and articulate the philosophic and hermeneutic implications of the inerrancy doctrine.

Over the years the Society has been criticized for its practice of requiring its members to annually subscribe to the doctrinal basis. Occasionally this requirement has affected its status with other scholarly theological societies. For instance, the Council on the Study of Religion, responding to an ETS enquiry about constituent membership, stated that the Society's membership requirement was the big obstacle to allowing their participation within the Council.[30] It was felt the ETS requirement violated Council guidelines, which state that Societies must be open to all those academically qualified.

This hampering effect on scholarly affiliations, al-

---

[29]For example, Stanley N. Gundry, "Evangelical Theology: Where Should We Be Going?", JETS 22 (March, 1979): 3-13; Millard J. Erickson, "Biblical Inerrancy: The Last Twenty-Five Years," JETS 25 (December, 1982): 387-394; and John S. Feinberg, "Truth, Meaning and Inerrancy in Contemporary Evangelical Thought," JETS 26 (March, 1983): 17-30.

[30]CSR Chairman Claude Welch to Dr. Vernon C. Grounds, January 12, 1971, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 5, Folder: 1971 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

though it is unfortunate, has not caused a significant amount of criticism. Rather, it has been both the question of the statement's adequacy as an efficient articulation of Biblical authority and the interpretation of which critical methodologies are consistent with the spirit of the statement that have caused the most controversy and membership attrition.

As early as 1966 a member resigned, having changed his theology since joining the ETS, and suggested the Society change its doctrinal basis to avoid losing other members by resignation. At that time Gordon Clark responded, "This may be the policy of liberalism, but it is not the voice of the Reformation. The voice of the Reformation says, 'Let goods and kindred go, some membership also.'"[31]

But controversy over the wording of the statement continued, and the 1976 publication of Harold Lindsell's Battle for the Bible seemed to bring the issue to a climax. Writing in the same year Carl Henry declared, "Right now the Evangelical Theological Society is in the midst of an unpublicized struggle over its inerrancy statement that some member scholars sign but no longer share."[32] The implication in Henry's comment is that some ETS members were guilty of intentional deceit in signing the statement. This, however, was not necessarily the case. Rather, because the Society relied upon unspoken consensus to interpret what it meant by the term "inerrant" instead of an official definition in print, it left itself open to the problem that some would subscribe to the doctrinal basis while holding to a view of inerrancy different from that intended by the majority within the Society.

This is evident by the comments made in some of the letters sent to the Society secretary. Robert Countess, a member of thirteen years standing, wrote stating his intention

---

[31]Clark, "ETS Tomorrow," p. 11.

[32]Carl Henry, Evangelicals in Search of Identity (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976), p. 50.

of not renewing his membership on the basis of personal integrity and suggested:

> Perhaps the Society will someday alter the creed to: "The Bible is the Word of God written and therefore inspired in the autographs." If so, I think that we would preclude some of the problems we have in part created by our choice of terms. Or, perhaps inerrancy might be clearly defined so that we know what it means before we sign the creed.[33]

This desire for the Society to produce an official definition of its doctrinal statement was also expressed by another member caught up in the controversy, Richard H. Bube. Bube, a long-standing member of the American Scientific Affiliation, became a member of the ETS in 1957. During the years 1969-1970 he began returning the doctrinal statement signed with the following addendum: "As interpreted in Chapter 4 of the Encounter Between Christianity and Science."[34] When informed by the Executive Committee that he must sign without qualification Bube responded:

> I am returning the doctrinal statement signed, but at the same time I feel moved to petition the Executive Committee to clarify what can only be an invitation to hypocrisy. The difficulty of course lies in the formula: "inerrant in the autographs." Inerrancy cannot be judged until the criterion for errancy is known.... I am left uneasy that I may be signing a statement in good conscience, whereas if I really understood the intent of the statement formers, I would be unable to sign.[35]

A number of years later, after he was taken to task for his views on inerrancy by Harold Lindsell,[36] Bube returned the

---

[33]Robert Countess to Vernon Grounds, October 22, 1976, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 1, Folder: 1976 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[34]Vernon Grounds to Richard Bube, January 5, 1971, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 7, Folder: Correspondence "A-B, 67-71", Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[35]Richard Bube to Vernon Grounds, January 9, 1971, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 3, Folder: Correspondence "B" 68-71; Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[36]Harold Lindsell, Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1976), pp. 128-131.

ETS Statement of Faith unsigned with an open letter to the Society which read in part:

> It is manifestly improper for any organization, and certainly a Christian one, to maintain as a qualification for continuance as member in good standing the signing of a Statement of Faith, the meaning of which is uncertain. The Evangelical Theological Society has limped along now for many years with the same statement, "The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs," without providing a definition of the scope and meaning of the term "inerrant." Such a procedure invites uncertainty, hypocrisy, and guilt--without a basis for judgment. I would like to take this opportunity to beseech the ETS to re-examine this question and move toward its resolution.[37]

Of course one can always argue, as some in the Society have, that these objections are merely semantic games to get around the obvious intent of the doctrinal basis.

But this view ignores the possibility that in the absence of an official interpretation of the term "inerrant" sincere scholars may join ETS and annually sign the doctrinal basis in good faith while holding to a view of inerrancy different from that intended by the original framers of the statement.

As these problems with the doctrinal basis continued, several suggestions were made to deal with them. J. Barton Payne and a group from Covenant Theological Seminary suggested an amendment to the ETS By-Laws which read:

> If the public statement of a member should raise doubt about the validity of his subscription to the ETS Doctrinal Basis, any other member may present the evidence to the Membership Committee, through its chairman, for evaluation. If the Committee concludes that deviation does indeed exist, it shall propose to the next annual meeting that the name of the member under question be dropped from the membership roll, in accordance with Article IV, 4 of the Constitution.[38]

---

[37]Richard Bube to ETS, April 10, 1976, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 1, Folder: 1976 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[38]J. Barton Payne *et al.* to Vernon Grounds, May 12, 1976, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 1, Folder: 1976 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

When this proposal was circularized to the Executive Committee, Robert L. Saucy responded that before implementing the amendment he preferred trying another approach. His suggestion was "to clarify the meaning of inerrancy and trust those who cannot subscribe to this belief to voluntarily withdraw from membership."[39]

As it turned out, however, neither of these proposals was implemented. The relevant section of the minutes from the 1976 Annual Meeting gives the Executive Committee's final decision on the matter:

> Though we regret receiving a resignation, we cannot see that a resignation is due to inadequate functioning of the ETS doctrinal statement. On the contrary, the Executive Committee is of the opinion that the statement in its brevity and simplicity is both adequate and sufficient.[40]

Although the decision to leave the statement in its original form without alteration is commendable from the perspective of remaining true to the purpose of defending inerrancy, it also implies responsibility. Because there is currently no general consensus on the definition and implications of inerrancy, even among inerrantists themselves, the need to work towards such a consensus falls upon the shoulders of the ETS.

Moreover, in 1978 Stanley Gundry expressed his sentiment that the Society "should be a forum where those with a commitment to inerrancy can come to grips with the problems of definition and hermeneutics."[41] This statement was made partly in response to the areas of disagreement among the participants of the summit meeting of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Commenting on the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" which resulted from

---

[39]Robert L. Saucy to Vernon Grounds, June 2, 1976, ETS Records, Acquisition 82-34, Box 1, Folder: 1976 Annual Meeting, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

[40]Vernon Grounds, "Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting Minutes," JETS 20 (March, 1976): 91.

[41]Stanley Gundry, "Evangelical Theology: Where Should We Be Going?", JETS 22 (March, 1979): 7.

the summit, Gundry noted that

> discussions leading up to the document clearly showed that inerrantists themselves disagree on the definition and implications of inerrancy, the determination of authorial intention, the question of single or dual intention, the use of historical-critical method, the uses of literary genre, and the cultural conditioning of Scripture.[42]

In response to these disagreements Gundry urged the Society to work towards "a common understanding of what inerrancy means and how it functions within the hermeneutical problems surrounding our use and appropriation of Scripture for our day in history."[43]

As the Society moved into the 1980s, however, subsequent developments kept the inerrancy debate alive. Currently there is still disagreement upon many of the same areas as mentioned above. Therefore, as the Society seeks to maintain its commitment to the doctrinal basis of inerrancy, further clarification and dialogue will be needed.

In conclusion, because this essay has predominantly been a historical one, perhaps it is best to close with a voice from the past:

> If, as we search for truth, we do err, let others be ready to point out the nature of the error and so lead one another back to the center of our evangelical faith. If we shall aid one another in this way, we shall make real advances for the cause of Christ. . . . On the other hand, if honest and sincere efforts in scholarly advancement are to be viewed in the negative atmosphere of theological suspicion, we shall destroy our own usefulness and with it the very purpose of our existence as a Society.[44]

This caution in Warren Young's presidential address over twenty-five years ago may still provide wise counsel to the Society as it works toward future resolution of the important questions surrounding the inerrancy issue.

---

[42]Ibid., p. 6.

[43]Ibid., p. 7.

[44]Warren Young, "Whither Evangelicalism?", BETS 2 (Winter, 1959): 14.