WHITHER EVANGELICALISM?

by

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The history of evangelical Christianity, both in America and in Europe, has been sufficiently traced by others so that no detailed consideration of it is needed at present, even if time permitted. In America in particular the conservative reaction to the rising liberalism in religion was named Fundamentalism, although many of the stalwart supporters of the evangelical position never accepted this particular name. Among the stout-hearted defenders of the traditional conservative position were numbered many outstanding biblical and theological scholars. They were men who believed in the eternal Truths of God; in His personal revelation in Christ, the living Word Who became flesh; and in the inspired record of God's complete plan and purpose for man in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures.

With the passing of the years, unfortunately, the propogation and defense of the evangelical understanding of the Christian faith sometimes took on forms generally unacceptable to the majority of evangelical Christians. At times sincere Christian leaders tended to become more obsessed with the preservation of the unessential past, rather than in the making of the gospel of Christ meaningful and relevant in the dynamic and ever-changing present.

The result has been a very evident and growing dissatisfaction with the methods and results of recent decades. More and more evangelical leaders have been working to separate the living gospel from the cold, dead past, that Christ may be made more real and meaningful for our day. This spirit of revolt against the perpetuation of the past may be illustrated quite well from leaders both here and in Great Britain.

For example, a little over four years ago, Dr. A. W. Tozer described the present scene as one in which there is a healthy revolt against the cold textualism so characteritic of fundamentalism for a quarter of a century.[1] In his striking article Dr. Tozer used the illustration of the French scientist who placed some army worms on the rim of a glass. They circled 'round and 'round each blindingly following the one ahead until they all fell off and perished. As a result of the same general precedure, he writes that we succeeded in creating "an army of cookie-cutter believers, all repeating each other without much need for the illumination of the Spirit." He continues,

> Fundamentalist leaders, like these army worms, have for decades been following each other around the rim of their own little jars, each one afraid to step aside or hunt any new direction for himself. each slavishly following the other.

The present day, in spite of mistakes which have no doubt been made, has been characterized by a sincere effort to transcend the sterility of the type of Chritian expression to which Dr. Tozer objects.

The discontent with the immediate past was also voiced by Dr. Harold John Ockenga in an address delivered in Fuller Theological Seminary later the same year. Dr. Ockenga says:

> For decades fundamentalism has proved itself impotent to change the theological and ecclesiastical scene. Its lack of influence has relegated it to the peripheral and subsidiary movements of Protestantism. Wherever fundamentalism and modernism came into test in a theological struggle, fundamentalism lost every major battle in the historical field. It has demonstrated little power to crack the social situation challenging the church today. The motivating loyalty to fundamentalism on the part of many christians lies in its orthodoxy, its faithfulness to the Word of God. However, the judgment of history of fundamentalism is that it has failed.[2]

When one crosses the water to the British scene one finds voices raised expressing the same general dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of conservative Chritianity. In an article written by C. D. Alexander, later republished in America, we encounter the same note of emphasis.[3]

Are we sure, asks Dr. Alexander, that our present day evangelicalism is of the kind the Lord may use to bring about a revival long overdue? Is there not grave reason to fear that there are conditions among us which may lead the Holy Spirit to seek elsewhere for his means of reviving grace? He reminds us that in the Reformation God chose to pass by the evangelicals of that day and instead put his hand upon the monks and priests of a corrupt church.

The two main criticisms he raises in this timely article are: the decline of worship, and the rise of externalism. Evangelicals have lost the true sense of worship and the Christian life is measured far more often by external criteria rather than by a biblical and spiritual emphasis. He closes his article with this thought-provoking warning:

> If, because of irreverence and externalism, Evangelicalism should be written off as an exhausted and empty thing, there may yet come a day when we shall find ourselves in the midst of a revival which some of us will not recognize as such, because it did not come out of our mould, and does not use our shibboleths.

From discussions both here and in Europe, it is evident that we're on our way. But, where are we going? It is our purpose to look briefly at what seem to be some tendencies in contemporary discussions which seem to have theological significance for the immediate future. Whole areas of develpment must, at the same time, be passed over without reference both because of the limitations of time and the inability of the speaker to deal adequately with them.

As we present what seem to us certain tendencies before us today, a word must be said about the spirit and intention of this study. No critical evaluation of any person or movement is intended. Our primary function is to report as we see it, not to evaluate. Hence, we have tried to keep our own personal convictions out of the picture in so far as possible, although it is recognized that no one can ever be fully objective. Our primary objective is that of presentation of seeming trends or tendencies in evangelical thought. Yet, throughout it is our intention to raise certain questions which seem to be implied by these trends, not because we question the trends, but because they are questions which we feel should be raised and should be given anwers. We propose then to deal with four main tendencies and then conclude with a word as to the place of our Society in the present situation.

Perhaps we should preface all of this with a general statement. There is today a very evident willingness among evangelicals to listen to what is being said by others. No longer are theologians who may differ from evangelicals on some points, subjected to the wholesale condemnation which was formerly so evident. There is an increased willingness to listen to what others say and to learn any truth and light which they may have to offer. There is an increased interest in listening to what the scientists have to say and to make a real effort to relate scientific advancement to the biblical perspective. Contemporary evangelicalism is, then, characterized by a willingness to study for itself and to learn from others in its effort to understand and to present the Christian faith to a tragic age.

1. *First of all, there is a tendency toward an understanding of theology as an experiential as well as a rational discipline.* A striking illustration of this is found in Edward J. Carnell's recent work, *Christian Commitment.*[4] Dr. Carnell discusses the nature of truth. There is what he calls, *ontological truth.* This simply states that what-

ever *is* is true. In the second place there is *propositional truth.* This is truth which results from making rational inferences or judgments by which we are brought into touch with the real. Philosophers, with the exception of a very few, have been concerned with these two types of truth. This is due to philosophy's bad habit of "ignoring the moral and spiritual realities that already hold man as a creature made in the image of God."[5]

However, philosophers for the most part have erred in supposing that the task is now finished. There is also the truth which comes into existence when one is transformed by ethical decision, what Carnell calls truth as *personal rectitude.* It is at this point that Carnell shows the influence of such thinkers as Socrates, Pascal, and Kierkegaard. There is a truth that comes into being when a person is transformed by ethical decision. It can probably be most simply expressed and understood in this fashion. One may know in his heart that he is not self-sufficient—that he can be and ought to be transformed by putting his trust in a power which transcends his own finite existence. He may know what he ought to do but this truth as personal rectitude does not come into existence until one actually decides and commits himself. If he refuses to commit himself this truth will never be his to experience. Thus to knowledge by acquaintance, and knowledge by inference, must be added knowledge by *moral self-acceptance.*[7] This latter truth comes when one is spiritually transformed by the *ought* which binds him. This, as I understand it, is the truth which is ours only by our Christian commitment.

Thus Carnell brings us face to face with what he believes is the inescapable facet of subjectivity inherent in the Christian faith. For later in the book he writes, "we certainly dare not treat God as an object; he cannot be regarded as the conclusion of a rational argument. God must be spiritually experienced; he must be encountered in the dynamic of fellowship."[8] In Christ himself who did not say, "I *have* the truth," but "I *am* the truth" this third level is best actuated.[9]

This revelation of God in Jesus Christ transcends complete expression in our finite categories of understanding, for "whenever a systematic theologian becomes too systematic, he ends up by falsifying some aspect of revelation."[10] We cannot work all the truth of the revelation of God into a neat harmony. Or, if we understand him correctly, Carnell is saying that the truth of the revelation of God can never be fully expressed in propositional or logical form.

Without question Dr. Carnell has brought us face to face with an emphasis in contemporary theological discussion which evangelicals cannot avoid facing and for which, no doubt, further suggestions should be forthcoming in the near future.

2. *Secondly, there is a tendency to listen to what science has to say about man.* I propose to deal with the contemporary discussions under the headings (1) Origin, (2) Age, and (3) biblical Adam.

(1). In our discussion of the origin of man we need scarcely remind ourselves that over a half century ago evangelical scholars such as A. H. Strong and James Orr turned away from the long accepted teaching of fiat creation in favor of a developmental approach to origins and apparently embraced a complete theistic evolution. While the intervening years indicated a definite trend away from this position, it was probably never given up by all evangelical thinkers. More recently the developmental hypothesis has gained new impetus in the form of either progressive creationism or threshold evolution.[11]

Bernard Ramm prefers to call his view Progressive Creationism for he writes:

> We believe in several acts of fiat creation in the history of the earth, and this clearly differentiates this view from theistic evolution.[12]

However, in the matter of carrying out the details of creation, it is somewhat difficult for us to see just how Ramm's view differs from that of others such as Douglas Dewar and Russell Mixter. Ramm goes on to say:

> After this comes the *process*, or *derivative creation*. God creating fiatly and *sovereignly* outside of nature now turns the task of creation over to the Holy Spirit who is *inside* Nature. The Spirit, the Divine Entelechy of Nature, knows what is the divine blueprint and *through process* working from the *level of vacancy* realizes the divine form or intention in Nature.[12]

In an article appearing in *Christianity Today*, Gordon Clark rejects the view that modern species are to be equated with the *kinds* of Genesis, as was often done by scholars in the past.

> They (the scholars) did not consider the possibility that the *kinds* of Genesis might be what biologists call *families* or perhaps *orders*. Thus they failed to recognize that the existing species are many more in number than the special acts of creation listed in the first chapter of Genesis.[13]

In an editorial in the same issue of this Journal, Carl Henry accepts the same position.[14] Edward J. Carnell likewise has adopted this general approach.[15]

No one, however, appeared to have approached the problem of origins with quite the boldness of Dr. Henry in his chapter on "Science and Religion," in a volume which he recently edited.[16] We quote from this work as follows:

> Perhaps we are not to rule out dogmatically the possibility that the "dust" of man's origin may have been animated, since the animals before man appear to have been fashioned from the earth (Gen. 1:24). The Bible does not explicate man's physical origin in detail . . . The new levels of being arise with quite obvious dependence on the lower in the creation account.

It is, of course, Dr. Henry's intention here to put the emphasis where it belongs—on that which differentiates man from the animal, not on that in which he may have some similarity. We are much better engaged in impressing upon a dying world man's spiritual nature and his moral responsibility under God, than in dogmatic declarations about the details of his physical being. Nevertheless it is obvious that there is much work to be done in this area in the years ahead.

(2). *Age of Man.* In so far as the antiquity of man is concerned there have been some changes made since the days of Bishop Ussher. In discussing this question in the *Christian Life* series of about three years ago Professor J. O. Buswell III of Wheaton College pointed out that it is not uncommon for scientists to suggest that man has been around for anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 years. Some recent discoveries classified as human have been placed back as far as 300,000 years. Estimates of the age of man on the American continent have been placed back to at least 25,000 years.[17] With reference to Genesis 5 this article quotes an evangelical anthropologist as saying, "even if the genealogy here spans 10,000 generations the paucity of persons mentioned would be consistent with the purpose and highly selective style of the author of the book." The article points out that by radio carbon dating the age of prehistoric man may be placed at more than 50,000 years. Professor Buswell concludes that it is neither unreaonable nor unscriptural to presume that he has been on earth more than 100,000 years. What is important is not his age but the fact that he was created in the spiritual image of the Creator. In a report such as this one senses the tremendous shift which has taken place in conservative Christian thought in the last two or three decades. When Bernard Ramm's work on science and the Bible was published, Vernon Grounds wrote quite frankly, "Ramm has simply been courageous enough to put on paper ideas which have been long circulated *sub voce* among evangelical scholars.[18]

(3). *The Biblical Adam.* The interpretation of man in Genesis 1-3 as found in a recent work by S. B. Babbage calls for some attention.[19] While the author is an Australian, his book has been published by an evangelical American concern and widely circulated here. In the first chapter alone, "Man and Biblical Revelation," several points are bound to raise theological questions. One is struck by the fact that no where is *a* man, Adam, mentioned—always *man* in a generic sense; by the fact that the views of Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr are presented on every page; and finally by

the fact that both Augustine and Calvin fare rather badly in the hands of the author.

Since man possesses a body, he, like all animals is subject to death. For "physical death is a universal fact of biological life, and man, as a physical organism, is subject to this law of death. He is dust, and to dust he must return."[20] Yet later we read that death is not simply a natural biological event, "it is also the penalty decreed by God for sin."[21]

Death is next explicitly related to the Fall of man, an event explained by Babbage in the spirit of Barth "as nothing less than the ungrateful and sinful repudiation of God's grace."[22] Man does not lose the image of God, either partially or fully in the Fall, for he cannot lose something he never possessed. Since man is a sinner his humanity is perverted and man apparently becomes truly human for the first time when by faith he responds to God's offer of grace.

Augustine's understanding of man is rejected because he interprets the *imago Dei* in terms of rationality, an idea derived from Greek thought in general and the Stoics in particular. Calvin's view of man is rejected on the same grounds.[23]

Another departure from the more traditional approach to the doctrine of man appears in the recent articles by William T. Bruner. Dr. Bruner rejects both the Natural Headship and Federal Headship theories on the matter of the imputation of sin, although he does make it clear that Adam was *a* man. Sin is something which belongs to personality, not to nature. Hence, to explain imputation we must assume "an absolute personal identity of the born sinner with the original sinner."[24] Dr. Bruner argues that:

> The whole human race had one body, one soul, one mind, one will, one consciousness, one personality, one self. Each one of us knew himself as one individual, the self-same person that he is today, and yet we all knew ourselves as Adam. We cannot remember that far back, for our memories are very imperfct and have faded out.[25]

While the views of these scholars may seem far from ours because we have always thought in certain terms, yet possibly to others they may seeem no less impossible than some of our traditional shibboleths. Evangelicals must be ready to consider all such suggestions, and, if they are in error, demonstrate this fact by solid biblical evidence.

3. *Thirdly, there is the tendency to restudy the problem of communications in the light of modern semantics.* This may be illustrated quite well from the discussion of the problem in the *Gordon Review.* The discussion was opened by Dr. Richard K. Curtis of Bethel College.[26] It is not our intention to deal with questions raised as to the value of traditional logic since these were dealt with by Dr. Gordon Clark in two articles of this series.[27] We are concerned at present with the problem as it relates to theology, as argued by Dr. Curtis and later elaborated in a more developed study by Dr. Eugene Nida.

The central problems concerns the question of the relativity or non-relativity of language, our primary medium of communication. The thesis of Dr. Curtis in his first article is stated as follows:

> To label the Scriptures *as we have them* as the *Absolute* Word of God is to hold a position completely untenable in view of but a cursory examination of the evidence. The most we can truthfully say is that our present translations represent the original revelation (which we believe *by faith* to have come from God) to a high degree of probability (such degree varying with the translation-interpreter relationship).[28]

In support of his position Dr. Curtis quoted a passage from a recent work by Dr. Eugene Nida which reads:

> The only absolute in Christianity is the triune God. Anything which involves man, who is finite and limited, must of necessity be limited, and hence relative. Biblical relativism is an obligatory feature of our incarnatonal religion, for without it we would either absolutize human institutions or relativize God.[29]

Dr. Curtis concludes that we can and do live our lives from day to day without the necessity of absolute, authoritarian dogma. The position presented by Dr. Curtis

was criticized by Dr. Roger Nicole of Gordon Divinity School[30] but defended and maintained by Dr. Curtis in two subsequent articles.[31] The discussion was then brought to a conclusion (for the present apparently) by Dr. Nida with a defense of the non-absolute position.[32]

Dr. Nida, early in his discussion, warns against our becoming like Don Quixote and spend our time charging medieval windmills by fighting ideas which long since died a natural death. Today, people aren't so interested in harmonizing Genesis with contemporary science or an archaeological defense of the inerrancy of the Scriptures as they used to be. The basic questions of interest now are concerned with the matter of the communicability of our faith. Hence, we ought to be more involved with such questions as:

> What is the relationship between the Bible and the Word of God? To what extent may divine communication be non-verbal? How may word symbols which have a particular meaning within the language of revelation be properly translated into another language, in which there are no exact equivalents?[33]

Today the men who deal with this problem of communication must face the fact that: (1) no two people mean exactly the same thing by anyone word, (2) no two words in any language have completely identical meanings, and (3) no two or more words in any two or more languages have exactly the same meanings.[34] Words have meanings only in terms of the cultural backgrounds of the speakers or writers in question.

Dr. Nida concludes on the basis of his analysis of language that "absolute communication is impossible." But, although communication is not absolute, "it is attained to a degree of overwhelming probability."[35] This non-absolute nature of communication does not mean though, that all is relative and that one cannot believe in an absolute God. Even though a formulation in language may not be absolute in its form, "It may nevertheless symbolize (in the sense of 'stand for') an absolute truth."[36] Thus he insists that "the fact that the linguistic forms of our doctrinal statements cannot be regarded as absolute does not mean that they are incapable of revealing truth about an absolute God."[37]

In speaking of God's communication to us Dr. Nida reminds us that we are not just limited to the Bible—the record of God's self-disclosure at certain crucial times and places.[38] God also communicates by means of the Holy Spirit. Thus we have the historic revelation of God in the Bible, the verbal revelation; and the non-verbal communication to the believer by the Holy Spirit.

The objection to the non-absolute position on the problem of communication Dr. Nida finds mainly in ourselves.

> In attempting to understand this problem of non-absolute communication we often suffer from certain emotional attitudes which tend to color our thinking, for we have become so familiar with, and confident of, our creedal formulations that we regard any suggestion as to their non-absolute character as being a reflection upon God Himself.[39]

Dr. Nicole, in his reply to the first article by Dr. Curtis takes strong exception to the basic thesis there expressed: that the Scriptures *as we have them* cannot be taken as the *Absolute* word of God.[40] The proposition of biblical relativity because Scripture "is couched in human language, which is always relative,"[41] would undercut the authority of the Word of God, according to Dr. Nicole. The Scriptures must be approached in terms of their being the infallible Word of God. How can this be true if the language is relative?

It should be pointed, however, that Dr. Curtis does not state the problem in quite the way in which Dr. Nicole approaches it. In his original statement Dr. Curtis underscored the words *"as we have them."* He is not speaking of the original autographs which we don't have but about the copies of the original as we have them now. Indeed in speaking to the question Dr. Nicole himself writes:

> Every informed theologian does, of course, acknowledge that the existence of variant readings in the manuscripts of the Scriptures necessitates the work of textual criticism and that our efforts at reconstructing the text of the original autographs do not always achieve ultimate finality.[42]

Is Dr. Nicole, then, also a relativist? It would seem so, for regardless of the reason or reasons involved, if we must agree that we are unable to achieve "ultimate finality" then it is difficult to understand how we may speak of the Scriptures "as we have them" as the "Absolute" Word of God.

Perhaps the difference in viewpoint lies, in part at least, in the distinction which must be made between an absolute of faith and an absolute of logic. While by faith we believe in the absolute authority of the Word of God, yet when we approach the problem from the perspective of logical verification we are limited to the area of probability. What we may believe as Christians as certainty can only be demonstrated logically as probability. Hence, this problem of relativity is always with us because of the fact that the revelation of God is involved in history.

An illustration of this problem may be found in a consideration of the resurrection of Christ. While faith testifies to the certainty of the resurrection,—for what Christian could possibly rest securely in the high probability of an empty tomb, yet there is ever with us the problem of the verification of the resurrection of Christ as an historical event. Dr. Edward J. Carnell points this out quite well when he remarks that the Christian claim "cannot rise above rational probability."[43] But he insists that:

> This admission that Christianity's proof for the resurrection of Christ cannot rise above probability is not a form of weakness; it is rather an indication that the Christian is in possession of a world-view which is making a sincere effort to come to grips with actual history.[44]

Should not the position of Drs. Curtis and Nida be viewed in the same perspective? In any case here is an area of investigation which has not yet received the attention it deserves by evangelical scholars.

4. *In the fourth place there is a tendency to reconsider and restate our understanding of the doctrine of revelation.* We have but to point to the large number of articles, as well as several books on the whole question of revelation and inspiration in recent years. The most recent discussion among evangelicals is to be found in the symposium edited by Dr. Carl Henry. This volume was not available at the time of the preparation of this paper, although excerpts from it have been appearing in *Christianity Today*.

The reconsideration of this subject by evangelicals has been prompted by the great emphasis placed on revelation in recent theological discussions. The advent of neosuperernaturalism has caused many to look anew at the meaning of revelation. Perhaps recent discussions among evangelicals can best be characterized as an attempt to retain the truth of the past, while, at the same time, trying to avoid many of the emphases and modes of expression of the past. To what extent this can be achieved still remains to be seen. A brief look at but a few of the recent expressions will show that evangelicals are still attempting to express the same truth in widely differing linguistic expressions.

Dr. Vernon Grounds discussed the question recently in *Eternity*. We must avoid all suggestion of dictation in dealing with Scripture for the writers were not automata, secretaries "to whom God gave His Truth word by word."[45] "Evangelicalism insists that the authors of the Bible engaged in research, employed their own unique circles of thought, and wrote in their own personal tyles."[46] We admit that errors have crept into the Bible as it has been transmitted across the centuries. Hence,

> The Bible which the Christian possesses in the twentieth century is a copy of an indefectible original, a copy marred by transcriptional mistakes and scribal blunders which careful criticism must strive to eliminate.[47]

Yet other evangelicals state the case as they see it in quite different words, although the effort may well be to convey the same essential meaning. Edward J. Young writes on the problem in this fashion. The prophets were lifted up and carried along by the Spirit. That which is picked up and carried along is absolutely passive. "So the writers of Scripture who spake from God were passive. It was the Spirit of God who bore them. It was He who was active, and they who were passive."[48] While to many evangelicals language like this speaks too strongly of dictation yet Dr. Young insists that the human writers of Scripture "were in no sense mere automata, but, rather, men whose own gifts and talents were brought into usage in the composition of Scripture."[49] We do not have these original documents, however, but copies which "do give the actual Word of God. No point of doctrine has been affected."[50] Many would have a problem of reconciling the seemingly opposing statements found here.

Dr. R. L. Harris emphasizes the need for rejecting dictation or any mechanical idea of inspiration. But the problem of relativity is ever before us still, for although we have a verbally infallible original, our copies are close enough "for all practical purposes."[51] Again, "some of our translations are more or less close to the original"[52] And, "we may say that to all intents and purposes we have the words that prophets and apostles wrote—and this was nothing less than the verbally inspired Word of God."[53]

The Wheaton Statement approaches the question from the conceptual aspect.[54] Ideas or thoughts are conveyed by means of symbols or words, so that inspiration extends from the thoughts to the words. "Scripture conveys the thought which God wished to communicate and the thoughts symbolized by these words are all true." "The biblical writers made their own choice of words, expressed themselves in their own style, and revealed their own particular personalities." "The message which the biblical writers proclaimed was decidedly their own. God, however, prepared them, illuminated them, and divinely energized them, so that their prophetic message would be at the same time His divine message to men."

The Wheaton Statement, it is noted, makes room for figurative, allegoric, and symbolic language. Inspiration applies to all, no matter what the type of literature used. But we must be careful to interpret in the light of the total context and the natural setting.

In a special interview Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer explained his personal understanding of the "Statement" on several important points. A specific question raised concerned the point of allegory. Is, for example, the Genesis account of Satan allegory?, he was asked. The freedom of the Wheaton Statement may be illustrated by Dr. Kantzer's reply:

> For me, personally, the story of Satan and the serpent is more difficult [than the story of the creation of Eve]. I hesitate to press either the figurative or a wholly literal view upon the account. I should insist that a "Serpent" was there and that the "Serpent" spoke. It seems to me that there is no special reason for not taking the snake in literal fashion as representing an embodiment of Satan.[55]

The point, as I understand it, is that the account is inspired regardless of one way of interpretation. Dr. Kantzer is willing to grant the possibility of a difference on interpretation as to what may be history and what may be allegory in certain cases. This spirit of openness is worthy of cultivation in the interchanges needed today in evangelical thought.

In the very first issue of *Christianity Today* the position of the Editorial Board was set forth as "plenary" inspiration.[56] This was reiterated at the beginning of the third year.[57] Dr. Carl Henry, in discussing the question in two articles in

the journal advocates verbal inspiration.[58] Revelation is broader than the Bible but the statements of the biblical writers are to be identified with divine revelation.

> According to the evangelical view, the Bible is a record of special revelation, and a witness to special revelation, if by the terms "record" and "witness" we do not mean the Bible is *only* a record and witness.[59]

He concludes his article by saying that "the language of revelation, like the language of prayer, takes the form of concepts and words."[60] No doubt Dr. Henry is endeavoring to emphasize the conceptual aspect of revelation which must find expression in some form of symbolization.

More recently in this same journal Dr. Berkouwer discussed the whole question of revelation without reference at all to the problem of inspiration.[61] We are not to assume by this that he does not have a doctrine of inspiration but rather that it was not his intention to deal with the matter in this particular way. He is concerned with the fact of the revelation of God in history.

J. I. Packer of Great Britain defends the evangelical view in the following terms, in a recent article published in Great Britain.

> Thus, if we call Scripture *infallible*, we mean, not that we suppose it will answer any questions we like to ask it, but that we are resolved to trust its guidance absolutely on all subjects with which it deals, and that we have no right to question anything that it lays down; for that would be doubting God. Again, if we call Scripture *inerrant*, we mean, not that we think we can demonstrate its accuracy in stating facts, but that we receive its statements as true on the credit of its divine Author, and deny that we have any right to doubt them; for that would be making God a liar. Again if we speak of Scripture (as many good theologians have done before us) as *divinely dictated*, we are not propounding a curious psychological theory of the mode of inspiration, but using a theological metaphor to express the fact that God caused to be written precisely what He wished, and His words were in no way altered or corrupted by the human agent through whom they were written down; so that we have no right to say of anything in Scripture that it is merely a human idea and no part of God's word. Again, if we say that Scripture should be interpreted *literally*, we do not mean that we know in advance that there are no metaphors of symbols in the Bible, but that we must allow Scripture to explain itself to us in its own natural, intended sense and that we have no right to spiritualize it after our fancy, nor to impose on it literary categories (allegory, for instance, or myth) which it does not itself warrant, but must let it fix its own sense by its own standards.[62]

Although time does not permit an analysis of Dr. Packer's position, some observations are in order. The acceptance of the Scriptures as infallible is completely a doctrine of our faith. It is not to be questioned in any way lest we doubt God Himself. Likewise inerrancy is not a truth which can be demonstrated, but one which must be believed lest God be made a liar. Dr. Packer believes it is quite all right to speak of the Scriptures as "divinely dictated" so long as we make it clear that we really don't mean dictation. Finally, we may speak of the literal interpretation of Scripture so long as we understand that this doesn't really mean literal all the time. Such a presentation as this does little to help the evangelical cause and probably much to harm it. Considerable misunderstanding and confusion could be avoided by using symbols which communicate what we rally mean, rather than by attempting to put new content into such terms as "dictation" and so beclouding the issue further.

Perhaps this matter, which has now taken too long, should be brought to a conclusion by a reference to the matter of inspiration in the statement of the Westminster divines. After we have considered all of the reverence, majesty, excellence, and perfection of Scripture, they write, the final test of inspiration is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in our souls, for we read, "yet not withstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and Divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."[63]

The Christian faith is built upon the idea of revelation—that God has spoken uniquely in history. It can hardly be doubted that he gave his revelation through prophetic utterances under the guidance of his Spirit. However, the Christian view is a completely supernatural view. Hence, the work of the Spirit in the preservation and copying of the manuscripts, the superintendence of the translations into symbols understandable by men no matter what their culture or language, and finally the illuminating work of the Spirit in the soul of the individual to whom God comes in his Word, both living and written, can never be overlooked nor bypassed as one considers the Christian idea of revelation.

Role of the Evangelical Theological Society. About two years ago *Christian Life* published an article under the title, "Is Evangelical Theology Changing?" With all its good intentions it is unfortunate that the thrust of the article was so widely misunderstood. Many seemed to assume that this was an attack on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. To some it seemed that we were bent on changing the Bible itself. Of course no such thought was ever in the mind of the contributors.

Yet, in answer to the question we must recognize that theology is always changing. Theology is man's attempt to relate the unchanging Truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and recorded in our unchanging Bible to the problems of the changing world in which we live. If theology were to remain static we should be left far behind, totally unable to relate our unchanging faith to the world in which we live. Theology is simply our efforts to make the gospel of Christ relevant to a dying world. In this great task there is, and always will be, a place for the efforts of those who make up our Evangelical Theological Society.

We are reminded as we gather here on this occasion that this is our tenth year of meeting together. In this year before us we bring to a close the first decade of our Society. Perhaps it is fitting for us to consider again the matter of our existence. Why was ETS organized in the first place? What is our function? Are we accomplishing the primary aims which brought this Society into being?

Certainly this aim is not to be achieved by following one another around in the same circle as Dr. Tozer so well pointed out. Progress is attained only when there are those who are willing to engage in creative explorations. Unfortunately the tendency has been in the past to evaluate sincere scholarly efforts as evidence of heretical theological deviations. This has not always been true, but it certainly has happened. The result has been to stifle academic endeavor and to place a damper on any novelty in theological expression. Let us hope that that day is slipping into the past in American evangelical endeavor.

This does not mean that we shall not evaluate the work of each other. In fact quite the contrary should be the case. It does mean, that ETS will best be fulfilling its function when the sincere efforts of others are evaluated in an atmosphere unclouded by theological witch hunting. At the same time we know that we shall all make mistakes—many of them. No doubt I have made a big one this evening! But let us strive as brethren in Christ to judge the efforts of others in the spirit of love which should motivate all the work of Jesus Christ. 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 and we shall not deviate far, nor long, from that normative center which should always be our goal. 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.

We believe that no man is omniscient and infallible. We reserve such thoughts for God our Creator. Today we often see through a glass darkly, but one day face to face. Let us strive to know as best we can the Truth that is found in the Christian gospel and to relate it to a constantly changing world. And let us also, as we endeavor to achieve this goal, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. By so doing it seems to us that the Evangelical Theological Society may best serve in the advance of the Christian faith.

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