

EVANGELICALISM: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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I. WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Evangelicalism—past, present, and future—is a story of complexities. Who are these evangelicals? What do they believe? Where did they come from?¹ How should evangelicalism be understood in North America? Great Britain? Europe? Other parts of the world?² What does evangelicalism have to do with politics?³ Are there differences between “mainline evangelicals,” and “mainline Protestants?”⁴ How should evangelicalism be understood in light of the denominational distinctives maintained by Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Assemblies of God, and others?⁵ What is the current state of evangelicalism? What are its future prospects? These are some of the questions we wish to explore in this article.

II. EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

Evangelicals are men and women who love Jesus Christ, love the Bible, and love the gospel message. They are gospel people. A hallmark of the movement is a willingness to cooperate together in evangelism, missions, and educational efforts. Evangelicalism is a

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¹In many ways, the questions raised by John Woodbridge and David Wells four decades ago remain with us today (David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They are Changing* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1975]).

²Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013).

³Kenneth J. Collins, *Power, Politics, and the Fragmentation of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012).

⁴Gabriel Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Thomas Oden, *Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of Life in Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003).

⁵For example, see David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

crossdenominational movement that emphasizes classical Protestant theology, which is best understood today as a culturally-engaged, historically-shaped response to mainline liberalism on the one hand and reactionary fundamentalism on the other.⁶

Evangelicalism, best understood, can be characterized by a “big tent” approach from Pietists to Confessionalists, from activists to quietists, from Lutherans to Anglicans, from Trinitarian Pentecostals to evangelistic Methodists, from social justice Mennonites to tall steeple Presbyterians, from those who love the Gettys to those who love the Gaithers, from dozens of small denominations that dot the landscape of this country to Southern Baptists, the largest evangelical group in the United States, in addition to an untold number of special-interest parachurch groups.⁷ Evangelicals are heirs of the Reformation from the sixteenth century; of Puritanism and Pietism from the seventeenth century; of the eighteenth and nineteenth century revival and awakening movements; and particularly of the postfundamentalists coming out of the twentieth century’s modernist-fundamentalists controversies.⁸ Martin Marty says that looking at religion in America one cannot miss evangelicalism—it would be like looking across the United States and missing the Rocky Mountains.⁹

Various efforts have been made to define what it means to be an evangelical.¹⁰ In the simplest terms, as several others have somewhat facetiously noted, an evangelical is someone who likes Billy Graham; a liberal is someone who thinks Billy Graham is a fundamentalist; and a fundamentalist is someone who thinks Billy Graham is apostate. Some have said that you know an evangelical by the hymns they sing. Others have suggested that you know evangelicals by a particular kind of piety or experience—that is, you know them by their heart, you know them when you are with them. George Marsden, one of the leading historians of the evangelical movement, sometimes describes true evangelicals as card-carrying evangelicals.¹¹ John Woodbridge, following Kenneth Kantzer and Carl E. H. Henry, says you know an evangelical by these things, but one must also include their doctrine—you know evangelicals by

⁶Mark A Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity An Introduction* (Oxford Blackwell, 2001)

⁷Michael A G Haykin and Kenneth J Stewart, eds, *The Advent of Evangelicalism Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville Broadman & Holman, 2008)

⁸Bruce L Shelley, “Evangelicalism,” in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed Daniel G Reid et al (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1990), 412-13, and the essays in *American Evangelicalism*, ed Darren Dochuk, Thomas S Kidd, and Kurt W Peterson (South Bend University of Notre Dame, 2014)

⁹Martin E Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1976), 80

¹⁰Donald W Dayton and Robert K Johnston, eds, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1991)

¹¹George M Marsden, “Contemporary American Evangelicalism,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, 27-39

what they believe.¹² I believe there is some truth in all of these observations.

III. SHAPING INFLUENCES THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The early sixteenth century movement led by Martin Luther, known as the Reformation, was shaped by the search for answers to many questions. Two in particular seem paramount: 1) What is the meaning of justification? and 2) What is the basis for religious authority? The responses that were given in the sixteenth century were as follows: 1) Justification is a declaration that believers are righteous by grace alone through faith alone in the atoning work and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and 2) the source of religious authority is primarily found in the Bible, not a bishop or a pope.

Following the deaths of Martin Luther (1546) and Phillip Melancthon (1560), the Reformation trajectory began to get off track at the end of the sixteenth century.¹³ Two important works, representing the best of Pietists, among others, helped to bring renewal to seventeenth century Christians: 1) Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*, 1675); and 2) John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). The Pietists proposed heartfelt faith, regular Bible study, consecrated prayer, and mutual care in the churches as the emphasis needed for renewal and spiritual health.¹⁴

While we can connect the evangelical movement with the teaching of the apostles, with the early church consensus as it developed through the great church councils, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century, evangelicalism is perhaps best traced to the revivals of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Many historians, including Doug Sweeney in his fine work, *The American Evangelical Story*, point to the experiences of John and Charles Wesley with the Moravians, and to the "surprising work of God" associated with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in the first Great Awakening.¹⁶

Though much has been made of the involvement of many evangelicals in the political arena, including the extremely insightful work by Kenneth Collins, *Power, Politics and the Fragmentation of*

¹²John D. Woodbridge, "The Princetonians and Biblical Authority," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 251-86; Wells and Woodbridge, *The Evangelicals*, 9-19; Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

¹³Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013).

¹⁴F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); F. Ernest Stoeffler, ed., *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

¹⁵David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Nathan O' Hatch, *The Gospel in America* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

¹⁶So Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Evangelicalism, evangelicalism is best understood not as a political identity, but a confessional identity focused 1) on the gospel, 2) on personal conversion or the response to the gospel; 3) on the Bible as the source of that gospel message; and 4) on service or activism, the living out of that message (borrowing from David Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral).¹⁷

Alister McGrath, in his fine book on *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, suggests six aspects of evangelicalism:

- 1) supreme authority of Scripture, 2) majesty and Lordship of Jesus Christ as only Savior for sinful humanity, 3) a belief in the Trinitarian God—including the important work of the Holy Spirit, 4) the need for personal conversion, 5) the priority of evangelism and missions, and 6) the importance of Christian community¹⁸

The Lutherans in the sixteenth century first used the term *evangelical* in a common way to describe the churches that believed in salvation by grace alone through faith, and held the Bible to be the Christian's supreme authority in all matters of life (those two questions that were mentioned earlier).¹⁹ During the sixteenth century, largely because of the German language itself, people came to equate *evangelical* with *Protestant*—especially with Lutherans, often using the terms interchangeably. The two Reformation doctrines of *sola scriptura* (the Bible is the church's ultimate authority) and *sola fide* (salvation is by faith alone) still inform and shape twenty-first century evangelicalism. These two defining emphases are often called the "material principle" (the gospel), and the "formal principle" (the Scriptures).²⁰ The seventeenth century added to these doctrinal essentials the need for personal, heartfelt, life-transforming, experiential faith. The movement known as Puritanism, similar to Pietism, stressed conversion and grace and downplayed liturgy and sacraments, maintaining that a conversion to Jesus Christ impacted all of life.²¹

Both the Puritan and Pietist movements were used of God to awaken a cold orthodoxy and to revive scholastic Protestantism.²² While seeking to address the spiritual decline in the Lutheran,

¹⁷Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, also, Wells and Woodbridge, *The Evangelicals*

¹⁸Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1995), 53-87

¹⁹Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog* (Minneapolis Augsburg, 1988), 136-73

²⁰Bernard L. Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage* (Waco Word, 1973), esp ch 2, "Evangelical Theology Belongs to Reformation Theology," 23-40

²¹Bruce Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1967)

²²Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York Harper and Row, 1957), Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1991), Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven Yale, 2013), Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1979)

Reformed, and Anglican churches, experiential faith was the key, emphasizing prayer, warm-hearted fellowship, and evangelistic zeal. The best example of the Pietists were the Moravians—led by Count Zinzendorf. The Moravians sent missionaries to many lands decades before William Carey, who is often known as the “Father of Modern Missions.” Further, the Pietists had a most significant influence on the eighteenth century revivals, including the conversion account of John Wesley.²³

By the end of the eighteenth century, the most evangelistic of the churches in both Great Britain and North America were the Baptists and Methodists, clearly the fastest growing groups—even impacting the slave community so that, as Joel Carpenter of Calvin College has observed, many African Americans found Jesus to be a “Rock in a weary land”—who alone could set them free.²⁴ In the final decade of the eighteenth century, William Carey set out for India launching a worldwide missions movement that would shape what would become a truly global evangelicalism by the beginning of the twenty-first century.²⁵

The evangelical movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century looked somewhat different from the Reformation and post-Reformation movements two hundred years earlier. While the Reformed theology at Princeton led by Charles and A. A. Hodge, along with B. B. Warfield, shaped the thought-leaders of the day, evangelicalism, as a whole, placed a greater emphasis on personal, warm-hearted, experiential faith, as well as cooperation across denominational lines, aggressive evangelistic efforts, conversionist views of salvation, pious living, and revivalist expectations.²⁶ D. L. Moody became the most influential figure in this regard on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century, not only for his evangelistic preaching, but for social efforts, urban renewal, as well as his transdenominational emphasis.²⁷

Thus by the time of the Civil War in both North and South, Protestantism could be equated with evangelicalism and evangelicalism could be equated with Protestantism. Indeed, historian William G. McLaughlin has dared to say that the story of American evangelicalism during the nineteenth century is the story of America itself, with its emphasis on rugged individualism, laissez faire economic theory, the Protestant ethic regarding both work and

²³John R. Weinlick, “Moravianism in the American Colonies,” in *Continental Pietism*, 123–63

²⁴Joel A. Carpenter, “The Fellowship of Kindred Minds: Evangelical Identity and the Quest for Christian Unity,” in *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004)

²⁵Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life Witness of William Carey* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991)

²⁶Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1989)

²⁷Michael S. Hamilton, “The Interdenominational Evangelicalism of D. L. Moody and the Problem of Fundamentalism,” in *American Evangelicalism*, 230–80

morality, and the millennial hope in the Manifest Destiny.²⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, that was all changing. Evangelicals saw that the churches were losing their connection with the truth of the gospel message made clear in an inspired and authoritative Bible.²⁹

As the twentieth century began, new movements were launched to revive, renew, correct, and sometimes even to separate from the established Protestant denominations—which evangelicals viewed as growing more liberal and more worldly. Prior to the Civil War, evangelicalism was understood to be the equivalent of Protestantism. After the Civil War, evangelicals wrestled with the changes taking place all around them, including Darwinism, naturalism, biblical criticism, a postslavery society, pragmatism, as well as expanding urbanization and industrialization.³⁰

As the twentieth century began, the “modernist/fundamentalist” controversy moved publicly into full force. In 1910, the “five fundamentals” were clarified by the Northern Presbyterians reflecting on earlier versions spelled out by the Niagara Prophecy Conference. These five doctrinal tenets, which focused on the full and complete inspiration and authority of Scripture, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the atoning death and resurrection of Christ, and the historical reality of the biblical miracles, were aimed at the primary challenges of liberalism. The publication of *The Fundamentals*,³¹ which included ninety articles, edited by R. A. Torrey and funded by Lyman and Milton Stewart, were well-reasoned, serious, calm, thoughtful, not shrill, and generally quite persuasive. More than thirty of these articles dealt with the nature of Scripture. Authors even included what some considered to be more moderate voices like the Southern Baptist leader E. Y. Mullins and British theologian James Orr.

In 1919, however, fundamentalist leader William Bell Riley said the five fundamentals were not enough. He wanted also to stress separatism, dispensationalism, and lifestyle taboos, which continue to be distinguishing marks for many aspects of the fundamentalist movement nearly a century later.³² In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick

²⁸William G McLoughlin, “Introductions,” in *The American Evangelicals, 1800–1900*, ed William E McLoughlin (Gloucester, MA Peter Smith, 1976)

²⁹George M Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1991), 7–61, Bill J Leonard, “The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism,” *RevExp* 79 (1982) 5–17

³⁰Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York Oxford, 1997), Stewart Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Hamden, CT Archon, 1963), Norman Furness, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven Yale, 1954), and Andrew Himes, *The Sword of the Lord* (Seattle Chuara, 2011)

³¹R A Torrey, ed , *The Fundamentals*, 12 vols (Los Angeles Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917)

³²Timothy P Weber, “William Bell Riley,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed Timothy George and David S Dockery (Nashville Broadman & Holman, 1990), 351–65, William Vance Trollinger Jr, *God’s Empire William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison University of Wisconsin, 1990)

preached his famous sermon at the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win? No!"³³ In 1923, representing the more conservative perspective, Princeton scholar J. Gresham Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism*, with the word *and* being key in the title so that Machen treated the subject as two different religions.³⁴ In 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, the Scopes Trial gained the attention of the nation. The fundamentalists won the battle, but seemingly lost the war.³⁵ Prior to the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, denominational distinctives were much more clearly recognized and understood:

- Lutherans Word and Faith
- Reformed and Presbyterian Sovereignty of God
- Anglicanism Prayer Book and Worship
- Baptists Scripture, Conversion, and Baptism
- Quakers Inner Light
- Methodists Heartfelt Religion
- Holiness Piety and Separatism
- Restorationists New Testament Church
- Pentecostals though just beginning in the early twentieth century, emphasis on the power of the Spirit³⁶

Such clarity began to dissipate with the rapid fragmentation that followed the modernists/fundamentalists controversies, and with the rise of a new generation of evangelical leaders who became more visibly identified following the Second World War.

In 1942 new winds began to blow with the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals, which created a type of evangelical ecumenism in which commonalities were seen to be more important than denominational distinctives. In 1947, a new theological seminary was founded by evangelist Charles Fuller, designed to create a new and scholarly evangelicalism. Fuller Seminary's young faculty included E. J. Carnell, Carl F. H. Henry, Wilbur Smith, and Harold Lindsell. The Evangelical Theological Society, with a shared commitment to biblical inerrancy, was birthed

³³Gary Dornien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology Idealism, Realism and Modernity, 1900–1950* (Louisville Westminster John Knox, 2003), 203–8

³⁴J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1987)

³⁵Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York Basic, 1997)

³⁶David S. Dockery, "Denominationalism: Historical Developments, Contemporary Challenges, and Global Opportunities," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity*, ed. Anthony L. Chute, Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton Crossway, 2013), 209–31

in 1949.³⁷ That same year, Billy Graham's evangelistic crusade in Los Angeles put Graham on the map, thanks to the unbelievable media attention provided by the *Los Angeles Times*. Now Graham had become the movement's architect and spokesman, Henry, the movement's theologian, and Harold Ockenga, the movement's organizer.³⁸ Others like Kenneth Kantzer, Ted Engstrom, and Bernard Ramm, to name a few, also carved out significant roles. The 1957 New York Crusade was pivotal for defining the nonseparatistic approach of Mr. Graham and the new evangelicals. The Fundamentalist leaders labeled Graham as apostate because he violated the separatist tendencies of the Fundamentalist movement. This story is told with great insight by historian Grant Wacker in his splendid new work on Mr. Graham called *America's Pastor*.³⁹

In 1959, E. J. Carnell, the brilliant theologian at Fuller Seminary, wrote *The Case for Orthodoxy* (which really should have had the inverted title of Machen's 1923 work, namely, "Christianity and Fundamentalism"). Carnell declared that Fundamentalism was suspicious, separatistic, and divisive—pointing out that they failed to agree on core beliefs, thus declaring that fundamentalism was "orthodoxy gone cultic."⁴⁰

By contrast, the "new Evangelicals," like Harold Ockenga and Carl F. H. Henry, focused on central core beliefs, stressing the importance of cooperation, scholarship, and cultural engagement.⁴¹ In the 1960s, the mainline denominations had seemingly lost their way. Living in a time of racial unrest, protests, rock and roll celebrations, love-ins and sit-ins, amidst the sexual revolution, the mainline denominations shifted their focus away from the gospel to social issues like the Vietnam War, civil rights, a dominant focus on gender and sexuality, with proposals such as Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* and John A. T. Robinson and Thomas Altizer's "Death of God" making headlines.⁴² The continued focus of the mainline on issues other than the gospel have in the words of former *Los Angeles Times* writer, Russell Chandler, moved the "mainline" to the "sideline" in the twenty-first century. This broad evangelical movement, largely shaped between 1940 and 1960, and which became so influential in the last half of the twentieth century,

³⁷Millard J. Erickson, *The New Evangelical Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1968), 13–45.

³⁸Matthew J. Hall and Owen Strachan, eds., *Essential Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

³⁹Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2014), 12–15.

⁴⁰E. J. Carnell, *The Case of Orthodoxy* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959).

⁴¹Owen Strachan, *Reawakening the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

⁴²Helen Lee Turner, "Fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention: The Crystallization of a Millennialist Vision (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1990); Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, rev. ed. (1965; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

replaced the mainline denominations in the center of American religious life.⁴³

IV. EVANGELICAL ESSENTIALS

Fundamentalism, best understood as a reaction to theological liberalism, modernism, Darwinism, and the expression of these movements in culture, developed through five or six phases in the twentieth century:

- Moving from a defense of historical orthodoxy,
- to the fundamentals,
- to fundamentalism,
- to harsh legalism and separatism,
- leading to withdrawal from denominations,
- and finally, to becoming hardline and isolationist, splintering into several groups.⁴⁴

Evangelical leaders in the middle of the twentieth century rejected fundamentalism, while holding onto the fundamentals represented in the best of the Christian tradition that runs through the Reformation, Puritanism, Pietism, and the Great Awakenings.⁴⁵

Carl F. H. Henry, in 1947, in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, put forth three characteristics that distinguished evangelicals from fundamentalists:

- not “anti-intellectual”;
- not *only* “other worldly”; and
- not separatist/legalistic.⁴⁶

Instead, evangelicals could be characterized as being historically orthodox, gospel centered, culturally engaged, and trans-denominational.

As can be seen from the contributors to Henry’s important work on *Revelation and the Bible* and the initial consulting editorial team at *Christianity Today*, Henry viewed biblical inerrancy as a marker of evangelical consistency rather than one of the evangelical identity.⁴⁷

⁴³Russell Chandler, *Racing Toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America’s Religious Future* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

⁴⁴C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); Barry Hankins, ed., *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

⁴⁵Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*.

⁴⁶Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

⁴⁷Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958). Contributors included G. C. Berkower, F. F. Bruce, Paul K. Jewett, among others.

Both he and J. I. Packer disagreed with Harold Lindsell at this point when Lindsell published *Battle for the Bible* in 1976. Lindsell pushed for a belief in biblical inerrancy to be a marker of evangelical identity. Henry and Packer, while affirming the importance of biblical inerrancy, defining and defending it in a more full-orbed way than almost anyone else, nevertheless, differed with Lindsell at this point.⁴⁸

Following this brief historical overview, let us look more closely at the essence of the evangelical movement, and evangelical beliefs. Andrew Walls, in his work, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, has noted that renewal movements, whether Pietism, Puritanism, or the evangelical awakenings, have started with a premise: something is wrong—the church is in need of renewal.⁴⁹ It has been said that the evangelical movement is a protest against a Christianity that is not “Christian enough.” The Puritans said this about the Church of England, claiming that it was only halfway reformed. The revivalists maintained that the churches were full of unconverted people. The critiques of the church and a call for renewal have been central features of evangelical-type movements for almost five hundred years.⁵⁰

Challenges within fundamentalism itself in the twentieth century and the emphasis on unity among the evangelical leaders help us understand the development of the evangelical movement over the past seventy-five years. Fundamentalism grew out of the 1920s controversies. Fundamentalism was hard-lined, harsh, and isolationist coming out of World War I. It was as though the orthodox Christian faith had completely dissipated in the eyes of some. The problem was that fundamentalism struggled to distinguish the core of the Christian faith. As Carl F. H. Henry and Harold Ockenga both observed, fundamentalists failed to differentiate the importance of the deity of Christ from questions like the permissibility of attending movies.⁵¹ Distinguishing evangelical essentials from secondary and tertiary matters, though difficult at times, has been at least an evangelical ideal through the years.⁵²

In the twenty-first century, evangelicals, for the most part, have attempted to refocus around the Bible and the gospel (*evangelion*) of 1 Cor 15. In doing so, people have discovered that the question of boundaries cannot be set aside. Yet at the same time, we must also recognize that the issue of boundaries is often defined differently from group to group, from denomination to denomination, and that

⁴⁸J. I. Packer, “Notes on Biblical Inerrancy,” Lecture 12 (Regent College, Fall 1978), Carl F. H. Henry, “The Battle for the Bible,” in *Conversations with Carl Henry Christianity for Today* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 23–28

⁴⁹Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 81

⁵⁰Donald G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 13–29, 101–58

⁵¹Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco: Word, 1976)

⁵²Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* (Waco: Word, 1967)

this issue represents one of the true challenges of this transdenominational movement.⁵³

I believe there remains a place for a “large umbrella evangelicalism” with a focus on core beliefs. We certainly recognize the need for parameters but also recognize the tensions involved over where they should be placed. Those who focus on boundaries struggle with how to implement them, often to the neglect of a clear focus on the center. The relationship of the center to the boundaries looks different from denomination to denomination, from group to group.

Thus it is best to understand evangelicalism as a large umbrella group that includes many submovements and thousands of parachurch organizations. Robert Wuthnow, the brilliant Princeton sociologist of religion, has argued, and I believe rightly so, that a major shift in the structure of American religion had taken place by the end of the twentieth century, a shift now best understood in terms of the commonality held across the historic denominational lines, rather than within traditional denominational structures.⁵⁴ Every major denomination now has its own renewal evangelical movements. It may be difficult to define the edge of the circle, except from denomination to denomination, but the core or anchor of evangelicalism seems clear viewed both historically and biblically.⁵⁵

For evangelicals, as with historic orthodoxy through the centuries, the church’s basic beliefs are centered and grounded in Jesus Christ. As John Stott has written, “The highest of all Christian motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission nor love for sinners, but rather zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ—a concern for his majesty and glory in all things.”⁵⁶ As we have noted, Alister McGrath insightfully observes that in addition to the majesty and lordship of Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinful humanity, evangelicals have built the core of the Christian faith around the following: the Trinitarian God; salvation by grace through faith; the need for personal conversion; and the truths made known to us in a fully truthful and authoritative Bible.⁵⁷ This summary sounds similar to C. S. Lewis in his best-known work, *Mere Christianity*. But we should not hear the Lewis plea as a call for a minimalist Christianity. “Mere” for Lewis, the classical scholar, corresponds to the Latin, *vere*, meaning “true, real, sure,” not *vix*, meaning “barely, hardly, no more than this.”⁵⁸

⁵³Millard J Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1997), 82–86, D A Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1999), 347–67 Kevin Vanhoozer has creatively suggested the need for identifying “anchored sets” as a way to address these matters

⁵⁴Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1988)

⁵⁵McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 61–62

⁵⁶John Stott, *Evangelical Truth* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1999), 13–34

⁵⁷McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 53 ff

⁵⁸C S Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York Macmillan, 1943)

Evangelical interpreters as diverse as Timothy George (Southern Baptist), Mark Ellingsen (Lutheran), Alister McGrath (Anglican), Mark Noll (Presbyterian), David Bebbington (British Baptist), George Marsden (Reformed), and others such as Tommy Kidd, Michael Hamilton, Barry Hankins, and Doug Sweeney are all in consensus agreement with this core understanding of evangelicalism. As we have seen, evangelicalism has a historical meaning and a ministry connectedness, but we need not fail to see that it also includes a truth claim, a theologically and historically shaped meaning. As Kenneth Kantzer reminded us, we cannot and must not miss the fact that evangelicals have focused on the authoritative Scripture and the gospel, understood in the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

Carl Henry maintained that the term *evangelical* has its roots in the Greek term "*euangelion*," meaning "good tidings" or "good news." Yet, he said, the good news is not the dramatic death of Jesus of Nazareth. Nor is the incarnation per se good news, nor the sinless life of Jesus per se, nor the Lord's return per se. For humanity in the grip of sin, all such realities are terrifying. The good news, he claimed, is the scripturally anticipated-and-fulfilled promise that God's sinless Messiah died in the place of otherwise doomed sinners, and moreover, that the crucified Redeemer arose bodily from the dead to resurrection life as helmsman of the eternal moral and spiritual world.⁶⁰

Evangelicals believe that salvation is by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. By grace believers are saved, kept, and empowered to live a life of service. Evangelicalism is more than an intellectual assent to creedal formulas, as important as that is. It is more than a reaction to error and certainly more than a call to return to the past. It is the affirmation of and genuine commitment to the central beliefs of orthodox Christianity, as these beliefs have been courageously retained in various eras and contexts, explicated in documents such as the Lausanne Covenant, and the Evangelical Affirmation Statement, and The Confessional Statement of the National Association of Evangelicals.⁶¹

V. A TRANSDENOMINATIONAL MOVEMENT/ ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Most denominations have been divided over whether evangelicalism as a movement has been a help or a hindrance to them. Forty years ago, Foy Valentine, the leader of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the forerunner to the Ethics and

⁵⁹Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in *The Evangelicals*, 38-67

⁶⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Who Are the Evangelicals?" in *Evangelical Affirmations*, 75-76

⁶¹J. I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004)

Religious Liberty Commission, claimed that “Southern Baptists *are not* Evangelicals; that is a ‘Yankee word.’”⁶² Part of that claim had to do with the left-of-center leanings of most Southern Baptist leaders at the time, part of it was a failure to understand the difference between evangelicals and fundamentalists, and some of it had to do with what was a reality for a variety of leaders across all denominational lines. That reality being that during the time of the Awakenings and Revivals in the eighteenth century with George Whitefield, in the nineteenth century with D. L. Moody, and in the twentieth century with Billy Graham, evangelicalism primarily worked *through* networks and *around* denominational structures, so evangelicalism was often viewed with confusion—then and now.⁶³

So, it seems best to understand self-identifying evangelicals as people who hold to orthodox Christian beliefs and who identify with these transdenominational movements, special purpose groups, and networks. These interlocking networks, more so than denominations, form the center of evangelicalism. It is here that we best see the constitution of what sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls “the restructuring of American Religion”: special purpose groups; parachurch organizations; evangelistic and missionary agencies; relief and social organizations; publishers and broadcasters; schools, colleges, and seminaries; and networks and coalitions.

The restructuring includes a more horizontal than vertical understanding of affinities within the Christian movement, particularly for evangelicals.⁶⁴ As a side note, it is certainly an interesting day when evangelical Baptists and evangelical Presbyterians find that they have more in common with traditional Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox than with progressives in their own denomination, resulting in such initiatives as “evangelicals and Catholics together.”⁶⁵

D. L. Moody popularized these special-purpose group movements. Billy Graham blessed and expanded these organizations, which emphasized lay leadership and entrepreneurial expansion. Evangelicals rarely started new denominations, but poured their energy into organizations like Youth for Christ, World Vision, Campus Crusade, the Navigators, Prison Fellowship, Christianity Today, InterVarsity, Wycliffe Bible Translators, and

⁶²Quoted in Kenneth L. Woodward et al., “The Evangelicals,” *Newsweek* 25 (October 1976): 76.

⁶³Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9–19.

⁶⁴John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Evangelical Landscapes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 13–120.

⁶⁵Charles Colson and Richard Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995); Mark A. Noll and Carol Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Frederica Mathewes-Green, *At the Corner of East and Now* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 1–14.

thousands of others.⁶⁶ While the media's understanding of evangelicalism for the past forty years has been almost exclusively focused on politics since the rise of the Moral Majority and "born again" president Jimmy Carter, we believe this really misses the heart and soul of evangelicalism that at its best is better understood as a kind of grassroots, gospel-focused, warm-hearted ecumenism.⁶⁷

VI. CURRENT CHALLENGES

Evangelicalism in the twenty-first century, however, is anything but a unified flourishing movement in North America.⁶⁸ In fact, as the influence of Billy Graham declines, so does the movement's unity.⁶⁹ While some aspects of evangelicalism are thriving, others are embattled. Some have lost their theological compass, having become untethered from both Scripture and tradition, resulting in a postevangelical drift. At the same time, it must be noted that evangelicalism is not necessarily dying in America. It is alive and well, but alive and well in, among, and across intercultural contexts. As highlighted in a recent *Christianity Today* issue featuring Peter Cha and Asian-American initiatives, ethnic minority churches are expanding and growing.⁷⁰ The majority of primarily white congregations, however, are in decline.

Thus, we realize the need for and take heart in recognizing our rapidly changing demographic patterns in this country coupled with Christianity's expanding global context.⁷¹ Evangelicalism today has recaptured the importance of local churches, but often more so across denominations and within cooperating networks, rather than within the denominations themselves (examples include 9Marks, Saddleback Church, the Willow Creek Community Church and Willow Creek Association, the Christ Together network, and more). Particularly are these network markers true for younger leaders. Evangelicals and evangelical denominations that thrive must remain connected to their heritage and tradition, while exploring and working together in rapidly changing demographic settings as well as a new global context, working cooperatively in a renewed way with these various networks and special-purpose groups. The world in which we live continues to change ever so rapidly as we move

⁶⁶Kenneth J Collins, *The Evangelical Moment The Promise of an American Religion* (Grand Rapids Baker, 2005), 34-40, also, W K Wilmer et al, *The Prospering Parachurch* (San Francisco Josey-Bass, 1998)

⁶⁷Richard Mouw, *The Smell of Sawdust What Evangelicals Can Learn from Their Fundamentalist Heritage* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 2000), also, see D A Carson, "Evangelicals, Ecumenism and the Church," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, 347-85

⁶⁸Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120-217, also, James Davidson Hunger, *Evangelicalism The Coming Generation* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1987)

⁶⁹Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 283-317

⁷⁰Helen Lee, "Asian Americans Silent No More," *Christianity Today* (October 6, 2014)

⁷¹Donald M Lewis and Richard V Pierard, eds, *Global Evangelicalism Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 2014)

forward in this second decade of the twenty-first century. Changes can be seen in technology, in the economy, in globalization, in government, in the social realm, in population patterns, and elsewhere. Evangelicalism is certainly not exempt from the impact of these issues.⁷² Recognizing that evangelicals in North America are much less than the 35 percent of the total population, as some have previously thought, is important for us to understand.⁷³ Being aware that our unity, or perceived unity, is threatened by politics, key doctrinal differences, a variety of approaches to church and worship, methods of ministry, and diverse opinions on ethical and social issues is essential for our own self-awareness, not to mention for efforts related to missional and ministry collaboration. D. A. Carson notes that there have always seemed to be generational conflicts of one sort or another. Arguably, they appear to be more pronounced as the rate of cultural change has sped up, making it far more difficult for older generations to empathize with a world so different from the one they knew just a few decades earlier.⁷⁴

Because of this rapid culture change, alternative trajectories are being offered to the church at the beginning of this century, which in some ways are not unlike those offered in the early decades of the twentieth century. At this time, we need to ask if we can suggest a trajectory that is faithful to Scripture, to the best of our Christian history, and which at the same time, is applicable for the global future of the evangelical movement?⁷⁵

A century ago, liberalism began to flourish by adapting the Christian faith to the changing culture, even identifying with it. Shaped by the influences of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Horace Bushnell, as well as their popularizers like Harry Emerson Fosdick, Henry Ward Beecher, and Philips Brooks, liberalism and its wide-ranging influence seemingly had great momentum. By the time of World War I, half of all denominational leaders in America were self-identified liberals, as well as about one third of all pastors, and more than half of all publishing house leaders and college/seminary faculty. During this time, the Christian faith began to be redefined in terms of naturalistic and human-centered perspectives that tended to dominate, thus rejecting the unique historic and orthodox claims of the Christian faith.⁷⁶

In our world today, we see the rise of secularization, a growing interest in a vast and amorphous spirituality, a new atheism, the rise of the "nones" (those with no religious affiliation), all shaped by and

⁷²John Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 11-122.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 21-36.

⁷⁴D. A. Carson, "Generational Conflict in Ministry," *Them* 36:2 (August 2011): 180-83.

⁷⁵Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of Global Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009).

⁷⁶Luigi Giussani, *American Protestant Theology* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 53-99.

within a postmodern culture.⁷⁷ While there are things for us to learn from the trends of the early twentieth century and from our own time period as well, before we go rushing toward the trending postevangelical trajectories of our day, it would be good to be reminded of the overall assessment of the progressive movement from H. Richard Niebuhr, one of the twentieth century's most profound thinkers: "Liberalism has created a God without wrath who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministry of Christ without an atoning cross."⁷⁸ Yet just as we need not fall into the waiting arms of a revisionist liberalism, so we would be equally wise to avoid a reductionist fundamentalism. Following John Stott, Kenneth Kantzer, and Carl Henry, we should affirm the fundamentals, or historic orthodoxy, but not be entrapped by fundamentalism.⁷⁹

VII. TOWARD A CROSSCULTURAL, INTERCULTURAL, AND GLOBAL EVANGELICALISM FUTURE

Evangelicals now find themselves without their shaping leaders of the past generation. John Stott (2011), Kenneth Kantzer (2002), Bill Bright (2003), Ted Engstrom (2006), Carl F. H. Henry (2003), Vernon Grounds (2010), and Chuck Colson (2014) have all passed away in the early years of the twenty-first century. Billy Graham, who announced his retirement in 2005, has less and less of a shaping influence with the passing of each year. Whether as a result of these changes, or coincidentally, evangelicals seem to be adrift. The present time, however, is not one for too much navel-gazing or handwringing, it is a time to celebrate what God is doing crossculturally, interculturally, and globally. In 1900 more than 80 percent of the Christians in the world lived in Europe and North America. In these early years of the twenty-first century, more than 60 percent of all Christians can now be found in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁸⁰

While most of us today struggle with enlightenment and postenlightenment issues, as outlined in Charles Taylor's masterful work, *A Secular Age*,⁸¹ our brothers and sisters in the Global South face the challenges of the demonic realm and intense persecution, a

⁷⁷James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids Baker, 2014)

⁷⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York Harper, 1959), 193, also see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 587-618

⁷⁹John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 2005), 13-34, also, James Davidson Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ Rutgers University Press, 1983)

⁸⁰Lamin Sanneh and Joel Carpenter, eds., *The Changing Face of Christianity* (New York Oxford, 2005), Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2006)

⁸¹Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge Belknap/Harvard, 2007)

world that seems much more closely connected to apostolic Christianity than most anything the majority of us have ever known. Christian Smith, the brilliant Notre Dame sociologist, in his book *Soul Searching*, suggests that twenty-first century American religion has more in common with “therapeutic deism,” than historic orthodoxy.⁸² By contrast, Southern hemisphere Christianity is convictional, confessional, and courageous.⁸³ What is needed now is a recognition that North American and European evangelicalism has been weakened in large sectors of the church and is under assault in our secular culture, experiencing what John Dickerson has called “the great evangelical recession.”⁸⁴

Neither a new form of liberalism nor a reactionary fundamentalism, however, are wise options for us at this time. We must realize that our real struggles are not with or against fellow Christ-followers, but against the expression of unbelief in our secularized culture. At stake is the unity and mission of the Christian movement, as well as the bedrock issues of the Christian faith. What is needed is a biblical orthodoxy, a historic Christianity, a faithful, intercultural, transcontinental, intergenerational, and trans-denominational evangelicalism, which stands or falls on first order issues like:

- the Holy Trinity
- the deity and humanity of Christ
- the uniqueness of the gospel message
- the divine inspiration and authority of God’s written word
- the enabling work of the Holy Spirit
- salvation by grace alone through faith
- the importance of the church, the people of God gathered and scattered
- the hope of Christ’s return
- the sacredness of life and family
- the need to share the good news of the gospel and its life-transforming implications with the least, the last, and the lost across this country and around the world
- authentic community, convictional civility, and a warm-hearted, Christ-like love for one another⁸⁵

⁸²Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2005)

⁸³Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2002), 79–106

⁸⁴Dickerson, *Great Evangelical Recession*

⁸⁵See the discussion in David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville Broadman & Holman, 2008), 16–98

A dynamic orthodoxy must be reclaimed, doing so in conversation with Nicea, Chalcedon, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Wesley, including the Puritans, Pietists, and revivalists. This dynamic orthodoxy, this "one faith," this "pattern of Christian truth" has, according to J. I. Packer, Thom Oden, and H. E. W. Turner, been believed by faithful Christians in all places in every age at all times. We affirm this "one faith" while being banner wavers for religious liberty out of conviction and not out of expediency.⁸⁶

Evangelicals must once again take seriously the biblical call to unity portrayed in John 17 and Eph 4, and reaffirmed within the Nicene Creed's attestation of the oneness and universality of the church. In doing so, we must be careful not to *ever unintentionally* move in the direction of an unhealthy inclusivism or heterodoxical universalism. We would be wise to hear again the wisdom of Richard Baxter: "in essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty, in all things, charity."⁸⁷

We need to hold together the priority of evangelism and the need for social justice, a vision for global missions and intercultural and missional service, an unhindered gospel presentation with informed contextualization, careful biblical interpretation coupled with Spirit-enabled proclamation, serious theological reflection combined with humble cultural engagement, and renewed rigorous scholarship that is not disconnected from faithful churchmanship, characterized by proclamation, worship, a sense of community, prayer, and service.

We need a vision for a global evangelicalism with a Rev 7 ideal that is sensitive to both crosscultural and intercultural matters, reflecting a biblical call to humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance, accompanied by a diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We need to understand who we are as evangelicals, to recognize afresh the movements that have shaped us, courageously to affirm the first order essentials that we believe and confess, while recognizing the multifaceted changes and challenges taking place around us and among us.

We need a new spirit of mutual respect and humility to serve together with those with whom we have differences of conviction and opinion. It is possible to hold hands with brothers and sisters who disagree on secondary and tertiary matters of "faith and order," while working together towards a common good to extend the work of the gospel around the world and to advance the kingdom of God. We need to avoid discouragement and disillusionment by believing

⁸⁶Packer and Oden, *One Faith*; H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

⁸⁷See the discussions on Richard Baxter and J. L. Packer in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 20, 97, 167.

the promise of Jesus Christ himself, that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16).⁸⁸

In conclusion, together let us trust God to bring a fresh wind from his Holy Spirit to the global world of evangelical life, bringing renewal to our theology, evangelism, missions, worship, education, and service. Let us recommit to relate to one another in love and humility as agents of grace and reconciliation in a broken and fragmented world. Let us emphasize not only historical orthodoxy but genuine orthopraxy before a watching world. Let us ask God to grant us a renewed commitment to the gospel, to the church, to the truthfulness of Holy Scripture and transformed living that will help to extend the gospel around the globe, while bringing renewal to the church of Jesus Christ for the glory of our great and majestic God. Amen!

⁸⁸Dockery, "Denominationalism," 228-31.



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