

***Evangelicals and Biblical Scholarship,
1945-1992: An Anecdotal
Commentary***

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INTRODUCTION

I owe you some things right from the beginning. First, you deserve to know the genre of these comments. They are patterned after the didactic narratives of the Books of Chronicles—somewhat genealogical, largely narrative, but not lacking in homiletic or even midrashic qualities. A recent reviewer sums up Simon de Vries' estimate of the Chronicler's *tendenz* as more than a history but "a confession, an affirmation of faith, and a call to unswerving piety" (*ExpTim* 103 [1992] 287).

Second, my remarks are personal and carry the salient risks of high selectivity and broad generalization. These observations are based on an *n* of one: all Indians walk single-file, at least the one I saw was doing so.

Third, I would ask you please to frame your own versions of this commentary whether parallel to, divergent from, or colliding with mine. The exercise of remembering significant influences and of weighing the consequences—what future churches would be like if everyone followed your tack—is ultimately more worthwhile than what I say.

Fourth, the chronological framework is arbitrary. The *terminus a quo* (1945) is both personal and general. The year 1945 marks my matriculation at California Concordia College, one of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, high school/junior colleges. There I met Greek (in classical form: remember Crosby-Schaeffer's text?) and

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ventured into the Latin of Virgil and Cicero. That year also saw GI's by the thousands return from war to our colleges and seminaries. Victory was in the air. And, along with a yearning for normalcy, there was fresh élan to study God's Word and prepare for the victories beyond the victory, for the Kingdom that overarches all kingdoms.

YEARS OF PREPARATION (1945-57)

The year 1945 was for me a milestone only in its marking of a formal beginning to preparation. My parents were both teachers and ordained pastors, my brothers and sister—all at least a decade older—became pastors, lay ministers, or missionaries. To this day I have no idea when I learned what about Bible, theology, and ministry except in the more technical areas that I can associate with specific courses or teachers.

At Westmont in 1947 I majored in Greek. Engaged to Ruth, I often named books as desired gifts when she asked me about birthdays and Christmases. I still treasure those tomes, mostly reprints of nineteenth century works: *Expositor's Greek New Testament* (4 volumes with bright blue covers), Edersheim's stalwart work on *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, and A. T. Robertson's large *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. From my father I had cribbed a volume or two of the *Cambridge Greek New Testament*—*Hebrews* by Farrar is one I remember. Thayer's *Lexicon* was by my side to shed light on an early edition of Nestle's *Greek New Testament*.

During those years at Westmont I met a hagiographic crowd of mentors: Westcott, Lightfoot, Hort, Conybeare and Howson, Farrar and Stalker, Godet and Plumber, Sanday and Headlam. They and their ilk were relentless in their pursuit of truth, intimidating in their knowledge of classical, Hellenistic, and patristic literature, and irrepressible in their loyalty to the faith.

Perhaps my most notable academic experiences at Westmont were my discovery of Carl F. H. Henry and C. S. Lewis. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* set my imagination aflame and kindled my zeal for *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*. But it was Henry's feisty essays on *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) that set the cadence for my life in the church. I slept with that book under my pillow. Its call for better evangelical scholarship sparked a decision that I have never recanted during the intervening forty-five years.

As my apprenticeship continued at Fuller, from 1949 to 1954, the books of earlier decades continued to dominate. John Stott's account of his experience paralleled mine:

When I was an undergraduate at Cambridge University in the early 1940s . . . there was no evangelical literature available to help me. In those days one had to ransack secondhand booksellers for volumes like A. H. Finn's *The Unity of the Pentateuch*, James Orr's *The Problem of the Old Testament*, R. W. Dale's *The Atonement*, or works of the Princeton divines. But there was virtually no contemporary evangelical theology.

Speaking of the Princeton divines, Carl Henry used A. A. Hodge's *Outline* in systematic theology and B. B. Warfield in Prolegomena (a course). Wilbur Smith introduced us to Machen's classic on the virgin birth, Gleason Archer's OT introduction was generously (I almost said liberally!) sprinkled with Robert Dyck Wilson's and O. T. Allis's answers to higher critical theories. Keil and Delitzsch were the desired commentaries, along with the reprints of George Adam Smith in the *Expositor's Bible*. Everett Harrison's notes were full of interaction with NT scholarship (I still treasure my copy of Machen's *Origin of Paul's Religion*, reprint 1947) but as yet they had not been reduced to print. George Ladd and William LaSor were seeking to be original—Ladd in his work on the Gospels and the kingdom, LaSor in his inductive method of teaching Hebrew. Both scholars left a deep impact on me as they offered bridges between the best of what evangelicals had written in the previous eight or ten decades and what needed to be said in our day.

The key teachers at Fuller introduced me to a whole new world of scholarship: W. F. Albright, A. M. Hunter, T. W. Manson, and perhaps most important to me, H. H. Rowley and James S. Stewart. Even more vital were the faculty's examples of broad knowledge, rugged independence of thought combined with a proven loyalty to Christian orthodoxy, fair treatment of opposing views, balance that resisted extremes.

Appetite sharpened by these teachers, I faced the question, where after Fuller? The major divinity schools did not sound promising. Neither R. H. Pfeiffer at Harvard, nor William Irwin at Chicago, nor Henry S. Gehman at Princeton seemed to offer opportunities for young evangelicals to flourish. Archer and LaSor had entered OT study through philological gates—Archer through Egyptian and Semitics and LaSor through Semitics, especially Akkadian, under Cyrus Gordon at Dropsie. I wrote Gordon (I think he was by then at Brandeis), proposing to study Semitics as an entrée into biblical theology. His response was so full of animus and misunderstanding that my negative decision was made on the spot. I then wrote Albright at Johns Hopkins and was accepted. Along the way I applied to Manchester, where H. H. Rowley thought my Th.M. thesis on Hosea displayed more fundamentalism than he could stomach.

In the meantime David Wallace, a Fuller friend, was sending news from Edinburgh that his mentor Matthew Black had accepted the principalship of St. Marys, the theological college in St. Andrews, which Wallace viewed as the strongest of the four Scottish divinity schools. Part of what tipped the balance toward Scotland was the virtually tuition-free education and the very low cost of living.

I cite these steps in my decision to demonstrate how few American options there seemed to be for evangelicals seeking a reasonably comfortable environment for graduate studies in OT in the mid 1950s. Even at St. Andrews, the Semitics studies were more compelling than the OT offerings, so I dived into Ethiopian literature with the help of Edward Ullendorff.

St. Andrews left such an impact on my psyche that for nearly a decade I dreamed—whether with satisfaction or frustration—of that old, gray town by the North Sea. Two aspects of that impact bear some relevance to our topic.

First, the opportunities to preach from week to week were a useful balance to the heady experience of having more time to study than I had ever before enjoyed. My faith was strengthened at the same time that my mind was stretched.

Second, even more memorable was the invitation to serve as a university lecturer during my final year. I taught the basic OT courses to the B.D. students as well as biblical studies to would-be school teachers. For the first time I was working outside the scrutiny of my fundamentalist family and my evangelical teachers. Many nights I lay on the hearth rug and stared at the coal fire while putting basic questions to myself: Who am I? What do I really believe? In what theological-spiritual context do I want to serve? My conclusions then were basically what they are now. My education and the evangelical faith it fostered were my own. I could walk into the classroom or the faculty common room and know that I belonged, without dint of compromise or hint of embarrassment.

This confidence in the credibility of our evangelical heritage was bolstered by the beginnings of friendships with George Beasley-Murray and Donald Wiseman, then on the staff of the British Museum. Through Wiseman I formed ties with the Tyndale Fellowship in Cambridge and its cadre of intellectual evangelicals.

WESTMONT COLLEGE (1957-63)

These years saw mild outbursts of evangelical publication. *Christianity Today*, newly founded with Carl Henry as its first editor, published a series of brief articles, each spelling out the themes, backgrounds, and theological importance of a "Bible Book of the

Month." My first payments for writing came from a couple of these. At the same time British InterVarsity was launching the *New Bible Dictionary* (1962); Carl Henry was editing the three volume *Biblical Expositor* (1960); and Everett Harrison and Geoffrey Bromiley were working on *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (1960). Harrison was teaming with Charles Pfeiffer on Moody's *Wycliffe Commentary* (1962); Bromiley was also beginning to gather contributors for the revised ISBE; and InterVarsity was commissioning volumes for the Tyndale Commentary series. It was a fine time to begin an academic ministry: lots of occasions to contribute, opportunity to appear in the same volume or series with seasoned scholars, compensation so meager that there was no temptation to ease off and play golf, even for a St. Andrews graduate.

While we were waiting for good stuff to be written, we were still in a bind for textbooks. We could use Bible School surveys from earlier ages or take the risk of requiring works written from a more critical perspective than our constituencies could swallow. I tried some of each—W. G. Moorhead's *Outline Studies in the Books of the Old Testament* (1893) and Bernhard Anderson's *Understanding the Old Testament*. Then Cal Bultheis from Eerdmans invited me to do my own. Boggled at the scope of such a work for someone just out of grad school, I proposed that Robert Laurin, my buddy from Westmont, Fuller, and St. Andrews, join the venture. We divided up the OT and ground out chapters that were then mimeographed and used in both our classrooms, his at California Baptist Seminary (Covina), mine at Westmont.

Two things scuttled that partnership. One was the difference in critical perspective that arose between us. Close as we were as Christian brothers, we found that we had less in common than we had first believed. Laurin was more ready than I to treat the early Genesis stories as myth, to opt for an open canon and a charismatic hermeneutic a la von Rad, to read the Pentateuch in terms of its literary sources, and to settle unequivocally for a Maccabean date for Daniel.

The second factor was the beginning of conversations with members of Fuller's board about the Fuller presidency. These conversations were paralleled by discussions within the Fuller community about the relevancy of "inerrancy" as the means of expressing biblical authority. Collaboration with Laurin was proving awkward both for my Westmont ties and for friends at Fuller who were advocating my candidacy. Laurin graciously withdrew from the project, left the Eerdmans contract with me, and some years later published *The Laymen's Introduction to the Old Testament* (1970). The Westmont years made me sensitive to the delicate balance between a high view of

Scripture's inspiration and authority and breadth in the use of critical tools to catch the meaning of the text.

Along the road, friends like Leon Morris, Merrill Tenney, Bernie Ramm, Paul Jewett, Bill LaSor, and Ed Carnell were supplying books that pointed the way to the irenic spirit, enlightened scholarship, and devout discipleship which I hoped to embody. Reprints more and more gave way to contemporary works during the late 1950s and early 1960s. John Bright's *The Kingdom of God* and G. E. Wright's *God Who Acts and The Old Testament Against Its Environment*, along with many other volumes in the Studies in Biblical Theology series from Britain were literally godsend to me, as was Jacob's *Theology of the Old Testament* (1958).

FULLER (1963-69)

Ambivalence describes my mood during this period. The painful sides were two: (1) a wrenching engagement in administrative labors that made time and energy for scholarly writing hard to come by; (2) a growing concern about the possibility of revising the Fuller doctrinal statement without opening the floodgates to a pluralism that would quench our orthodoxy and ultimately swamp us. Wilbur Smith, Gleason Archer, and Harold Lindell left the faculty. The immediate tension was eased, but the long-range question of our direction still nagged at my insides. The stakes seemed high for us and for other evangelicals who looked to us for clues to their own positions.

The joyful sides of the ambivalence were notable: (1) seeing the faculty draw together around the task of strengthening our statement of faith, a task pursued by a fine committee under Paul Jewett's leadership; (2) watching Everett Harrison (*New Testament Introduction* [1964]; *Short Life of Christ* [1968]) and George Ladd publish significant works in NT studies, especially Ladd's books on *Jesus and the Kingdom* (1964) and *Evangelicals and Criticism* (1967). These two books conveyed a symbol of Fuller's centrism in biblical studies: one looked left and dealt with the weaknesses of Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutics; the other looked right and called for a devout use of critical tools by evangelicals.

During this period von Rad (1962, 1965) and Eichrodt (1961, 1967) published their OT theologies in English; I found the latter informing and useful and the former exciting and scintillating. From Gunkel's reprints, Mowinckel's *Psalms in Israel's Worship* (1962), and Westermann's *Praise of God in the Psalms* (1961) and *Forms of Prophetic Speech* (1967), I began to venture seriously into form-criticism. I felt that I heard overtones in the text to which I had previously been deaf. Overall, two scholars influenced my thought and attitude to-

ward biblical studies for this decade: F. F. Bruce, with his blend of learnedness, clarity, diligence, evenhandedness, and devotion to the gospel; and Oscar Cullmann, with his grasp of the sweep of Scripture's message, especially in his magisterial *Salvation as History* (1967).

While the work proceeded on the revision of Fuller's doctrinal statement, the issue of the importance and meaning of inerrancy continued to bubble on our campus and across the land. Harold John Ockenga, Fuller's co-founder and the chair of the boards of *Christianity Today* and Fuller proposed a national conference to discuss the issues. He helped raise money for it, asked me to draft the agenda, and then co-chaired the sessions along with Russell Hitt, editor of *Eternity Magazine*, which, with *Christianity Today* represented by Frank Gaebel, co-sponsored the symposium. It was held in 1966 on the Gordon campus at Wenham and attracted several dozen American, British, European, and Australian scholars. The results were something of a stalemate. A helpful statement was issued, listing the participants' common ground and issues yet to be resolved. To my not unbiased ears, the major division was between the philosophers and theologians on the one hand and the philologists, historians, and exegetes on the other. A memorable debate between Jim Packer and Frank Andersen encapsulated this division. I left Wenham heartened by the common ground among most of the biblical scholars and by my surmise that a number of the theologians were attracted to the term inerrancy more by the desire not to cause division or raise suspicion than by the conviction that it was an essential biblical label.

What I was seeking throughout these years, and even more in the decade of the 1970s, was an approach that would define biblical authority from the combination of proof-texts fairly used, of biblical teaching about the Bible soundly applied, and of biblical phenomena squarely faced. Of these, the third factor seemed most crucial and controversial: the role of biblical phenomena in influencing how we shape and defend Scripture's doctrine of itself. As the *Christianity Today* report (July 22, 1966) noted: "any definition of inerrancy must be framed in the light of all the biblical data."

The contest was for turf: what part do biblical scholars who have to deal with every text and every word in every text play in forming a doctrine of inspiration and its implications? Or the struggle was to settle the rules that governed a golf match: were they winter rules or summer rules? Do we play the ball as it lies, as biblical students are trained to do? Or do we place it on the cushy turf of our favorite proof-texts or presuppositions to get a better swing at it, as some theologians or philosophers seem to do?

FULLER (THE 1970s)

The decade of the seventies for me was dominated by two important opportunities and an unwelcome interruption. The first opportunity was the call to speak regularly on *The Joyful Sound*, the successor to Charles E. Fuller's *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*. Harold John Ockenga blessed that decision with, "It will keep your head in the Bible"—words both prescient and prescriptive. For a dozen years I had the privilege of sharing my study with an international radio audience and of trying to forge faithful links between scholarship and proclamation.

The second was the virtually unprecedented growth in seminary enrollment between 1974 and 1980. The challenge was to take women and men, generally innocent of biblical knowledge, and train them in large numbers to acquire biblical languages and content, along with skills in exegesis. Guidebooks, handbooks, syllabi, and other tools were needed by the dozens and a growing list of major textbooks like Barker-Lane-Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (1969) and Ralph Martin's *New Testament Foundations* (1975, 1978) began to appear.

The new generation of texts sought to introduce evangelical students to approaches of which our tradition had been chary: redaction criticism, unconventional suggestions about authorship of parts of the Pauline corpus, Second Peter, the Fourth Gospel, etc. Anxiety and excitement marked the poles of my moods during this period. I was excited by the spate of work from our evangelical colleagues, capped in 1979 by the lead volume of the *ISBE* revision. The line between the left wing of the church and the right was being perforated and a corps of scholars both Protestant and Catholic were finding a shared center in the use of critical tools and a reverence for Scripture's major messages. I am quick to recognize, however, that beyond that central group are many teachers both to the left and to the right who find little in common besides their study of a common text.

One sign of the softening of the "them and us" attitude was the decreased use of the term "higher critic" to describe the work of scholars more liberal or radical than we. We had learned along the way that we are all higher critics when we ask questions about the origin, setting, authorship, unity, and intention of the text. The question was not higher criticism but the nature of our assumptions and the quality of our scholarship. About this time I sensed a narrowing of the gap between exegetes and theologians as evangelical theologians began to reckon more regularly with the gains made in biblical theology and exegesis.

Most of my anxiety during this period stemmed from my dual role as teacher and administrator. I, like most of you, had a fairly clear sense of the critical boundaries in my own field—how far I could go, what I could say, what the gains and risks were of various methods and approaches. But I was not nearly so sure of how bold and venturesome my colleagues should be. Glenn Barker, then our Dean of Theology and later our Provost, and I wrestled with this question of boldness when our beloved teammate, Ralph Martin, asked us to look at the manuscript of Volume 2 of *New Testament Foundations* in the mid-seventies. The discussion centered on the question of Pauline or Paulinist authorship of Ephesians and the Pastorals. Did we at Fuller want to be first on the block to break with the conservative-evangelical consensus on this? Ralph Martin experienced measurable pain in those conversations and agreed to soften somewhat his conclusions for publication while retaining the arguments that had led him to a Paulinist approach. I cite this instance not to renew a debate on the meaning of "authorship" in Scripture, but to illustrate the tensions and gains of that period—gains in the freedom to advance fresh answers to biblical questions within a commitment to revere and obey the Scriptures.

The unwelcome interruption to which I alluded in characterizing the seventies was the almost simultaneous publication of Paul Jewett's *Man as Male and Female* and Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* in 1976. Dealing with Lindsell's frontal assault on Fuller was no small task: a campaign of national ads featuring comments on Scripture from key alums; ten radio sermons on our doctrinal statement published as *What We Evangelicals Believe*; publication of a collection of essays by Paul Rees, Clark Pinnock, Berkeley Michaelson, Bernard Ramm, Earl Palmer and me, entitled *Biblical Authority*, edited by Jack Rogers (1977). Our main thesis was that inerrancy and evangelicalism were not synonymous. Our chief plea was that evangelicals should unite around our commitment to Scripture and our orthodox heritage and not go to war over any particular word used among us to define Scripture's inspiration.

Jewett's book did not make my task at Fuller easier. I had long maintained that the alternative to an inerrant Bible was not a doctrine of errancy. Yet one of Jewett's chief assumptions seemed to imply such errancy. Jewett held that Paul's apparent restrictions on women in the churches were the result of the apostle's rabbinic training that had not yet been thoroughly eradicated by his experience "in Christ," where there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." Though Jewett's method gained little support from his Fuller colleagues, it did give us an opportunity to demonstrate the forbearance of varieties of evangelical views and to

underline our conviction that we test orthodoxy by the sum of one's ministry not by idiosyncratic approaches to what Scripture has not made fully clear.

The subsequent conferences sponsored by the International Council for Inerrancy had a positive impact on biblical studies. They voiced the conviction that all evangelicals must take the Bible's sacred nature with full seriousness even as we investigate its meaning. The summary statement rightly acknowledged both the strengths and limits of the term "inerrancy" and left room for further discussion of its implications. Happily, it has led to discussions on the more central question, not how do we *describe* the Bible, but how do we *interpret* it.

In August 1979, I published a brief tract on "Reflections, Appreciative and Inquisitive on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." On the appreciative side I listed the following points: (1) the need to connect inerrancy with the intent of the biblical author, (2) the recognition that the mode of inspiration remains largely a mystery, (3) the acknowledgment that inerrancy must be defined by a list of qualifications drawn from the data of Scripture, (4) the note taken of literary genres with their differing degrees of precision, (5) the attention paid to the relationship between revelation and culture, (6) the importance attached to the internal testimony of God's Spirit, (7) the focus on Christ as the chief message of Scripture, (8) the concern that prevalent errors in nonevangelical doctrines of Scripture be refuted.

As for the inquisitive side of my response, three areas were tagged for further attention: (1) hermeneutics, including the tensions between the Bible's unity and diversity, the questions raised by human language with its cultural limits as the vehicle of infallible revelation and the matter of distinguishing what is binding on Christian faith and practice today from what was temporary in God's program in holy history; (2) theological method, including effects of apologetic strategy on our theological formulations, analysis of philosophical formulations, and the achievement of presuppositions as authentically biblical as possible; (3) textual transmission, including the relationship of the original texts to later versions and translations, together with problems that arise if we either overemphasize or downplay the importance of the autographa.

FULLER (1980-92)

Interpreting the Bible has dominated the scholarly side of my life in the past dozen years. During the "Battle" of the mid-seventies, Glenn Barker and I persuaded Word Books that the evangelical

movement needed a fresh set of technical commentaries based on the original languages. We felt that such a work would demonstrate the power, vitality, and devoutness of solid scholarship. "By their exegetical fruits, ye shall know them" was my silent motto. In 1982 Peter O'Brien's *Colossians* and Fred Bruce's *Thessalonians* appeared and the project was off and running. In the decade since then, including John Hartley's *Leviticus* and Roland Murphy's *Ecclesiastes* (the latest releases), forty-one volumes have appeared. Along with *The New International Commentaries* (Eerdmans), they offer a testimony both to the scholarly rigor and cooperative spirit of our generation of evangelicals.

Today's steady trickle of commentaries is possible only because of the regular flow of monographs and journal articles to which evangelicals seem to be contributing more heavily now than at any time in our century. Some evangelical presses are seeking to enlarge their repertoire with scholarly monographs as well as textbooks, while denominational houses like Fortress and Westminster-Knox are releasing volumes from evangelical scholars. Scholars Press and the various series from Sheffield have done yeoman service in publishing good dissertations without regard to the creed of the authors.

The changes in the past dozen years have been highlighted for me in the task of revising the *Old Testament Survey*, which with huge boosts from Bill LaSor and Fred Bush finally escaped from the press in 1982, more than two decades after its conception. Writing a survey is a cheeky task. No one knows enough to comment on the whole scope of any subject. That may be why many of us write them while we are young, brimming with energy, and not aware of how much there is yet to know. Trying to update the book and make it more friendly to its users has swamped me, so much so that I have sent SOS messages to a half-dozen of my friends to bail me out. The problem is at least threefold. First, I know more about some OT subjects now than when I began the project almost thirty-five years ago and I have a compelling urge to tell what I know. Second, I am more skittish about generalization and oversimplification and am tempted to kill, or at least paralyze, the subjects with a thousand qualifications. Third, there are tables full of recent literature to be consulted before one can write a summary of the important ingredients in any biblical book.

That third facet of my problem is a tribute to our guild in general and to many of you in particular. We have an embarrassment of riches with which to work, and a treasure trove of new questions to consider. Canon criticism, for instance. We are called to deal with the text not just in parts but as a whole. How important are the canonical orders of the Psalter and the Book of Proverbs, especially 10:1-22:16?

What about the unity and order of the Writings or the total message of the Book of the Twelve? Which of the suggested purposes of the Deuteronomic History is the most likely to be correct?

Or the matter of genre. Are Isaiah and Zephaniah dramas? How do story and history relate to one another in the narratives of Pentateuch and Former Prophets? Or in the Synoptics and Acts?

What about Hebrew poetry? Is there such a thing? What are its real differences from prose? Which of the current explanations of the matter is most faithful to the text?

Then there is narratology. One could assemble a library on Samuel, Saul, and David. How do we boil this down to an essence that college freshmen can grasp and use to refresh, not sour, their faith? I rehearse this list of queries not to complain (though it does make deadlines harder to meet) but to commend the progress that our combined ministries have made. I do not want to return to simpler days. I agree with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who purportedly said, "I do not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my right arm for the simplicity on the far side of complexity."

My hope is that from the give-and-take of scholarship, made more accessible by technology, will come better consensuses and deeper understandings. They in turn will cause yet more light to be shed on the gospel and the Lord of that gospel.

The variety of new approaches is more to be welcomed than feared. Our evangelical faith can tolerate a wide range of opinions about the composition and meaning of the text so long as their proponents revere the Scripture and cling to the confessions that through history have marked off orthodoxy from heresy. There is no necessary evangelical stance on a host of biblical questions. But there may be an evangelical mood—a set of attitudes that provides a framework for our scholarly efforts. First, we are disciples who happen to be scholars, not vice versa. Next, we labor first as members of Christ's body and second as practitioners of a guild. Third, we are willing participants in a historical movement called evangelical, orthodox, and Bible-believing, among other rubrics. We toil as guardians of a heritage even as we strive for fresher and clearer insights into the texts we treasure.

These relationships protect us from being "lone rangers" and urge us to weigh the consequences of how and what we say. We test new ideas with peers before we thrust them on students or church. We walk around our theories to judge whether they will raise more problems than they solve. We sight down their trajectories to measure whether they lead toward or away from our valued historic formulations of the faith.

At the same time we take seriously the historical character of revelation. This seriousness frees us to trust the Lord who superintended the whole process of inspiration, preservation, and canonization and is the ultimate source of all valid means of investigation: linguistic, historical, sociological, anthropological, and literary. This seriousness also encourages our humility before the wonder of God's otherness, and that humility preserves us from an arrogance that seeks natural explanations for all God's activity and leads us to an unshakeable confidence in God's sovereign transcendence in revelation and redemption. What we cannot know God reveals; what we cannot do God achieves.

We shall continue to debate with collegial intensity the process of Job's composition, the meaning of **לבל** in Qoheleth, the social and moral condition of Gomer at the time of her marriage to Hosea, the relationship of the two halves of Zechariah, the priority of Mark, indeed the whole synoptic question, the purposes of John's Gospel or that of Romans, the setting of Ephesians, and the ground rules for interpreting the Apocalypse. And we carry on these and a thousand other debates using all the testable means that God's providence has placed at our disposal.

The very term evangelical carries at its heart the grace of forgiveness. Can "forgive us our debts" carry a strong footnote of repentance for not doing our work better, even as "Just as we forgive our debtors" embraces a warm forbearance of those scholars whose faulty judgments have misled us?

A note of encouragement. More remarkable than the growth, diversification, and maturity of biblical scholarship among evangelicals is the large number of persons nurtured in the faith, sent out to nurture their children and grandchildren, and toiling as faithful servants, both lay and clergy, in Christ's vineyard. While we have been finding the way, we have also been pointing the way. While we have been scouting out the truth, we have been witnessing to the truth of the One who is the truth.

CONCLUSION

Three questions spring to mind as we reflect on our pilgrimages, you on yours, I on mine. First, how far have we come? An anecdotal answer may give an inkling. While drafting this talk I leafed through the September 1992 issue of *The Expository Times*. A few sentences warmed my heart.

Cyril Rodd sums up his lead review of *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* like this: "I commend this volume as a very serviceable dictionary with which conservative readers can feel secure, though

at times their eyes may be opened to ways of interpretation which are new to them, while those with more radical views will not be offended by anything approaching obscurantism. It is a volume which any minister will find it useful to possess" (p. 356). Congratulations to Joel Green, Scott McKnight, and Howard Marshall and to the dozens of you whose work is lauded in that verdict!

A few pages later Harry Mowvley sought to choose the best technical commentaries on Amos and Hosea. Focusing on the works of James Mays, Francis Andersen and Noel Freedman, and Hans Walter Wolff, he ends with Doug Stuart (whose name he misspells) and asks "Which of these four pairs may be judged 'Best of Breed'? All of them meet my first criterion of good scholarship. . . . [Mays] and even more so Stewart [sic] both attempt to show how the prophetic words are still relevant today. I suppose that on these grounds the vote must go to Stewart, especially as it is the most up-to-date" (p. 366). No sooner had I set down the September *Expository Times* than I picked up the October volume of *Interpretation* and took delight in the articles on *Matthew* by David Bauer and Klyne Snodgrass.

These instances are heartening because they are but a tiny sample of what could be cited. Perhaps the clearest evidence of how far we have come is the strength of the IBR (and of our new journal) and the cumulative quantity and quality of the work of our members.

A second question is, What lies ahead? I am not sure that I have a clue. My reading of the past is probably skewed beyond recognition. My probing of the future may be suspect at any point.

Two suggestions. First, we need to weigh the role of ancillary disciplines in our work. We have yet to assimilate the impact of the human sciences salient to the Bible in fields like anthropology, sociology, social psychology, history from below (life of the common people), and archeology with its modern refinements. The same can be said for literary techniques like narratology, structuralism, poetics, and gnomic devices.

Many of you are venturing into these and a host of other areas with promising results. And your tribe will increase. At the same time others will continue to gain ground with forays into Semitic philology and comparative literature, into Hellenistic and Roman backgrounds and into links between the testaments. Especially helpful will be a full court press on intertestamental and Jewish thought from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, through the Qumran materials, newly liberated from their captivity on the river Charles, to the massive and intimidating body of Tannaitic Jewish literature and its awesome progeny.

My other suggestion on what lies ahead has to do with the polymorphous topic of hermeneutics mentioned briefly above. The lack

of consensus on how to read the biblical texts, let alone how to write commentaries on them, is nudging us toward anarchy.

How reader-oriented should our interpretations be? Are multiple readings based on differing contexts—culture, gender, social status—desirable? What relative emphasis do we put on what the text meant and what it means? Are both the duty of a commentator? In his analysis of Amos/Hosea commentaries, Mowvley makes a positive comment or two about my Tyndale volumes and then says: "They tend to be limited to an exposition of the prophets' message to their own contemporaries without much effort to relate them to our times. The application has to be taken by the user himself [sic: the sexist language]. As we have seen, some would think that this is the correct way to write a commentary" (p. 366).

To seek agreement on such issues may be a tactical mistake, like an army aiming at a bridge too far. But the matter of interpretation cannot be ignored or left to individual tastes. As evangelicals we have a passion to drain the last drop of meaning from any part of Scripture. At the same time to be caught up in the fads and philosophies of our day or any other day may lead us away from, not toward, Christ's truth.

At the very least we must be forthright about the assumptions that inform our work. In the potpourri of hermeneutical options, we ought not to leave our students and readers to guess the nature of our menu, but must make clear the guidelines that shape our choices.

Why do we need to do it right (or at least not do it badly)? We want our work to last. That's one answer to this third question. We all know the maxim: the biblical expositions that are wed to the philosophies of their times end as widows (or widowers) in the times that follow. Both rationalists and existentialists have learned that doleful lesson.

We want to help, not hurt, the churches is a second answer. If James Turner's analysis of the mistakes of our forbears prior to and after the turn of our century is even half right, it sounds a shrill alarm. His thesis goes like this: the loss of belief in the Christian God and the tenets of our Christian creeds was due as much to the accommodations of the churches as to the secular attacks on our faith. Here are some of his salty conclusions: "In trying to adapt their religious beliefs to socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, to the tightening standards of science, the defenders of God slowly strangled Him. If anyone is to be blamed for deicide, it is not Charles Darwin but his adversary Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, not the godless Robert Ingersoll but the godly Beecher family."

Of such accommodating religious leaders, Turner concludes, "They were hardly fools, to insist that any God must be Lord of this world, but they did not remember that this world did not define Him. They forgot, in short, that their God was—as any God had to be to command belief over the long term—radically other than man" (*Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, pp. xiii, 267).

A lot is at stake in what we do. We are producing works that may enjoy a half-century of influence. We are training the teachers who will dominate evangelical thinking for the first third of the next century. Let this be a humbling, not a paralyzing, thought. Let it spark excitement, not anxiety.

It is our era to be representatives of the triune Lord in the discovery and delivery of sacred truth. We do it not alone. The Blessed Trinity, ever at work in the extension of the kingdom and the nurture of the faithful, has seen to it that the holy faith has been investigated and promulgated from Clement and Irenaeus to F. F. Bruce, George Ladd, and E. J. Young. That divine surveillance is still on watch. One of the great joys of milestones like mine is to pass the baton to men and women more gifted, better prepared, more passionate for truth than I have been. But the greatest joy of all is to know that the God of the churches—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is yet at work gifting sons and daughters to be pastor-teachers for the edification of Christ's people.