

"This book gives us a snapshot of evangelical scholars engaging their world over the last fifty years. It is a valuable history. But more than that, it also shows just how difficult it is to preserve Christian orthodoxy, constantly beset as it is by questions, challenges, and perplexities. This calls for both fidelity and wisdom, and these presidents showed that they had what was needed."

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"For those who think evangelical Christians are intellectually blinkered when they uphold the infallibility or inerrancy of Holy Scripture, this book should give genuine pause. It constitutes a veritable treasure trove of sparkling insights and reflections upon the meaning, import, and biblical warrant of the doctrine. In fact, a belief in the Bible's infallibility represented the central tradition of the Christian churches (whether Protestant or Roman Catholic) until at least the mid-nineteenth century. Today's evangelicals reside squarely in that great Christian tradition."

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—Richard W. Yarbrough, Associate Professor and  
New Testament Department Chair, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

# QUO VADIS, EVANGELICALISM?

*Perspectives on the Past,  
Direction for the Future*

Presidential Addresses from the First Fifty Years  
of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

Edited by  
Andreas J. Köstenberger

Foreword by  
Roger Nicole

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## FOREWORD

As one of the very few surviving founders and charter members of the Evangelical Theological Society, it gives me great pleasure to recommend highly Andreas Köstenberger's *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* Often evangelicals have been considered by those who differ from them as *beati possidentes*, people who are happy in the enjoyment of what they possess without much care given either to what others are thinking or about ways in which they themselves might improve their own scholarship.

Köstenberger, the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* editor, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Journal*, has chosen nine of the annual presidential addresses as embodying perspectives on the past and direction for the future. The choice that he made will clearly show that the Society has not been immune from criticism from without or from within. Yet it is also apparent that, under the safeguard of the supreme authority of the autographic Scripture as the Word of God, we have been eager to acknowledge and validate any truth, irrespective of its origin.

Dr. Köstenberger has also provided a helpful introduction and a challenging brief epilogue. We are grateful that under the providence of God our Society has grown from about one hundred members in 1949 to more than four thousand in the last few years. We hope that this book will help others to understand our stance and help us by the grace of God to fulfill our aims, to the glory of God.

Roger Nicole

# INTRODUCTION: *QUO VADIS*, EVANGELICALISM?

*Andreas J. Köstenberger*

The Latin phrase *Quo vadis?* (“Where are you going?”) is most famously found in the Vulgate translation of John 13:36 (cf. 16:5) where Peter asks Jesus this question prior to the crucifixion. The reference is later picked up and further developed in the apocryphal Acts of Peter. More recently, *Quo Vadis?* was the title of a novel written by Henry Sienkiewicz and set at the time of Roman emperor Nero in AD 64, in which Marcus Vinicius, a Roman patrician, falls in love with a young Christian woman, Lygia. Since it came out in 1896, the book has been translated into over fifty languages, and its author was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905. Famously, Hollywood made the book into an epic movie in 1951 (MGM).

In case you haven’t seen the movie, or read the book, I will not spoil your enjoyment by telling you the ending. In any case, my primary concern is not with the movie or the book *Quo Vadis?* or even Peter’s original question to Jesus. I believe that once again, in our day, the

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question is appropriate to ask of the evangelical movement at large: "Where are you going, evangelicals?" There are some who stress doctrinal fidelity, including biblical inerrancy, defined in terms of a literalism that insists on us having the *ipsissima verba* ("exact words") of Jesus in every instance in the New Testament. There are others who insist that "evangelical" can mean just about anything. In between, there is a large variety of definitions and understandings. In fact, there seem to be almost as many views on what it means to be evangelical as there are evangelicals.

The present volume gathers together some of the most seminal presidential addresses in the Evangelical Theological Society's fifty-year history of the publication of its journal, the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (*JETS*).<sup>1</sup> What all these addresses—penetrating and well-articulated all, with characteristic candor and at times even entertaining—have in common is that they address not a more narrow, specialized topic (as many other, worthy presidential addresses did over the years), but the present state and future prospects of the Evangelical Theological Society in particular and of the evangelical movement as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

The addresses fall nicely into three periods: The Early Years (1958–1970); The Maturing Movement (1971–1999); and Recent Reflections (2000–2007). For each period, three presidential addresses were chosen. The first three addresses, by Ned Stonehouse, Warren C. Young, and Gordon H. Clark, all deal with the one foundational issue forming the doctrinal base of the Evangelical Theological Society, namely, inerrancy. In the second period, Stanley Gundry, Alan Johnson, and Moisés

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1. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Editorial," *JETS* 50, no. 1 (Mar. 2007): 1–2. Three presidential addresses with suitable topics, by Allan MacRae (1960), Burton Goddard (1964), and Kenneth Kantzer (1968; see the table on p. 221), could not be included here because they were not printed in the *Bulletin/Journal* and, despite major efforts, could not be found. Wayne Sparkman, director of the PCA Historical Center in St. Louis, MO, where many of Allan MacRae's papers are kept, did not succeed in locating MacRae's ETS presidential address. Burton Goddard, in a note dated Feb. 28, 2007, writes, "Sorry. I do not have what you request." Dick Kantzer, son of Kenneth Kantzer, informed me in a message on Feb. 22, 2007, that he was unable to locate his father's address, adding, "It is also possible that my father recycled portions of that speech and literally cut and stapled it into any number of other presentations since those were the days he was constantly working to build and shape evangelical institutions."

2. Hence the non-inclusion of other presidential addresses does not mean these do not have merit, but rather that they do not fit as well into the specific topic chosen for the present volume, that is, the present and future state of the evangelical movement at large. An example of this is the presidential address of Carl F. H. Henry, a towering figure of American evangelicalism in the last half century, on the topic of justification (1969). Henry's influence on the ETS is without question; for example, he delivered the banquet address at the founding meeting of the Society, December 27–28, 1949, in Cincinnati, OH, on "Fifty Years of American Theology and the Contemporary Need," which led to the publication of Henry's *Fifty Years of Protestant Theology* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1950) the following year, a volume still very much worth reading.

Silva each deal with critical issues (in more ways than one) related to evangelical exegetical and theological practice and methodology. The three addresses by Darrell Bock, Millard Erickson, and Craig Blaising provide instances of recent reflections on those and other issues. The summaries below are offered in the hope of weaving a meta-narrative connecting the various addresses so as to document the quest of the evangelical movement—and the Evangelical Theological Society as part of that movement—to define its identity in the midst of the larger world of scholarship and the surrounding culture.

In our brief survey we turn first to the three essays chosen to sketch the thinking of evangelical leaders through the first period, the Early Years, spanning from 1958 until 1970. Ned Stonehouse's address, "The Infallibility of Scripture and Evangelical Progress," was delivered in 1957 and printed in the very first issue of the *Journal* (or the *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, as it was called at that time). In a programmatic presentation, Stonehouse, as indicated by the title, argues that there is an inextricable link between an affirmation of the infallibility of Scripture on the one hand and true evangelical progress on the other. Stonehouse acknowledges that this contention runs counter to the view, common in his as well as our day, that a belief in scriptural infallibility reflects obscurantism and presents an intolerable burden for the evangelical scholar.

Yet Stonehouse contends that, rightly conceived, "our doctrine of Scripture is an aspect of our doctrine of God." This, of course, is in keeping with the ETS doctrinal base, according to which "[t]he Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the *Word of God written* and is *therefore inerrant* in the autographs."<sup>3</sup> In holding to the infallibility of Scripture, Stonehouse insists, evangelicals must first of all maintain "a qualitative distinction between Scripture and tradition." We should not despise tradition, but neither should we absolutize it.

Second, in a related point, evangelicals must recognize Scripture's final authority. It is not enough to profess scriptural inerrancy; one must also award the Bible authoritative status. Among other things, this will mean that rather than holding to the dubious rule, "as literal as possible," we will maintain that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself." It will also mean that we will give

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3. Emphasis added.

both God and Christ their due in our reading of Scripture and its redemptive message. In these ways the evangelical commitment to the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture will prove to be a liberating and energizing force by which we “lay hold with all our powers upon the Word of God in order that all our thoughts and ways may come under his control.”

Warren Young’s address, carrying the programmatic title, “Whither Evangelicalism?” dates from the following year, 1958, and was printed in 1959. In his opening remarks, Young chronicles the increasing dissatisfaction felt in his day with the arid type of fundamentalism that, while advocating conservatism and literalism, was judged insufficient to bring about spiritual revival and to address adequately the historical challenges brought against the Christian faith and the truthfulness of God’s Word. To reverse this trend, Young proposes to deal with the following four main tendencies: (1) a tendency toward an understanding of theology as an experiential as well as a rational discipline; (2) a tendency to listen to what science has to say about man; (3) a tendency to restudy the problem of communications in the light of modern semantics; and (4) a tendency to reconsider and restate our understanding of the doctrine of revelation.

Regarding the first tendency, Young notes that there are limits to the propositional, systematic presentation of Scripture; we must come face-to-face with “the inescapable facet of subjectivity inherent in the Christian faith.” Incipient in this realization is what has in subsequent years given rise to explorations as to the nature of biblical inerrancy and the different kinds of genres represented in Scripture. Second, Young encourages further work in the area of human origins but warns against denials of Adam as a historical person and of the fall as a historical event. The third issue relates to language as the vehicle of divine communication. While language is relative (i.e., culture-bound), this does not mean that it is incapable of revealing truth about an absolute God. Fourth, Young notes the diversity of views on the nature of divine revelation and its implications for our view of inspiration, plenary and verbal.<sup>4</sup>

In his concluding comments, at the close of the first decade of the ETS, Young notes that theology is always changing, because theology

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4. Young is perhaps too critical of J. I. Packer’s views expressed in an article published in 1958.



is seeking to address the changing world in which we live. The ETS and the evangelical movement will progress, therefore, if its theology, while grounded in “the unchanging Truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and recorded in our unchanging Bible,” creatively explores ways of addressing the ever-changing world around us. For this reason there should be room for this kind of creative exploration in the Evangelical Theological Society, or progress, rightly defined, will likely be stifled.

In December 1965, Gordon Clark delivered another important, forward-looking presidential address, bearing the title “The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow.” Clark notes the battles raging around the so-called formal principle of the Reformation, namely the truthfulness of Scripture. He maintains that no one can rightly call himself “evangelical” who rejects this foundational tenet, and points out that the very purpose of the founding of the ETS is tied up with propagating the doctrine of scriptural infallibility. As did Ned Stonehouse before him, Clark notes that the ETS doctrinal base is cast in the logical form of an implication: because the Bible is the *Word of God*, it is *therefore* inerrant.

In his ensuing comments Clark vigorously maintains that the present (1965) task of the Society continues to be that of upholding a high view of Scripture. This, he notes, may come at a cost, such as the ETS losing some of its members who (citing a resignation letter) find it “spiritually unnecessary and intellectually impossible to accept the last clause of the Society’s doctrinal basis” regarding inerrancy. To be sure, biblical inerrancy should not be viewed as a truth without which no one can be saved, but it is an important foundational doctrine nonetheless. In fact, without adhering to the “formal principle” of the Reformation, other important doctrines, such as justification (the “material principle”) are likely to fall by the wayside as well—a truly prophetic word in light of recent efforts at redefining this and other doctrines. “If the Bible in a hundred different passages is mistaken in its account of itself, why should the rest of its message be accepted as true?” Clark asks.

If the Bible is nothing but the word of men—as was stated by the new creed of the United Presbyterian Church—it cannot be trusted. Our faith would have lost the legitimate basis on which to affirm the truthfulness of any one doctrine. Those who wish to affirm the truthfulness of a biblical doctrine while rejecting the Bible’s truthfulness

must explain on what basis they are able to do so. “In theology, as in automotive engineering, if you take out the spark plugs, you will have to use some substitute, or the car won’t go.” If such is the view of any ETS member, Clark urges, better for him to honestly resign than to dishonestly remain. Adapting Luther’s adage, “Let goods and kindred go; some memberships also.”

After these three early contributions, we move into the period of “The Maturing Movement” (1971–1999). Three seminal presidential addresses delivered during those three decades, those by Stanley Gundry, Alan Johnson, and Moisés Silva chronicle and characterize the pressing questions of this era in the life of the ETS and of the evangelical movement. Stanley Gundry’s presidential address (delivered in December 1978) bears the title “Evangelical Theology: Where *Should* We Be Going?”<sup>5</sup> Not content merely to describe the *status quo*, Gundry challenges his fellow society members in several areas.

While the Early Years seem to have focused primarily on asserting the truthfulness and inerrancy of Scripture as the legitimate and only adequate doctrinal base from which the ETS and its scholars can do their work, it appears that in this phase of the Maturing Movement certain methodological questions raised their heads, and it became necessary not to move beyond inerrancy but to flesh out more precisely its methodological implications for evangelical scholarship. What is more, the makeup of the Society itself became the subject of concern, as we will see shortly.

As Gundry notes in his opening remarks, one question will not go away: the inerrancy question. He cautions against either of two extremes: so narrowing inerrancy as to depart from its biblical basis and the historical understanding of the concept, or repudiating the concept altogether or letting inerrancy die the death of a myriad of qualifications. Gundry affirms that one’s position on inerrancy is “a kind of watershed indicating the logical, and perhaps eventual, direction of one’s theology.” At the same time, he urges love toward non-inerrantists and “open confrontation of issues, not people” (something that, as subsequent history has shown, is easier said than done, if possible at all).

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5. Gundry’s title alludes to that year’s conference title, “Evangelical Theology: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?”

Gundry notes that while defending inerrancy, inerrantists will be confronted by some rather difficult questions themselves. He also points out that there was not a “common, univocal meaning” ascribed to the word “inerrancy.”<sup>6</sup> Gundry proceeds to list a host of difficult questions for inerrantists, including whether or not it is in keeping with inerrancy to hold to the presence of pseudonymity in Scripture or whether “a New Testament scholar who subscribes to inerrancy [can] legitimately argue that the evangelists created a distinctively Christian type of literary genre called ‘Gospel,’ somewhat akin to Jewish *midrash*, in which historical accuracy, in the author’s intention, took second place to the author’s exposition of the Christian message, with the result that there are *actual* discrepancies and contradictions among the Gospels in reportorial details.”

Gundry also notes two different approaches in resolving apparent contradictions in Scripture among inerrantists: (1) proposing a solution which technically is possible but not the most natural meaning; or (2) suspending judgment and acknowledging that no natural resolution has been found to date (Gundry expresses his preference for the latter approach). As Gundry observes, however, neither approach is free from difficulty in that both ways of dealing with apparent discrepancies seem to fall short of the principle of the “clarity of Scripture.”

By his probing comments Gundry exemplifies just the type of honest self-examination and openness to the evidence that he calls for in dealing with thorny issues defying simplistic resolution. This, in my view, is an important way in which the ETS sought to move away from a rigid fundamentalism (decried by Warren Young citing A. W. Tozer in his presidential address; see above) to a more carefully nuanced evangelical approach that, while holding to a high, inerrant view of Scripture, is willing to face the challenges presented to such a commitment by the complex nature of some of the evidence.

Gundry rightly observes that issues such as the ones mentioned above move inerrancy into the realm of hermeneutics.<sup>7</sup> In fact, James

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6. This, incidentally, became very clear in the early years of the new millennium when the ETS saw itself confronted with the need to deal with the teachings of open theism and the question of its proper scriptural and hermeneutical basis. Two members of the ETS executive committee voted not to expel two leading proponents of this theology on the basis that the doctrinal base in their judgment provided insufficient grounds on which to judge open theism as violating biblical inerrancy. The Society has subsequently put in place a new bylaw in order to address this perceived deficiency (see p. 218).

7. See his helpful listing in a footnote of a whole slew of articles from the *Bulletin* and the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in the decade between 1968 and 1978.

Barr's then-recent book *Fundamentalism* (published in 1977; see ch. 6) presented evangelicals with a considerable list of unfinished business. To this end, Gundry urges that the ETS "should be a forum where those with a commitment to inerrancy can come to grips with the problems of definition and hermeneutics." After all, the ETS doctrinal base was never intended as a creed. It is rather "a doctrinal basis on which we have agreed to do our scholarly work." Hence evangelical scholars are faced with the dual task of defending inerrancy externally over against errantists while continuing to clarify internally the implication of their inerrantist position.

What is more, evangelical scholars must move beyond internecine quibbles about inerrancy to the constructive task of formulating "a biblically-based evangelical theology addressing the issues of our time" (expressing a concern similar to that voiced by Warren Young). It is important to have a proper foundation; but of what value is even a proper foundation without a building on top of it? Among such issues that evangelicals should address, according to Gundry (speaking in 1978), are various aspects of ecclesiology and missiology: the former including the questions of church structure and the nature of Christian ministry; the latter comprising issues such as collaboration with other Christian groups and challenges posed by the need for contextualization of the Christian message. But common to all these challenges, Gundry notes in his conclusion, is the need for more attention to hermeneutics; it constitutes "the unfinished item on our agenda of theological prolegomena. . . . Without a hermeneutical consensus, any hope for a consensus in theology and ethics is mere wishful thinking."

To pause and evaluate for a moment, Gundry is clearly right in identifying hermeneutics as a critical issue to be addressed in the continuing debate. How we interpret Scripture will invariably affect our interpretive conclusions. At the same time, I believe, the decades subsequent to Gundry's programmatic remarks have shown that even a hermeneutical consensus among scholars does not necessarily lead to a convergence in exegetical results. I am thinking here in particular of the complementarian-egalitarian divide within evangelicalism where, in my observation, both sides largely agree in general on what constitutes proper hermeneutics—such as giving priority to context, engaging in comprehensive lexical and syntactical study, and so on—while coming to sharply differing

exegetical results.<sup>8</sup> While hermeneutics is clearly important, perhaps the years subsequent to Gundry's 1978 address have shown that hermeneutics is not quite the be all and end all Gundry seemed to suggest it was from his vantage point. It may be that it is here that the types of larger worldview questions impacting hermeneutics come to the fore—questions that have been increasingly recognized as absolutely critical in the past two or three decades of hermeneutical thinking.<sup>9</sup>

The second of the presidential addresses chosen from this period, delivered by Alan Johnson in December 1982, hones in precisely on one of the critical issues defined by Stan Gundry: the methodological implications of inerrancy in relation to the so-called “historical-critical method.” The catchy title of Johnson's message captures the essence and scope of Johnson's thought-provoking address: “The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice?”

Johnson's address takes its point from Augustine's comment on the Christian use of certain ideas from pagan philosophers in which this church father urged believers to accept the “Egyptian gold” supplied for the Israelites at the Exodus as provided “by the mines of divine Providence.” Does this principle enunciated by Augustine, Johnson asks, also apply to the historical-critical method, or should it be feared and shunned as “pagan precipice”—perhaps, one might add, in light of the biblical injunction that “a little leaven leavens the whole dough”?

In the remainder of his address, Johnson contends that, given “a more precise understanding of the origins of the historical-critical method together with a rejection of its negative features,” the method, in the hands of inerrantist scholars, can be used for the good of the church. Johnson identifies the dual roots of the historical-critical method in the Reformation's emphasis on the literal-historical sense of the Bible and the Enlightenment anti-supernaturalist view of history. (On a deeper level, Johnson perceives a crisis of biblical authority, evidenced in the demise of biblical theology, the abandonment of cognitive divine truth, and fragmentation.)

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8. I have sought to chronicle this in my evaluation of the hermeneutical chapters in *Discovering Biblical Equality* (ed. R. W. Pierce and R. M. Groothuis [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004]) by Roger Nicole and Gordon Fee, published in the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 88–95. My conclusion is that the difference between the two sides does not lie in hermeneutical *theory* but in exegetical *practice*, so that the overall question turns on consistency between a group's enunciated hermeneutical theory and its practice of that theory in the exegesis of specific biblical passages.

9. See especially the work of Kevin J. Vanhoozer, most notably his *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005) and D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

According to Johnson, some see only the negative antecedents and advocate a complete rejection of the historical-critical method, while others affirm the validity of the philological, cultural, historical, literary, and archaeological study promoted by the Reformation vein of thought.<sup>10</sup> The question is, are the tools (such as source, form, or redaction criticism) themselves hopelessly tainted by anti-supernaturalist presuppositions as to render them useless for inerrantists or can they be transformed in the hands of Bible-believing scholars to serve as useful means of studying various aspects of Scripture? Johnson's sympathies lie decidedly with the latter view. He concludes with a plea for evangelical unity ("ecumenicity") and dialogue in navigating this "healthy, tolerant tension," which holds hope for the ETS in particular and evangelicalism at large.

The years since Johnson's address have seen continued polarization of the two camps identified by Johnson, with Eta Linnemann, Robert Thomas, and Norman Geisler representing the first position<sup>11</sup> and advocates of the judicious use of a historical-critical approach, such as D. A. Carson and Darrell Bock, representing the other, though the pendulum seems to have swung toward the side of the latter group. Nevertheless, the question remains, to what extent can evangelical scholars credibly engage in, for example, the "quest for the historical Jesus" with its various criteria for historicity, when they are tied by their doctrinal presuppositions to an inerrantist position that precludes a negative outcome of their assessment of the historicity of a given pericope in the Gospels?<sup>12</sup>

Fascinatingly, Moisés Silva, in "'Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?' Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship" (1997), takes up the challenge voiced by Stan Gundry in his presidential address almost twenty years earlier to address the concerns raised by

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10. Among those evangelicals engaged in redaction-critical study, Johnson lists Grant Osborne, Robert Stein, and Robert Gundry, among others. Johnson also mentions Ned Stonehouse, the exegete (see comments on his presidential address above), and Moisés Silva's discussion of the principles enunciated by Stonehouse. The other scholar who receives Johnson's commendation is Carl F. H. Henry, the theologian, and his analysis of "The Uses and Abuses of Historical Criticism."

11. See Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Robert L. Thomas, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998); and Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *JETS* 42 (1999): 3–19.

12. On challenges faced by evangelical scholars in the area of Jesus studies, see the remarks on Darrell Bock's presidential address and his own full remarks in chapter 7.

James Barr in his 1977 work *Fundamentalism*, which is highly critical of evangelicals.

Silva's remarks are of particular interest since he studied under Barr, having high regard for the philological acumen on display in Barr's seminal work *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961). At the outset, Silva takes exception to Barr's choice of the most prejudicial term available, "fundamentalism," to describe a wide range of scholars, suggesting that all of them, by virtue of applying the label "fundamentalist," are, in Barr's words, guilty of "narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism and sectarianism."

Second, Silva objects to Barr's tendentious description of fundamentalists: (1) their strong emphasis on the inerrancy of Scripture; (2) their hostility toward biblical criticism and modern theology; and (3) their alleged belief that those who do not share their viewpoint "are not really 'true Christians' at all" (i.e., their tendency toward separatism). As Silva points out, however, no inerrantist believes that inerrancy is required for salvation. In fact, conservatives such as J. Gresham Machen (Ned Stonehouse's teacher) explicitly affirmed the very opposite. To make matters worse, Barr says nothing about the underlying convictions that motivate evangelical belief in biblical inerrancy, such as their personal relationship with God and their desire to obey his Word and serve him.

Third, Barr did not read widely enough in evangelical literature. Most glaringly, he almost completely ignored Machen, whose contribution to the movement is beyond doubt.

At the same time, Silva identifies a half-dozen valid criticisms Barr lodges against evangelicals (or "fundamentalists," as he prefers to call them). Among these he cites (1) the selectivity with which the supernatural is invoked; and (2) the way in which evangelicals relate to mainstream critical biblical scholarship. The latter includes a "tendency to adopt a critical point of view but to use that approach only when it supports the evangelical agenda." Thus evangelicals read critical works whose methods they reject in order to find arguments to refute their critics. Or we avoid doctrinal issues by focusing our research on areas that do not conflict with evangelical convictions.

According to Barr, conservatives regularly borrow from critical scholars whose presuppositions they do not share without acknowledging their debt. Yet ironically, Barr noted acerbically, this is precisely where



they make their scholarly contribution. In some cases, this may occur deliberately; scholars may identify themselves as evangelical in order to maintain their conservative base and constituency (not to mention their readership and teaching position!) while knowingly abandoning actual conservative positions. In other cases, even more alarmingly, these individuals may not be aware of what they are doing, considering themselves conservative while having unknowingly imbibed from a critical (polluted?) well.

Turning to Ned Stonehouse's presidential address (surveyed above), Silva self-critically points out that typically evangelicals have held certain views of date and authorship with undue intensity, elevating them to first-order status (he cites the early date of Daniel and the Pauline authorship of the disputed letters as examples). Silva's concern is that evangelicals back themselves into a corner that renders them inflexible and insufficiently able to nuance their traditional view. In this regard he expresses regret that the kinds of issues that led to Robert Gundry's resignation from the Society were never adequately aired—according to Silva, a wasted opportunity.<sup>13</sup> We must not be content to pull *ad hoc* solutions out of the bag while leaving the larger, underlying issues unaddressed. Thus, concludes Silva in answer to the question posed in his title, evangelical theology and biblical scholarship can walk together, but only if they address the difficult questions forthrightly and concretely.

From this we move to the third and last group of presidential addresses selected for inclusion in the present volume under the rubric "Recent Reflections," addresses by Darrell Bock, Millard Erickson, and Craig Blasing. No doubt (at least in part) occasioned by the open theism controversy in the ETS at that time, Bock (2001) made some proposals as to the proper way in which the nature of the Society ought to be conceived in his opinion in his address "The Purpose-Driven ETS: Where Should We Go?"<sup>14</sup> At the outset, Bock cautioned against losing sight of our larger mission in the world owing to undue self-preoccupation and introspection. Identifying himself as a "third-generation member of ETS," Bock set out to speak to the up-and-coming fourth

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13. Though he acknowledges that one issue of the *Journal* (26, no. 1 [Mar. 1983]) was largely devoted to the controversy.

14. The conference theme that year was "boundary setting." Bock's address also appeared in booklet form from InterVarsity Press.



generation, younger scholars who will lead the ETS and evangelical movement into the middle of this century.

Bock begins his reflections by surveying the historical roots of evangelicalism from the Reformation until the present, characterizing this history as unfolding under the rubric of the divine promise to the church, “till glory makes us complete.” What is the proper role of ETS as an organization, recognizing that ETS is only *part* of the evangelical movement, defined as “people committed to Christ, his gospel, and the primacy of Scripture”? This, according to Bock, depends in large part on what type of organization ETS was founded to be. With reference to remarks by Michael Horton and Shane Rosenthal, Bock uses the metaphors of the ETS as a “village green” where people can meet and exchange ideas and as a “public square” where people from the “circles” of various confessional backgrounds can come together.

As such, Bock argues the ETS should be a “purpose-driven Society.”<sup>15</sup> This purpose, Bock notes emphatically, is bound up with the church’s missional mandate. The ETS, as part of evangelicalism at large, must understand itself in its proper historical and global contexts. Surveying the five decades of the Society’s existence, Bock discerns five major issues that have surfaced, roughly one per decade: (1) science and the Bible, especially origins (1959); (2) inerrancy, its definition, and hermeneutics (1979); (3) the role of historical criticism (1983); (4) women and the Bible (1986); and (5) open theism (2001).

Interestingly, Bock quotes from three of the presidential addresses also included in the present volume, those by Warren Young, Stanley Gundry, and Alan Johnson, noting (and agreeing with) a consensus that ETS should be a forum where those committed to inerrancy can come together to solve various problems and discuss relevant issues. There should be boundaries, Bock argues, but ones that are defined broadly enough—the inerrant Scripture, a vibrant trinitarianism—that allow for sufficient scholarly exploration. The Society “is a place within evangelicalism that evangelicalism desperately needs to preserve for that purpose.”

Applying these insights to Jesus studies, Bock sets forth two alternative approaches, one favoring “less engagement with historical criticism” and another advocating “the careful use of such methods.”

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15. This pays tribute to Rick Warren’s mega-bestseller *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

With reference to Millard Erickson's *Postmodernizing the Faith*, Bock contends that it is important to engage critics and their methods rather than adopting an unduly defensive posture. Evangelical efforts in Jesus studies should include (1) the production of first-rate monographs; (2) collaborative efforts; and (3) media initiatives by evangelical scholars. Bock proceeds to address the (then-current) open theism debate and proposes judicious ways in which to allow adequate time to discuss the issues it raises.

In his parting comments, Bock expresses his hope that a "purpose-driven ETS" will devote more of its energies to addressing issues that are critical in reaching a lost world for Christ in our day. As a community, evangelicals are called to be "diligent in keeping watch over our commitment to Scripture" that "points to God's central story." Discerning and rejecting the wisdom of this world, we should pursue our loyalty to God and cling to "the meta-narrative that is Jesus the Word as revealed in his Word." Let us set the realistic goals of "small victories in clarification and better movement toward mutual understanding"; pursue our larger mission in the world; and debate fairly and fully until God dissolves "all our questions into eternal answers."

Similarly concerned with larger issues is Millard Erickson's presidential address given in November 2002 and entitled "Evangelical Theological Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century." Following a humorous prolegomenon, Erickson shares several of his hopes for evangelical scholarship and, like Darrell Bock before him, addresses his remarks particularly to the younger generation of scholars. Erickson's first hope has to do with the quality of evangelical scholarship. Evangelicals should set a high standard of excellence in both scholarship and education.

Second, Erickson hopes that "evangelical theological scholarship will be increasingly characterized by primary research and originality." In that vein evangelicals should avoid what Erickson terms "secondary plagiarism," by which he means undue reliance on secondary sources. Erickson cites several—convicting!—examples where such dependence led to errors being repeated, revealing that a given writer never bothered to check the original primary sources.

Third, it is Erickson's hope that evangelical scholars of the twenty-first century will adequately argue their assertions. One's theories must be adequately supported by evidence. Mere assertion or repetition of

one's argument will not substitute for furnishing actual proof. This, in turn, requires, fourth, increasing competence in logic, and especially inductive logic. "How much evidence is required for a thesis to be considered confirmed?" and "How probable is a given position?" are two of the questions that should be asked on a regular basis.

Fifth, evangelical scholars should become more aware of their own presuppositions. This is the scholarly equivalent of taking the log out of one's own eye before removing the speck in the eye of a scholar holding an opposing point of view. Sixth, evangelicals should increase the precision of their thinking, both in their understanding and in the formulation of their positions. This includes growth in conceptual discrimination, that is, the ability to comprehend fine distinctions between concepts. This is borne out of the conviction that much of the misunderstanding in theological discussions is a result of inadequate conceptual sophistication.

With regard to style in evangelical scholarship, Erickson cautions against undue defensiveness when one is criticized or shifting one's position in order to evade criticism. Civility of discourse is another of Erickson's *desiderata*. Another is the practice of moving from descriptive summary of another's viewpoint to analysis and finally to evaluation. Also, we should be willing to state our convictions openly and clearly and allow others to do the same. Erickson even proposes a pledge to which we as evangelical theological scholars should be prepared to subscribe.

Finally, Erickson remarks on the strategy of evangelical scholarship. This has to do with the definition of the term "evangelicalism." As Erickson points out, historically, evangelicalism has involved all of the following four elements: (1) a doctrinal component (orthodoxy in one's beliefs); (2) a spiritual element (personal piety); (3) an ethical aspect (a life commitment); and (4) an evangelistic thrust (what some have termed "revivalism"). Any church missing any one (or several) of these elements cannot justifiably call itself "evangelical" in the historical sense of the term.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, different groups or individuals may set their emphases differently, and this should be welcomed as adding variety to the evangelical landscape. Naturally, Erickson notes,

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16. Compare in this regard Moisés Silva's critique of James Barr's characterization of evangelicals in his presidential address in chapter 6.

in the case of the Evangelical Theological Society the emphasis lies on proper doctrinal boundaries.

Erickson, like Bock, also urges the recognition that North American evangelicalism is only a part—decreasing in relative size—of a world-wide movement. The center of gravity has already begun to shift as documented in Philip Jenkins's 2002 book *The Next Christendom*. This, Erickson urges, should lead to a broadening of evangelical scholarship beyond its Euro-American confines in the years ahead. Not only should North American evangelicals be more globally minded, they should also be forward-looking. One way of anticipating the future is to watch trends in other disciplines. Another way is to be aware of recurrent patterns in history and to learn from the past. Popular opinion is often a contra-indicator of what is true; we should be wary of popular trends and emotional appeals. Also, watch the outcome of a given person's or school's theology. One final point made by Erickson is that evangelical scholars should cultivate interdisciplinary awareness and collaboration while avoiding the "tunnel vision" of a narrow focus on one's own specialization.

After such liberal doses of sage advice, Craig Blaising has the last word—but only as far as the present volume is concerned—when he offers his address "Faithfulness: A Prescription for Theology" (November 2005). Blaising holds up our risen Lord's Great Commission as the proper focal point for the work of evangelical scholarship, particularly that of making disciples by teaching the nations to obey all that Jesus commanded. Alluding to the conference theme "Christianity in the Early Centuries," Blaising noted that there is a direct correlation between how we conceive of early Christianity and the nature of our task. In this way, we find the role of evangelical scholarship rooted in the history of missions.<sup>17</sup>

Blaising takes particular issue with the view of Bart Ehrman in a (in my judgment) compelling critique that need not be repeated here. Ehrman's views are widely known. In essence, his is a revival of the thesis, first popularized by Walter Bauer, that the early Christians moved from an initial stage of doctrinal diversity to eventual orthodoxy which is primarily a function of ecclesiastical power rather than

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17. In this Blaising provides theological grounding for Bock's contention that evangelical scholarship must not be unduly inward-focused but outward-looking and attending to its missional mandate.

divinely revealed truth. As Blaising points out, in essence Ehrman's is an effort to validate his own pluralistic beliefs by documenting such diversity among the early Christians. This, Blaising insists, is an exercise in revisionism rather than flowing from responsible historical research. Hence Ehrman's theses turn out to be driven by his desire "to make a statement about religious and theological discourse today."

In what follows Blaising discusses the implications of Ehrman's agenda of religious diversity for the task of theology. Since Ehrman does not draw out these implications, Blaising turns to Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of Culture*. In this work Tanner sets out her proposal on how to engage in theological work "from the standpoint of a postmodern view of culture with its commitments to diversity, equality, tolerance, and freedom" (Blaising's description). This, according to Tanner, means that faithfulness to the Word should not be restricted to the expression of Christian beliefs. God's "Free Word" (Karl Barth's expression) should be allowed to do its work in a diversity of settings. We must be sensitive to all voices and allow everyone a place at the theological table. The theologian is an artist whose work is never finished, and the task of theology is by its very nature open-ended.

As in the case of Bart Ehrman's views, Blaising engages in a succinct, yet penetrating critique, showing that in Tanner's theology Scripture is no longer *de facto* the Word of God because it is emptied of its specific linkage to his revelation in Jesus Christ. Instead, Blaising proposes that evangelicals, on the basis of their common belief in biblical inerrancy, "do what the earliest church and the Reformers set as their task, and that is speaking the truth in love, to strive for the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God."<sup>18</sup> It is hard to think of a final appeal that would sum up better the task ahead for evangelical scholarship in the twenty-first century than the closing words of Blaising's address: "Our call is ultimately, for all the work we do, a simple one. May we be faithful in the work of the Word that we and those we serve know him and that together we grow in knowledge of the truth as the truth is in Jesus, so that we, standing in a line of faithful servants, in the new creation will likewise hear the commendation: 'Well done!'"

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18. In keeping with his expertise in the area of patristics, Blaising proceeds to cite an example from Athanasius.

Speaking personally, reading and digesting these presidential addresses—spanning a half-century and delivered by some of evangelicalism’s most distinguished leaders—has given me, a third-generation scholar in the ETS, a much fuller and deeper appreciation for the history of the evangelical movement and my place within it. No one reading these addresses can fail to benefit from the tremendous collective wisdom offered by these guiding visions. In my judgment the present volume offers great hope for the future of a movement whose best days, by God’s grace and abundant mercy, may yet lie ahead.