

## EDWARD JOHN CARNELL: AN EVALUATION OF HIS APOLOGETICS

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An apologist is one who actively seeks to defend the Christian faith from attacks from within and without, and who seeks to provide compelling evidence on behalf of the Christian gospel. As I have written elsewhere, the task of apologetics encompasses three facets.<sup>1</sup> The first is definitive: True Christianity must be defined so as to eliminate confusion with distorted or erroneous descriptions. The second is negative: Apologetics seeks to blunt the attack of those who would discredit the gospel, while at the same time showing the inadequacies of non-Christian options. And thirdly, apologetics marshalls evidence that will commend it to the modern mind.

In light of this definition, Edward John Carnell pre-eminently qualifies as an apologist. In his eight books and numerous articles, he sought to "justify the ways of God to man." Even when he was not writing explicitly Christian apologetic books, the end result was still the support of the orthodox Christian faith. Of his five explicitly apologetic works—*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*,<sup>2</sup> *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion*,<sup>3</sup> *Christian Commitment*,<sup>4</sup> *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life*,<sup>5</sup> and *The Case for Orthodox Theology*<sup>6</sup>—more will be said shortly. His other three books also had apologetic overtones and should be briefly mentioned, although their arguments and contents are beyond this paper's scope. *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, an expansion of his Harvard University Th.D. dissertation, assessed the value of Niebuhr's thought and the weaknesses of neo-orthodox epistemology.<sup>7</sup> *Television: Servant or Master?* was an early attempt to measure the impact of the then-new medium on society.<sup>8</sup> That Carnell intuited its importance as early as 1950 is a credit to his cultural sensitivity. *The Burden of Soren Kierkegaard* is a sympathetic attempt to

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<sup>1</sup>K. C. Harper, "Say Why You Believe," *HIS Guide to Life on Campus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973) 76-77.

<sup>2</sup>E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

<sup>3</sup>E. J. Carnell, *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

<sup>4</sup>E. J. Carnell, *Christian Commitment* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

<sup>5</sup>E. J. Carnell, *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

<sup>6</sup>E. J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959).

<sup>7</sup>E. J. Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).

<sup>8</sup>E. J. Carnell, *Television: Servant or Master?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

commend Kierkegaard to a suspicious evangelical audience.<sup>9</sup>

A fourth volume deserves mention as well. *The Case for Biblical Christianity* is a posthumously-published volume of Carnell's better articles and papers, edited by a former student, Ronald H. Nash.<sup>10</sup> It is useful for bringing out other facets of Carnell's thought, as well as for providing an exhaustive bibliography.

Carnell was born in Antigo, Wisconsin, in 1919. He received his undergraduate and seminary training at Wheaton College and Westminster Seminary. He was the recipient of the Th.D. from Harvard University and the Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University. Ordained to the Baptist ministry in 1944, he pastored churches in Massachusetts while teaching at Gordon College and Divinity School. In 1948 he joined the faculty of the newly-founded Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He spent the rest of his nineteen years there, serving as president from 1954-1959. He died just ten years ago, at the age of 47, from an apparent heart attack.<sup>11</sup>

### I. A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Studies that evaluate Edward John Carnell and his place within the context of twentieth-century apologetics and theology are exceedingly scarce due to the convergence of two areas of neglect in historical theology. The first area of dearth is in apologetics. Very few penetrating analyses exist on the role of apologetics in twentieth-century theology, and these seldom give evangelical works mention, still less extended treatment. Works of evangelical apologetics exist, to be sure, spilling forth in increasing number from the pens of new conservative authors.<sup>12</sup> These works, however, neither evaluate their own arguments, nor are they matched by liberal critiques. *Christian Apologetics*, by Alan Richardson, is a neo-orthodox attempt at apologetics.<sup>13</sup> J. V. Langmead-Casserley's *Apologetics and Evangelism* is a theological appraisal of apologetics' role in the theologian's task.<sup>14</sup> Two recent histories of apologetics exist. The first is J. K. S. Reid's *Christian Apologetics*, which speaks out of great sympathy for the radical "apologetics" of Paul Tillich and J. A. T. Robinson to the sheer exclusion of conservative attempts.<sup>15</sup> The second is *A History of Apologetics* by Avery Dulles in the "Theological Resources" series. This is a far more helpful work, which at least mentions the resurgence of evangelicals in the

<sup>9</sup>E. J. Carnell, *The Burden of Soren Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

<sup>10</sup>E. J. Carnell, *The Case for Biblical Christianity*, ed. R. H. Nash (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

<sup>11</sup>J. W. Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969) 194.

<sup>12</sup>Harper, "Say Why You Believe," pp. 79-80.

<sup>13</sup>A. Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* (London: SCM Press, 1947).

<sup>14</sup>J. V. Langmead-Casserley, *Apologetics and Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

<sup>15</sup>J. K. S. Reid, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 192-210.

post-World-War-II period; Carnell rates a footnote.<sup>16</sup>

Works of evangelicals themselves are sparse. Bernard Ramm in his *Types of Apologetic Systems* included a chapter on the early writings of Carnell.<sup>17</sup> He removed the chapter, however, in the revised, retitled work, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics*. He wrote, "In the first edition the last two men discussed were C. Van Til and E. J. Carnell. Many reviewers and friendly critics suggested that I stay more in the classic examples of apologists, so accordingly I have substituted chapters on Calvin and Kuyper."<sup>18</sup> Ronald H. Nash treated Carnell in a chapter entitled "Philosophical Apologetics" in *The New Evangelicalism*.<sup>19</sup> Finally, E. R. Geehan, editor of *Jerusalem and Athens, a Festschrift* in honor of Cornelius Van Til, included two essays that compare Carnell's epistemology with that of Van Til and the presuppositionalist school.<sup>20</sup>

The second major area of dearth is in a more general evaluation of evangelical theology since World War II. The standard works on fundamentalism—those by Steward G. Cole,<sup>21</sup> Norman F. Furniss,<sup>22</sup> and Ernest R. Sandeen<sup>23</sup>—all focus their attention on (and in some cases date from) pre-World-War-II and pre-resurgence periods. William Hordern represents a lone, early attempt to wrestle with evangelical thought in a chapter entitled "The New Face of Conservatism" in *New Directions in Theology Today*. Writes Hordern, "While such factors [as church growth] might cast doubt on forecasts of the death of fundamentalism, they could not bring it into theological respectability. Non-fundamentalist theologians might concede that fundamentalists could inspire commitment, but they still were convinced that fundamentalists had Neanderthal minds."<sup>24</sup> Hordern likewise notes that *Living Options in Protestant Theology* by John B. Cobb, Jr., consciously excluded a treatment of conservative evangelicalism. This, Hordern wryly remarks, belies liberalism's claims to an open mind. Hordern continues:

Today most conservative writings bristle with references to nonconservative theologians, but one seldom finds any reference to the conservative in the work of nonconservatives. To date, the conversation has been

<sup>16</sup>A. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (New York: Corpus; Philadelphia: Westminster; London: Hutchinson, 1971) 231, 273-274.

<sup>17</sup>B. L. Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems* (Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1953) 210-236.

<sup>18</sup>B. L. Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962) 7.

<sup>19</sup>R. H. Nash, *The New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963) 113-128.

<sup>20</sup>E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971) 349-379. Cf. esp. the articles by G. R. Lewis and C. M. Horne.

<sup>21</sup>*The History of Fundamentalism* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1931).

<sup>22</sup>*The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven: Yale University, 1954).

<sup>23</sup>*The Origins of Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

<sup>24</sup>W. Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), I, 76.

a monologue. Perhaps the time has come to ask which side has the "open mind" today.<sup>25</sup>

John Warwick Montgomery more carefully documented liberal theology's scorn of conservative thought in his short article, "Bibliographic Bigotry," in *The Suicide of Christian Theology*.<sup>26</sup>

The tide is slowly changing, however, and evangelicals are receiving some treatment in more recent scholarly studies. One example is *A Religious History of the American People*, in which Sydney Ahlstrom places evangelical theology after World War II in the context of "The Revival of Revivalism"—i.e., the upsurge in religious activities of all types that characterized the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> A second example is Louis Gasper's *The Fundamentalist Movement*, a surprisingly fair evaluation of "fundamentalism" that includes an excellent chapter on the rise of conservative scholarship.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years, evangelicals themselves have attempted to historically understand their heritage and their stance in a spate of books, many of them of high quality. Bernard Ramm in *The Evangelical Heritage* rather narrowly links current conservatism to the "western" fathers, the Reformation, and orthodox Protestant scholasticism. His treatment of the twentieth century is not full, though it contains provocative forecasts of future directions.<sup>29</sup> Donald Bloesch in *The Evangelical Renaissance* has provided the only complete treatment of the period in question.<sup>30</sup> His work is only slightly less valuable than *The Evangelicals*, a collection of twelve essays edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge.<sup>31</sup> The scope of these essays is diverse, as are the viewpoints of the contributors. It is in this volume that Ahlstrom traces the roots of contemporary evangelicals to the Puritans and unfavorably reports on their current thought patterns and behavior.<sup>32</sup> The Wells and Woodbridge collection is also enhanced by a short bibliographic essay, "A Guide to Further Reading," by Donald Tinder, associate editor of *Christianity Today*. Tinder notes that good, scholarly evaluations of evangelicalism are difficult to find:

For the past half-century "fundamentalism" has been and continues to be used by many scholars, journalists, and others to refer to the whole of the movement which this book has designated "evangelicalism." On

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>26</sup>Montgomery, *Suicide*, pp. 180-183.

<sup>27</sup>S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1972) 949-963.

<sup>28</sup>L. Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1963) 93-125.

<sup>29</sup>B. L. Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage* (Waco: Word, 1973) 151-171.

<sup>30</sup>D. G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

<sup>31</sup>D. F. Wells and J. D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 269-289.

the other hand, in the past two decades a self-styled fundamentalist movement has emerged which is clearly a subdivision of evangelicalism and only partially the successor of the fundamentalist movement of the twenties. The basic point is that the contents of the book or article, not the title or terminology, have to be consulted to see about whom the author is speaking.<sup>33</sup>

Richard Quebedeaux's *The Young Evangelicals*<sup>34</sup> deals with the intellectual roots of the post-War renaissance, though his work more specifically treats that group of conservative evangelicals noted for their "prophetic" stance on political and social issues.

These are the sources I was able to discover. We will return to them as they contribute to an understanding of Carnell's thought.

## II. CHRISTIANITY FOR THE TOUGH- AND TENDER-MINDED

From an overview of the secondary sources, we turn now to the primary. Since this essay is primarily concerned with Carnell as apologist, our concentration will be on five of his eight books—*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, *Christian Commitment*, *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life* and *The Case for Orthodox Theology*.

The books divide into two major groups. Carnell's first two works form a cohesive whole and should be evaluated together. The pair represents Carnell's more intellectual, "tough-minded" approach (to borrow a term from William James) apologetic for Christianity. As we will see, Carnell changed his emphasis later in his career, though he never repudiated his early work.

*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, subtitled "A Philosophic Defense of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith," divides into three major sections. In the first, Carnell discusses the existential dilemma of man. This involves two problems. The first is "soul sorrow," which is linked to man's finiteness, to his frustrating limitations, and ultimately to his inevitable death. Man, according to Carnell, is caught between the Charon of a meaningless existence and the Styx of the unknown grave. In this connection he quotes the words of the song "Old Man River": "Ah gets weary an' sick of tryin', / Ah'm tired of livin' an' skeered of dyin'".<sup>35</sup> The answer (which Carnell presents before justifying it) is the gospel of Jesus Christ, expressed in the words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).<sup>36</sup>

The second dilemma of man is intellectual and relates to the perpetual philosophic problem of "the one and the many." Over-infatuation with the "one" leads to an iron-clad logic isolated from the real world,

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>34</sup>R. Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper, 1974) 61-72.

<sup>35</sup>Carnell, *Introduction*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

while over-infatuation with the "many" leads to atomistic chaos.<sup>37</sup> Again, Carnell briefly presents the Christian answer without justifying it. The Christian can accept the "many" since God created the universe, and the "one" derives from God himself who is the unifying principle.

Having stated both problem and solution, part two is an attempt to justify the Christian answer and the Christian way of knowing. After rejecting other options as insufficient, the method of verification Carnell chooses is *systematic consistency*.<sup>38</sup> "Systematic" refers to testing a hypothesis by measuring it against the facts of the real world. "Consistency" refers to the internal consistency of the hypothesis. Carnell then works out the application of systematic consistency to the Christian world view. In doing so, he treats the problems of starting point, common ground and faith.

Since this 150-page section represents the core of Carnell's epistemology, it is wise to pause and evaluate his test of "systematic consistency." The first observation is that the epistemology reveals the two most significant philosophic influences in Carnell's life—Cornelius Van Til and Edgar Sheffield Brightman.<sup>39</sup> The second preliminary observation is that it is a *dual* criterion for truth. Empiricism and deductive logic are elevated to equal rank with no provision made for their potential contradiction. That this is more than a theoretical problem will be seen shortly.

Cornelius Van Til assaulted the "systematic" facet of Carnell's epistemology.<sup>40</sup> Van Til's presuppositionalism assumes that empirical knowledge is useless, since the non-Christian is operating with *a priori* commitments that exclude God. Therefore internal consistency is the only option. It operates negatively by showing that non-Christian philosophies suffer from internal self-contradictions and by positing Christianity as a logically, self-consistent world view.<sup>41</sup> Van Til's position, however, fails to consider that a system of philosophical truth might succeed in being internally self-consistent and yet be totally false—with no basis in the real world.<sup>42</sup>

Thus it is that apologists who stress empiricism fault Carnell at the point of "consistency." The law of non-contradiction is valid and necessary, they claim, but what should be our approach if empirical facts appear to contradict each other? Empiricists would hold that the facts must be accepted even if illogical harmonization is as yet not forthcoming. An example often cited from natural science is light,

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-62.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. the many index references to Brightman, *ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>40</sup>G. R. Lewis, "Van Til and Carnell—Part One," in Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 347-361.

<sup>41</sup>For a more recent use of the same reasoning, cf. F. A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972). For my response to Schaeffer, see "Francis A. Schaeffer: An Evaluation," forthcoming in *BSac*.

<sup>42</sup>J. W. Montgomery, "Once Upon an *A Priori*," in Geehan, *Jerusalem*, pp. 380-392.

which displays the properties both of a wave and a particle, yet clearly cannot be both. Scientists have rightly held to both, defining the photon as a wave-particle, suppressing the data for neither facet.<sup>43</sup>

The same principle holds true for the theologian, who encounters such perplexing questions as: Is God one or three? Is Jesus human or divine? Is the Bible the writing of men or the Word of God? Is salvation a matter of predestination or free will? The rigid application of either/or logic would lead one into that violation of data known as heresy.

How, then, must one commend the gospel to the unbeliever? Carnell answers that a Scriptural starting point is necessary. In so doing he categorically rejects the Thomistic "proofs for God" as relegating too much ability to the sin-stained intellect of the unbeliever.<sup>44</sup> Once a man accepts the reality of God, the twin problems of metaphysics and morals fall into place.<sup>45</sup>

Following this epistemological discussion, the third section is an aggregate of chapters on isolated problems and implications of the Christian position: Biblical criticism, miracles and natural law, and evil, to mention a few. Generally, these intelligently present evangelical responses to traditional problems and are still appealing to many conservatives. The concluding pages pose Pascal's wager and urge the uncommitted reader to opt for the Christian gospel.<sup>46</sup>

If *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* was an evangelical attempt to deal with *epistemology*, its companion volume, *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, is an evangelical attempt to deal with *axiology*—the problem of value systems. In this work, Carnell surveys a wide variety of philosophic systems that purport to deal with human need. He begins with the "lower immediacies" of physical pleasures and wants in hedonism and materialistic Marxism and moves through the "higher immediacies" of intellectual and philosophic need to the "threshold options" that stand at the border of theism—humanism, deism, pantheism and finite-theism. "Kingdom clarifications" deals with sub-Biblical theistic and Christian options and finally appeals for a fully Biblical Christianity. In every case he shows the inadequacies of a given position, moves on to the next level of need, points out the inadequacies there, and so forth, until Biblical Christianity is reached as being the only fully-satisfying value system.<sup>47</sup> Schematically, his approach can be diagrammed as follows:<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Montgomery, *Suicide*, p. 298.

<sup>44</sup>Carnell, *Introduction*, pp. 121-151.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 180-184.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 357-359.

<sup>47</sup>Carnell, *Philosophy*, pp. 511-516.

<sup>48</sup>J. W. Montgomery, unpublished class notes from apologetics class, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1970.

**Biblical Christianity**

(Human needs cannot ultimately be met by anything short of Biblical Christianity)

Kierkegaard

Roman Catholicism

Universalism

Unlimited God

Limited God

Humanism

Rationalism

Positivism

Materialism (esp. Marxism)

Hedonism

} options on the "inside"  
(i.e., theistic option)

} the "God question" }  
the threshold

} higher immediacies

} lower immediacies

Again, it is important to see that *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* is grounded in the epistemology of *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* and is not to be read as an independent work. Because it operates axiologically, it has to do solely with values; it attempts to show the relevance and worth of Christianity. The works must be taken together because an ideology may meet human need (as Nazism did for many Germans in the 1930s) and yet not be true. On the other hand (theoretically, at least), an ideology may be true and yet not meet the needs of men. Carnell quite properly puts the two together.

In subsequent books, Carnell changed his apologetic approach. He himself noted the differing tenor of his books by acknowledging in the preface to *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life*:

In my own books on apologetics I have consistently tried to build on some useful point of contact between the gospel and culture. In *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* the appeal was to the law of contradiction; in *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* it was to values; and in *Christian Commitment* it was to the judicial sentiment. In this book I am appealing to the law of love.<sup>49</sup>

Our discussion of the two books, *Christian Commitment* and *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life*, will be quite brief. Both books emphasize a "tender-minded" approach to the gospel (if we may again

<sup>49</sup>Carnell, *Kingdom*, p. 6.



borrow William James' term). The emphasis is on the moral and ethical value of the gospel rather than on its intellectual persuasiveness.

*Christian Commitment* builds upon the theme of moral perception in man. A man, claims Carnell, can only show his ultimate commitment to a system of truth by *acting*. To act unfairly or to fail to act to meet need is seen by all as morally reprehensible. Whence springs this sense of moral indignation? And how can the moral predicament be resolved? The gospel, Carnell claims, provides both the explanation and the solution:

But how are systems verified? How can one decide whether one system is better than another? Here is the answer, and the answer once again applies to both theology and philosophy: Systems are verified by the degree to which their major elements are consistent with one another and with the broad facts of history and nature. In short, a consistent system is a true system. Were a person to demand a higher or a more perfect test than this, he would only show his want of education. This is about all that can be said. Christianity is true because its major elements are consistent with one another and with the broad facts of history and nature. The third method of knowing has shown that the human race is held in a moral predicament; and only Christianity can resolve this predicament without offending the larger features in man's fourfold environment—physical, rational, aesthetic, and moral and spiritual. Existence itself raises a question to which the righteousness of Christ is the only critically acceptable answer. Hence, Christianity is true.<sup>50</sup>

Thus *Christian Commitment* seems to be an extended discussion of a modified "moral argument." It is true, Carnell would say, that a moral sense does not require an Ultimate Lawgiver (as Aquinas would have argued), but it does provide impetus to find a world view that will explain and satisfy it.<sup>51</sup>

There are two observations to be made regarding the book. The first is that it is very difficult to read; there is a heaviness of style that obscures the substance. M. L. Barrett observes, "The argument is sustained and documented but, at the same time, hard to find under a weight of words."<sup>52</sup> This observation applies to a lesser extent to all of Carnell's works.

The second observation is that this is a tender-minded approach. It is not written to make converts through the force of logic and evidence, but rather by striking a sympathetic chord with the morally-sensitive non-Christian reader. It is unfortunate that the previously-noted heaviness works against that approach.

In *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life*, Carnell attempts to link the insights of Freudian thought with the Christian gospel. The central thesis of the book is that one's fullest expression of personhood can be found by following Christ and permitting his life-transforming

<sup>50</sup>Carnell, *Commitment*, p. 286.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-30.

<sup>52</sup>M. L. Barrett, in *Library Journal* 82, p. 1524.

power to permeate one's life.<sup>53</sup> In this, he follows the device of treating a portion of the account of Lazarus' resurrection at the onset of each chapter.<sup>54</sup> This contributes to the cohesiveness and continuity of the book. The treatments of man's problems are again given scrutiny, as well as the inability of modern philosophy to resolve them.

The main criticism of the work is that its link with Freudian thought, which is supposed to provide the framework for the book,<sup>55</sup> is rather tenuous at best. Freudians might be disappointed to see the use to which their concepts are put. One example will suffice: Psychoanalysis' attempt to probe the childhood sources of neuroses is connected with Jesus statement, "Unless ye become as little children. . . ." <sup>56</sup>

The final book in Carnell's apologetic corpus is *The Case for Orthodox Theology*. This book was issued by Westminster Press as one of three volumes presenting popular overviews of the current theological scene.<sup>57</sup> Virtually every element in Carnell's book can be traced to his earlier writings, yet here the case for a Biblically-loyal theology is presented clearly and cogently. It is certainly the easiest of Carnell's books to read. The strength one attributes to his arguments will be determined in part by one's own theological convictions. There can be no doubt, however, that conservative evangelicalism has seldom been better represented.

### III. A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

In addition to the comments made with each book, I have four additional observations to make regarding Carnell's writings.

First, on the positive side, Carnell has attempted to deal creatively with contemporary thought from the vantage point of evangelical Christianity. He is not reluctant to engage in dialogue with those who differ with him. When one considers that evangelicalism was long beset by an anti-intellectual and anti-cultural isolationism, Carnell was bold enough to meet the non-Christian on his own ground, confident that the gospel would commend itself to the modern mind.<sup>58</sup>

A second observation, likewise positive, is that Carnell's attitude is one of humility. In *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, he recognizes that orthodoxy is beset with intellectual difficulties. These he admits and describes, saying, "To affect omniscience is cultic."<sup>59</sup> He likewise repudiates the sins of the older fundamentalism, which he calls "ortho-

<sup>53</sup>Carnell, *Kingdom*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 36, 51, 65, 78, 94, 106, 122, 138.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>The other two books of the trilogy are W. Hordern, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* (1959), and L. H. DeWolf, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective* (1959).

<sup>58</sup>Cf. the example of Paul in Acts 17:16-34.

<sup>59</sup>Carnell, *Orthodox*, p. 92.

doxy gone cultic." His irenic attitude was well noted in a posthumous tribute in the *Christian Century*.<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that Carnell did not engage in polemics. He did. But this departure from his own inclination and temperament may best be explained by the fact that Carnell saw himself as a voice in the wilderness. Indeed, prior to the founding of *Christianity Today*, Carnell was one of the few conservative spokesmen in the predominantly liberal *Christian Century*.<sup>61</sup>

The third observation is that Carnell's basic theological weakness was his epistemology. This has been mentioned in connection with *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. Due to the influence of Van Til at Westminster and Gordon H. Clark at Wheaton, Carnell was drawn into the presuppositional web. He never extricated himself from it. This led to the main source of weakness in his two "tough-minded" volumes.

The weakness remained, though in different form, in his later works. Carnell was beset by many personal and psychological difficulties. Shortly after assuming the presidency of Fuller Theological Seminary, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized for some time. It was as a result of these problems, I would assume, that he developed a feeling of kinship with the "melancholy Dane," Soren Kierkegaard, who was to become the subject of a long and excellent treatment by Carnell, *The Burden of Soren Kierkegaard*.<sup>62</sup> Carnell tended to absorb the more subjective type of verification that characterized Kierkegaard, and this is responsible for the "tender-minded" approach of his later works.

The final observation is that Carnell must be placed in his historical context. Of this we shall have more to say in the concluding section. Suffice it to state now that apologetics is a peculiarly fluid art. While the heart of the gospel remains unchanged, the world's criticism of it varies from generation to generation. Thus, even to evangelicals some of Carnell's statements seem curiously archaic. His relative lack of concern for the social dimensions of the gospel is a troublesome example.<sup>63</sup> Another is his position on evolution and his *tertium quid*, "threshold evolution."<sup>64</sup> But these anachronisms must not be used to obscure the overall value of his work, and they must be seen in context. It is to this final task that we now turn.

#### IV. AN HISTORICAL PLACEMENT

How does Edward John Carnell as a writer, apologist and theologian fit into the stream of Christian thought and Church history? To borrow an image from navigation, there are four "sightings" that will place Carnell in his proper historical context. We will discuss these in order of increasing importance.

<sup>60</sup>A. B. Haines, "Edward John Carnell: An Evaluation," *Christian Century* 84, p. 751.

<sup>61</sup>Carnell, *Biblical*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>62</sup>See the fine review by V. C. Grounds in *Christianity Today* 20, pp. 521-522.

<sup>63</sup>Haines, "Evaluation."

<sup>64</sup>Carnell, *Introduction*, pp. 236-242.

Firstly, and most theologically, we must place Carnell in the stream of Dutch presuppositionalism. We have already seen that Carnell was deeply indebted to Cornelius Van Til. One must observe, however, that Van Til himself stood in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. Kuyper, a Dutch thinker of incredible breadth, sought to relate Calvinism to all of life, including its political and philosophical dimensions. Such a point of view made of Calvinistic Christianity an organic whole that had no need for interaction with any other philosophy.<sup>65</sup>

Herman Dooyeweerd, who was strongly influenced both positively and negatively by Kuyper, has developed this to a much higher degree. His thought as professor of jurisprudence at the Free University of Amsterdam parallels and influences Van Til's own.<sup>66</sup> Beyond these generalizations we dare not go: Dooyeweerd's thought is highly complex and beyond this author's competence. It suffices to draw attention to the connection.

Secondly, we must see Carnell as a product of the resurgence in religious interest that followed World War II. Sydney Ahlstrom has traced the social sources of this upswing in religious activity to the new affluence of Americans, the changing intellectual environment, and the uncertainty of the "cold war" and the "balance of terror."<sup>67</sup> It is probably true that even without this "revival" Carnell would have thought and written. It is unlikely, however, that he would have had as much impact on young seminarians. It is even doubtful that the institution to which he gave his life would have thrived apart from the "revival" of the 1950s.

But the data are somewhat confusing. That is why the term "revival" is set off by quotation marks. On the one hand, the revival's central figure was Billy Graham, who certainly lends an evangelical tone to the phenomenon. So it is likely that the encouragement of evangelical scholarship generally and Carnell specifically can be linked to this revival. But other forces were operating as well. Political and social conservatism was the order of the day. Anti-communism became a secular religion for many. Indeed, "American civil religion" seemed most to characterize the Eisenhower years.<sup>68</sup> While this may have added a more generally conservative tint to the revival, it certainly was neither uniquely evangelical, nor even Christian.

Thirdly, we must see Carnell against the backdrop of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. It must be mentioned preliminarily that the fundamentalists of the 1910s and 1920s were represented by some

<sup>65</sup>Ramm, *Varieties*, pp. 179-195.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. the article by W. Young in P. E. Hughes, ed., *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 270-301.

<sup>67</sup>Ahlstrom, *History*, pp. 950-951.

<sup>68</sup>W. G. McLoughlin and R. N. Bellah, *Religion in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) 3-23.

very able scholars—B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, J. Edwin Orr and Robert Dick Wilson, to name but a few. As modernism captured the seminaries, however, it seemed to capture scholarship as well. Fundamentalist interest centered on the foundation of Bible institutes, where the English Bible (*KJV*, of course) occupied the center of the curriculum.<sup>69</sup> Intellectual ossification joined the other excesses to which fundamentalism became heir. Higher education apart from Bible institutes was suspect in fundamentalist groups and was actually regarded as dangerous to one's faith. In short, the fundamentalists were demoralized and adopted the attitude, "If you can't beat 'em, drop out of the game."

With such an attitude, creative scholarship could scarcely flourish. It is instructive to note that such respected evangelical publishers as Eerdmans, Zondervan and Baker made their start by reprinting old theological classics.<sup>70</sup> It is likewise instructive to note that one of the first significant evangelical works in apologetics during this period was Wilbur Smith's *Therefore Stand*, virtually an annotated bibliography that simply repeats the apologetic arguments of Grotius, Butler and Paley.<sup>71</sup>

This partially explains the noted lack of creativity in Carnell's work. It also explains why Carnell was subjected to such vituperative attacks from the older fundamentalists. He had not only been educated in "liberal" schools but also was conversant with liberals and granted the validity of many of their points.<sup>72</sup> Seen in this light, Carnell must be commended for doing as much as he did.

Finally, one must see Carnell as a pioneer of a new theological movement. And the analogy can be further applied. A pioneer's recollection of newly-explored territory may be limited and inaccurate, but it does represent a beginning. A flood of scholarship has come from the movement Carnell helped to start. Quebedeaux specifically mentions Fuller Theological Seminary as one of the major wellsprings of modern evangelical scholarship.<sup>73</sup> It was to this that Aubrey Haines referred when he wrote that Fuller Seminary, and not the eight books Carnell wrote, may be his greatest legacy to evangelical Christianity.<sup>74</sup> Along with Carl F. H. Henry and a handful of others, Edward John Carnell represented the vanguard of a new and resurgent evangelical scholarship.

<sup>69</sup>Gasper, *Movement*, pp. 92-96.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>71</sup>W. M. Smith, *Therefore Stand* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942).

<sup>72</sup>Carnell, *Orthodox*, pp. 113-126.

<sup>73</sup>Quebedeaux, *Young Evangelicals*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>74</sup>Haines, "Evaluation."