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**Do evangelicals glory in their ignorance?**

**What does "Inspiration of Scriptures" mean?**

**Will evangelicals stand up to the liberals?**

**Is the church calling a truce with science?**

**Is extreme dispensationalism fading away?**

**What about the Christian's role in society?**

# Is Evangelical Theology Changing?

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New currents—some revealed here for the first time—are churning evangelical waters today. Tomorrow they may be tidal waves.

**D**URING Billy Graham's 1955 Scotland crusade a B.B.C. interviewer asked him to define the *fundamentalist* label he'd been plastered with.

Billy objected. "I don't call myself a *fundamentalist*," he said. There was an aura of bigotry and narrowness associated with the term—which he certainly hoped was not true of himself.

"I prefer to call myself a 'constructionist,'" Billy said, explaining he was seeking to rebuild the church.

Billy Graham is not the only fundamentalist chafing under the term.

Why? Because fundamentalism is no longer what most people think it is.

Before going into what fundamentalism is today, let's take a brief look at what it *was*.

In the 1920's *fundamentalist* was the label for men who, like J. Gresham Machen, Princeton Seminary scholar, rushed to defend certain great doctrines

under attack. These included the inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, the Resurrection.

Then what started as a high-level theological discussion degenerated into a cat and dog fight. The Virgin Birth ran neck and neck with murder on the front pages of newspapers. Evolution was pitted against the Bible in the Scopes trial of 1925. Fundamentalism began to be a catch-all for the lunatic fringe; Holy Rollers, snake handlers, even Mormon polygamists were calling themselves fundamentalists.

That's why to the man on the street *fundamentalism* got to be a joke. As an ignorant, head-in-the-sand, contentious approach to the Christian faith, it seemed as out-dated as high-button shoes.

But all the while there was a solid core behind the garish shell. Even be-

fore World War II that core began to push out.

When the war was over, the crust split wide open. Out popped a younger generation. They agreed with their elders. But they thought there was more to Christianity than being on the defensive all the time. They wanted to build on the contributions of older leaders a positive, not a reactionary, movement.

Fundamental theologians took time out to look at themselves, to find out just what fundamentalists of 1956 believe.

Here's one thing they found: fundamentalism is still a protest against the mishmash liberal Protestantism made of Christianity. It's still as concerned over preserving the Christian essentials as were the early fundamentalists.

But it is something more: a positive witness for God's redemptive love, wis-

dom and power as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In short, fundamentalism has become *evangelicalism*.

The fundamentalist watchword is "Ye should earnestly contend for the faith." The evangelical emphasis is "Ye must be born again."

That's the major change in conservative theological thought. What other trends in evangelical thought mark it as different from fundamentalism?

A spate of books and magazine articles has recently appeared to give clues. But to get even more authoritative answers *CHRISTIAN LIFE* went directly to the leading evangelical theologians. For the most part, it found them ready to talk freely—in itself an indication of a new spirit.

The currents of thought brought out into the open by *CHRISTIAN LIFE*—many for the first time in any publication—are vital to every alert Christian.

Here they are:

*A friendly attitude toward science.* For a long time the scientist was regarded as the arch enemy of the fundamentalist. This was natural. For it was denominational Protestantism's capitulation to so-called science that led it down the path to modernism.

But today, science is steadily getting humbler. And evangelicals, while maintaining there are areas where science shouldn't presume to tread, are holding out the olive branch.

In 1941 evangelical scientists started the American Scientific Affiliation (which accepts only men with a doctorate degree in some science). Then it had 44 members. Today it has close to 700. A major contribution of the Affiliation is the book *Modern Science and Christian Faith* (1946).

Then in 1955 came *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* by evangelical Bernard Ramm, professor of religion at Baylor University.

Wrote Ramm: "Evangelical Christianity of today owes to science a great debt in setting us free from the superstitious, the magical, the animistic and the grotesque. It has helped in the purification of our theology, our exegesis (explanation of Scripture) and our spiritual life."

Ramm plumped for the "progressive creationism" theory (God plans, God puts His plan in motion by distinct creative acts and the Holy Spirit, through nature, carries out the plan).

Other opinions: that theologians are wrong to attempt to say how old man is, that the day of Genesis 1 are "pictorial days" not 24-hour days and that the flood was local.

Ramm's book was roasted by some evangelical reviewers, but the December 1955 issue of the *Journal of the*

*American Scientific Affiliation* gave it three favorable reviews.

Representative of the views of theologians on the book is probably this statement by Vernon Grounds of Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary. He says: "Ramm has simply been courageous enough to put on paper ideas which have long circulated *sub voce* among evangelical scholars. His book, whatever its defects and weaknesses, is a challenge to a thorough-going evangelical re-examination of some cherished opinions."

Ramm wasn't even the first to do this. Back in 1948 Edward J. Carnell, now president of Fuller Theological Seminary wrote *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, probably the outstanding recent conservative theological work. He criticized both science and the church for declaring their independence of each other. But he admitted: "The Church has repented of its rashness; it confesses humbly today that it cannot fulfill God's command to subdue nature without the precision of the scientific method."

*A willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit.* Time was when Calvinists and Arminians, Pentecostals and holiness groups had no truck with one another. They drew up their skirts and swept on. But now laymen, preachers and theologians are working together. This was out of the question 20 years ago. A good example is the still-young Evangelical Theological Society which got going only in 1949. Membership is now around 300.

Some results of this spirit: some holiness groups are edging away from the old holiness line of a second blessing that brings entire and final sanctification. Instead they're veering to the view that baptism of the Holy Spirit is just the beginning of a new walk which will continue to show gradual growth in grace.

At the same time evangelicals who shied away from holiness experiences are wondering if there might not be some truth to a second "crisis experience" after conversion.

Says Stanley Horton of Central Bible Institute (Assemblies of God): "Fundamentalists now can even discuss *tongues* without getting hot under the collar—something unheard of a few years ago."

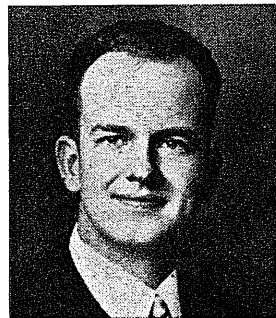
Conservative theologians (as well as liberals) are doing some soul-searching on the subject of divine healing. Many decry emotional "healing meetings." But they are seriously mulling over the idea that Christ meant His disciples to heal physical ills as well as spiritual ills.

Says Wilbur Smith of Fuller Theological Seminary: "There has been an obvious change in the attitude of the Church toward 'faith healing.' An enormous literature has appeared during the last ten years on this subject . . . The Christian Church needs to re-examine thoroughly this question."

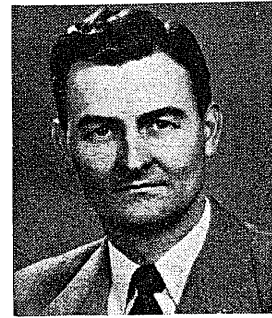
He adds, though: "My opinion, however, is that we are being ungrateful to God in placing so much emphasis upon healing when we ought to thank God for the uninterrupted years of health most Christian people enjoy."



VERNON GROUNDS



EDWARD J. CARNELL



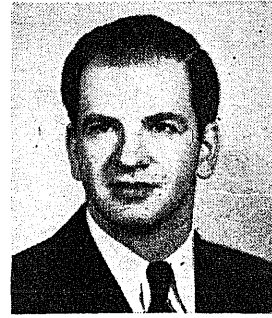
LLOYD KALLAND



STANLEY HORTON



CARL F. H. HENRY



BERNARD RAMM

A more tolerant attitude toward varying views on eschatology. Used to be that most fundamentalists were pre-millennial and pre-tribulation. That is, they believed that Christ was coming again to begin a thousand year reign of peace. Furthermore, that the church would be "raptured"—(taken up to Heaven)—before the "tribulation" (seven years of trouble) the Book of Revelation says will come before Christ's return.

But for the last ten years debate has been raging on these subjects. Some evangelicals have taken an "amillennial" position (no actual thousand year period). Some are saying that the Bible doesn't teach that the church will escape the tribulation.

Debate hasn't always been friendly. Seminary faculties have split only recently over tribulation views.

One theologian expressed to CHRISTIAN LIFE fear that conservative Christianity might be seriously split between "those who wish to identify their views with strict orthodoxy and those who wish to keep eschatology as a matter of open and free discussion."

But among theologians, at least, the "free and open" spirit is winning out.

Last year's debate on the tribulation between Harold John Ockenga of Boston's Park Street Church and John Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary in the pages of CHRISTIAN LIFE is an example. It caused a flurry of comment pro and con. Yet generally it was accepted as a legitimate discussion for an evangelical magazine.

Paul Woolley of Westminster Theological Seminary gives the viewpoint that seems to be growing: "The average evangelical Christian realizes that the exegesis (explanation) of the Scriptures on this point is not so simple that he can be cocksure about every detail. The result is that there is a more healthy open-mindedness about the details of the eschatological scheme."

Certainly everybody isn't going to agree. The significance of the whole thing, however, is that evangelicals can agree to disagree.

Vernon Grounds sums up: "The outcome of the controversy will be exceedingly wholesome, I am confident. We will emerge with a more balanced eschatological interest, emphasizing the larger issues of human destiny which have often been obscured by incidentals."

A shift away from so-called extreme dispensationalism. Theologians are probably closer to agreeing on the fact that dispensationalism is facing a real test today than on any other statement.

Warren Young's comment, "The trend today is away from dispensationalism—away from the Scofield Notes—to a more historical approach," is echoed by many evangelical theologians.

Wilbur Smith stated, "Regarding evangelical views on eschatology, I am sure that there is a growing repudiation of extreme dispensational views. In fact, many who are absolutely conservative in their eschatological beliefs rarely use the word dispensation now."

In Assemblies of God schools, it is reported, "dispensational truth" is being submerged "to a less conspicuous place in the curriculum." And fewer and fewer Assemblies of God ministers are using dispensational charts.

An increased emphasis on scholarship. Says Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary: "To present the full implication of the Gospel requires a body of men who are trained in the sciences and in philosophy and who fathom the significance of the Christian religion for these fields."

Carl F. H. Henry of Fuller Theological Seminary feels keenly the need for evangelical schools to "organize the scholarship forces into creative centers of research and writing. We need a great center of conservative theological thought."

It's clear that evangelicals do not glory in ignorance. The evangelical scholar does not stab a finger at the Bible and say, "This is it, take it or go to hell." As Warren C. Young of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary puts it: "The evangelical believes that his position can be supported and justified by a scholarly consideration of the case. He is the apologist for conservative Christianity."

Though there is as yet no "great center of theological thought," evangelical schools have been steadily upping their standards. Today the young evangelical can get a well-rounded education at a good number of schools firmly committed to the teaching of God's Word.

A more definite recognition of social responsibility. Evangelicals believe that only by calling individual men to the reality of sin in their lives will the ills of society be cured. Nevertheless—unlike fundamentalism—evangelicalism realizes the church has a prophetic mission to society. There are times when the church must thunder, "Thus saith the Lord!"

To quote Grounds again: "We must admit that a compelling ethic in terms of biblical categories has yet to be worked out. We must . . . make evangelicalism more relevant to the political and sociological realities of our time."

Terrelle B. Crum of Providence-Barrington Bible College stresses that "unless conservative Christian theologians take more time to point out the relevance of Christ and the Bible to important (social) issues conservatism will be neglected by the rising generation."

A re-opening of the subject of biblical inspiration. Now just a pebble in the pond of conservative theology, this could expand to the bombshell of mid-century evangelicalism.

Evangelicals, like fundamentalists, believe that the Bible is the infallible.

## What the Terms Mean

**Arminianism:** doctrinal position stemming from James Arminius stressing the free will of man to accept or reject divine grace.

**Calvinism:** doctrinal system stemming from John Calvin stressing the sovereignty of God and emphasizing predestination and eternal security of the Christian.

**conservatism:** theological position derived from the traditional principle of interpretation which adheres to the Bible as God's infallible Word.

**dispensationalism:** dividing Bible history into periods in which God is interpreted as working in distinctly different ways and classifying scripture passages accordingly.

**eschatology:** branch of Christian doctrine concerned with the last or final things, such as the millennium, tribulation, second coming of Christ.

**evangelicalism:** movement which adheres to the historic doctrines of the Christian faith plus a warm-hearted commitment to the projection of that faith in evangelism.

**exegesis:** a critical explanation or interpretation of the Scriptures.

**fundamentalism:** movement which arose in opposition to liberalism, re-emphasizing the inerrancy of the Scriptures, separation and biblical miracles, especially the Virgin Birth, the physical Resurrection of Christ and the substitutionary Atonement.

**liberalism:** movement which rejects the authority of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, tending to interpret it in the light of modern-day science and philosophy.

**modernism:** sometimes equated with liberalism, it is an extreme form, the final step of which is humanism.

**neo-orthodoxy:** a reaction away from liberalism and toward accepting some of the historic Christian doctrines, especially the sinfulness of man, in the light of individual experience.

**tongues utterances (Acts 19:6) which some groups (especially Pentecostals) believe accompany the infilling of the Holy Spirit.**





WARREN YOUNG



TERRELLE CRUM



KENNETH KANTZER

inspired Word of God. But evangelicals are making bold to ask, "What does 'infallible, inspired' mean?"

Few evangelical theologians believe today the view that it was "dictated" by God much as a business man does when he says, "Take a letter, Miss Brown." Neither do they deny that errors have crept in as the Bible has passed down to us through translations.

What they do say is that God spoke through writers who were fully kept from error by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Is this enough of an explanation? Perhaps it once was. But now liberal trends — notably neo-orthodoxy — are using the old standby terms of orthodoxy. So orthodoxy is forced to redefine its terms.

Says Wilbur Smith: "I believe that most conservative theologians today agree that the whole subject of biblical inspiration needs reinvestigation. What the majority of conservatives of our time mean by 'the inspiration of the Scriptures' is certainly not, for example what Luther meant by the phrase."

Carl F. H. Henry echoes this view and adds, "The impact of neo-orthodox theology has been felt especially in the area of Biblical authority. I notice a weakening even in some conservative circles of confidence in the high doctrine of Scripture."

Warren C. Young says: "Evangelicals must cope with this problem (biblical inspiration) in the light of neo-supernaturalism. Any type of verbal inspiration which fails to recognize the conceptual side will not carry much weight today."

A growing willingness of evangelical theologians to converse with liberal theologians. When conservatives first lost the battle on the denominational front, theologians pulled their heads in their shells. Now they're poking them out again.

Vernon Grounds believes: "An evangelical can be organizationally separated from all Christ-denying fellowship and yet profitably engage in an exchange of ideas with men who are not evangelicals. Why not? How else can

we bring them into an experience with the Christ Who is Truth incarnate?"

Says Lloyd Kalland of Gordon Divinity School (Mass.): "Evangelical scholars today are more willing to be drawn into open conflict with the liberals than at any other time in recent history."

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That sums up sketchily some ripples on the waters of evangelical thinking. Will they grow to ground swells?

Kenneth Kantzer of Wheaton College (Ill.) points out that: "Evangelical thought is very much a grass roots affair, humanly speaking." Nevertheless the men who are teaching the future preachers, Christian educators and lay leaders of tomorrow are bound to have a tremendous effect on the whole evangelical movement.

What about the future? Do the theologians view with alarm or point with pride?

Vernon Grounds: "The future, I sanguinely predict, is bright for the evangelical cause if somehow it can

counteract its fissiparous tendencies. Never before has there been such an opportunity to demonstrate the adequacy, vitality and necessity of the Gospel."

Paul Woolley: "Conservative Christianity is faced with a decision. It can stick to a lot of unnecessary traditional baggage in the forms of customs, practices and lingo beloved through the generations but now obstacles to preaching the Gospel to the unsaved. Or it can recognize that it has the opportunity to state the truths of the Christian faith in new terms and by new methods."

Paul Erb, editor of the Mennonite *Gospel Herald*: "Evangelical Christianity is likely to dominate the future if it can face openly and creatively the certainties, not the doubts, of modern scholarship—for instance, in the field of textual criticism."

No doubt about it. With a man like Billy Graham in the world spotlight, the Gospel that evangelicalism preaches is being put before men and women as never before. Atomic war threatens. The world is tense and troubled. People want the genuine Gospel.

Evangelical Christianity has what they are hungering for. That's why its future is bright.

### Next month, Christian Life

looks on the other side of the picture: "Is Liberal Theology Changing?" What trends are observed among liberal churchmen today? The editors have surveyed responsible authorities to come up with a picture worth viewing by every evangelical Christian today.

### Contributors to this Article

This is the first of two articles answering the question, "What are the trends in Protestant thought today." The second, appearing in next month's issue of CHRISTIAN LIFE, will deal with trends in the theology of liberal Protestantism.

For both articles the editors are indebted to the help of theologians representing virtually every phase of evangelicalism. Among them are Terrelle B. Crum, dean, Providence-Barrington Bible College; Paul Erb, editor, Mennonite *Gospel Herald*; Vernon Grounds, president, Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary; Carl F. H. Henry, professor of systematic theology and Christian philosophy, Fuller Theological Seminary; Stanley M. Horton, professor of Old Testament, Central Bible Institute; Lloyd Kalland, lecturer in philoso-

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The opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily shared by all the contributors.