

The Emerging Church

Part 1: Historical Background

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Anglican theologian Alister McGrath describes Protestantism as a “living entity whose identity mutates over time.”¹ “In biological mutation—explains McGrath—, small changes in genetic codes lead to the emergence of new forms.”² Postmodernity has brought about deep epochal changes in Western culture and philosophy. These changes reached evangelical circles during the last twenty years generating a number of responses. One of them, the “emerging church” movement is gaining momentum, attention, and influence. Justin Taylor thinks that it involves a “significant shift” in some segments of evangelicalism.³ The leadership of the Evangelical coalition and the future of the Protestant Reformation may be at stake.

What are the extent and nature of the changes taking place in the emerging Church movement? Moreover, does the emerging church movement represent a minor evolutionary mutation⁴ in the history of

¹ Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 400.

² *Ibid.*, 461.

³ Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of this Book,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Paul Kjoss Helseth, Millard J. Erickson, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 17.

⁴ Rick Warren seems to assume the Emerging Church is a minor mutation in the practical areas of ministry and worship. “The only way to stay relevant is to anchor your ministry to unchanging truths and eternal purposes while being willing to continually adapt

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Evangelicalism or the emergence of a new macro evolutionary form? To answer these questions provisionally we need to keep in mind a brief outline of the Protestant theological experience (part 1), to gain a working knowledge of the present situation in American Evangelicalism (part 2), to become acquainted with a brief sample of “neo-Evangelical” reactions to the changes taking place within the leadership of the Evangelical movement (part 3), to explore the philosophical foundations and levels of these changes (part 4), and to consider the way in which the present situation relates to the future of the Protestant Reformation (part 5).

The goal of this article is to highlight some important theological aspects of the Evangelical experience that may help us to better understand and evaluate the present situation and envision the future. My focus, then, is theological rather than historical. There are many and extensive studies on the basic facts involved in the theological and historical evolution of Protestantism and Evangelicalism.⁵ By necessity, any attempt to deal with broad issues briefly will distort and “caricature” them. Caricatures select and overemphasize some features of the reality they represent to make a point. When they are close to reality, caricatures help to communicate general points quickly and clearly. In theology, we rather speak of “models” than “caricatures.” Yet, my limited goal in this article requires less than what a model usually involves in Systematic theology.⁶

how you communicate those truths and purposes.” He later reminds us, correctly, “the world changes, but the Word doesn’t.” Rick Warren, “Foreword,” in *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, ed. Dan Kimball (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 7-8.

⁵ For a sample, see for instance, Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1998).

⁶ David Tracy explains that “a widely accepted dictum in contemporary theology is the need to develop certain basic models or types for understanding the specific task of the contemporary theologian,” David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 22. For further literature on models, see, e.g., Frederick Ferre, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Scribners, 1958). Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), and *Christian Discourse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

European Protestantism

The history of genetic mutations from which American Evangelicalism springs is complex.⁷ As we attempt to describe and assess the nature and span of change Evangelicalism presently experiences in the emerging Church phenomenon, we should keep in mind some of significant earlier mutations.

Greatly simplifying a highly complex reality for the sake of providing a quick historical background to contemporary events, we could say that the Protestant experiment started in Europe with the master minds of the Reformation, Luther (1517), Calvin (1536), and the Radical Reformers (1521).⁸ Luther generated a revolutionary idea; Calvin developed the idea into a system; and, the Radical Reformers anticipated the complexity and fragmentation of Protestantism and the roles that Scripture and laity will play in the evolution of the movement.

Eventually “state” churches emerged from the reform movement (1560’s and 1570’s). Confessionalization is the interlocking of “religious beliefs and practices with the objectives of the state.”⁹ In the process of organization, Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinistic) communities “defined

⁷ “The term ‘evangelical’ has been used by Reformed and Lutheran churches since the Reformation, because they base their teaching pre-eminently on the ‘Gospel.’ In Germany and Switzerland, ‘Evangelical’ (*evangelisch*) has been used by Lutheran churches in contradistinction to Calvinist bodies (in North America the tendency runs the other way), but in 1945 all Protestant churches in Germany were designated part of the Evangelical Church in Germany. In ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries, evangelicals distinguish themselves from Catholic, ‘liberal,’ neo-orthodox and radical Christians, and regard themselves as part of a broad, pandenominational movement stemming from the eighteenth-century evangelical revivals.” Trevor A. Hart, *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 197.

⁸ “The diverse group of Reformers categorized under the rubric ‘Radical’ possessed certain distinctive features that marked them off from both Lutherans and Reformed. Reformers such as Karlstadt, Müntzer, Konrad Grebel (ca. 1498–1526), and Felix Manta (ca. 1500–1527) of Zurich, Balthasar Hubmaier of Waldshut (1485–1528), as well as Hans Hut (ca. 1490–1527), Michael Sattler (1490?–1527), and Menno Simons, were advocates of radical changes in doctrine, practice, and society. Anticlerical motifs and actions played an important role among them, and they minimized or even dispensed with sacraments. Because they did not work with or through secular overlords, as Reformers they are often contrasted with the ‘magisterial’ reform of Luther, Calvin, and others,” Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* Vol. 4 (Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 553.

⁹ McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 101.

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themselves by explicit and extensive doctrinal formulations.”¹⁰ Thus, doctrinal and organizational lines were drawn.

In England, Anglicanism (1520’s and 1530’s), and, Puritanism (1558) advanced different visions of the Protestant Reformation.¹¹ Anglicanism, while remaining closer to tradition, attempted to purify the organizational and moral excesses of Roman Catholicism drawing from both Luther and Calvin’s ideas. Following Scripture more closely, Puritanism attempted a more deep and extensive reformation of Christianity following the Calvinistic model from Geneva.

After the thirty years war (1618-1648), an exhausted Europe needed a break from religious debate and reformation. As a secular culture of tolerant rationalism emerged with modernity, religious commitment and church attendance greatly diminished. In this new cultural climate, Protestant renewal and adaptation brought about Pietism (1675). Nikolaus Ludwig Graf Zinzendorf’s (1700-1760) pietistic ideas influenced John Wesley’s (1703-1791) emphasis on the role of experience in the Christian life.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹¹ For a brief introduction to the general differences between Anglican and Puritans, see for instance, D. A. Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 147-48.

¹² McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 146-47.

American Protestantism

All these ideas and religious practices crossed the Atlantic and populated the fertile soil of early American settling creating, in turn, new developments centering around epoch changing events such as, for instance, the first (1720-1750) and second (1800-1850)¹³ Great Awakenings. With the passing of time, the complexity and options of religious practices increased. Centrifugal forces overpowered centripetal ones. To overcome the disadvantages of theological and ecclesiological fragmentation, American Protestant denominations began to cooperate in specific projects, like for instance, missionary outreach and the translation of Scriptures to foreign languages. American Evangelicalism is a coalition of protestant denominations that attempt to overcome their fragmentation by working together in theological and practical tasks.

As Protestantism, American Evangelicalism is a varied, multifaceted, and complex phenomenon that defies neat descriptions and definitions.¹⁴ Moreover, the term “Evangelicalism” may describe historical, doctrinal, and pastoral referents. Historically, it may refer to the sector of American Protestantism influenced by the two Great Awakenings and the Baptist and Methodist denominations strengthened by them. Doctrinally, it may refer to a theological summary of beliefs shared by various denominations. Pastorally, it may refer to a coalition of denominations working for a common cause.¹⁵ In this article, I use the term “Evangelicalism” in a general and inclusive sense to describe the center of American Protestantism during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

¹³ Byron D. Klaus, “Great Awakenings,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Warren S. Benson Michael J. Anthony, Daryl Eldridge and Julie Gorman, *Baker Reference Library* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 316.

¹⁴ Alister McGrath express it well, Protestantism came into existence as a diverse entity by a multiplicity of driving agendas, cultural contexts, intellectual resources, and directing visions. There is no question of a ‘lost primal unity’ of Protestantism, a golden age of unity that quickly shattered into fragments. Its multiple geographical, cultural, and historical origins made Protestantism diverse from the beginning. McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 463.

¹⁵ For an introduction to the complexity of meaning and uses of the term evangelicalism see, for instance, D. A. Sweeney, “The Essential Evangelicalism Dialectic: The Historiography of the Early Neo-Evangelical Movement and the Observer-Participant Dilemma,” *Church History* 60, no. 1 (1991): 70-84.

Modern Protestant Theology

After the thirty years war, emerging philosophical trends began to recast the intellectual landscape of European civilization. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Descartes, 1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and John Locke (1632-1704), among others, spear headed a relentless attack on the epistemological foundations of classical philosophy and science opening the way for the emergence of the Modern Age. In various ways, the new age would shake the foundations of Christianity. One of these ways was the rise of the Historical Critical Method based on the claim that Scripture is not an inspired book advanced by philosophers like Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) and John Locke (1632–1704).¹⁶

More than a century later, Protestant theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the Father of Modern Protestant Theology, thought that the solution to the epistemological problem presented by Modernity was to accept its premises and readjust theological construction to the new situation. Drawing from his Pietistic tradition Schleiermacher argued that God reveals himself through feeling rather than reason. On this basis, Schleiermacher went on to articulate a system of the Christian Faith¹⁷ that became a solid alternative to the reigning Calvinistic system. Although both systems were Christian, they advanced widely different interpretations of doctrines, life, and ecclesiastical practices. Soon, modern scientific ideas went on to challenge biblical cosmology by means of the evolutionary theory.¹⁸

¹⁶ “A detached reading of the Bible as a book like any other book, which paid due attention to the original language and historical circumstances, would produce a tolerant and peaceful agreement about the essentials of a moral and spiritual religion.” J. C. O’Neill, “Biblical Criticism,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday: 1996), 727.

¹⁷ See for instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Addresses in Response to its Cultured Critics*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA.: Knox Press, 1969 (1799)); ———, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, Translation edited from the second German edition (1830) and the second edition (1830) ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928).

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: J. Murray, 1859).

Fundamentalism

Not surprisingly, leaders of American Protestantism reacted differently to the new scientific ideas and the modernistic approach to theology championed by Schleiermacher. Since the new ideas appealed to intellectuals, they reacted to them first. For various and different reasons, some found the changes in the foundations of Christianity advanced by modernity convincing, others did not. Progressively, some theology professors and Seminaries adjusted to the new ideas, others became critical of them.

During the nineteenth century, theologians from the Old Princeton Theological Seminary understood that the acceptance of modern epistemology and cosmology were incompatible with traditional Biblical Protestantism.¹⁹ Acceptance of the Historical Critical Method of Biblical interpretation, Schleiermacher's theological system, and evolutionary theory, represented a challenge to the foundations of Biblical Protestantism. As the heir to prestigious Old Princeton theologians Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) and Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921),²⁰ used their Calvinistic heritage to defend and reaffirm the classical understanding of Reformed Protestantism against the challenges of modern science and theology.²¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer reminds us "Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield laid the groundwork for conservative evangelical theology."²²

¹⁹ B. J. Leonard, "The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism," *Review & Expositor* 79, no. 1 (1982): 6.

²⁰ E. G. Hinson, "Neo-fundamentalism: An Interpretation and Critique," *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no. 2 (1981): 33.

²¹ "Princeton Theology began at Princeton Seminary in the work of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge and was continued by Alexander Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen. In their efforts to defend Calvinism and with it the orthodox doctrines of Christianity, the Princeton Theologians developed a system of doctrines grounded in reason and biblical inerrancy. Thus they stressed the importance of reason in authenticating Christian faith and the need for an inerrant text which revealed ultimate divine truth. The Princeton Theologians made biblical inerrancy one of the cardinal doctrines of Fundamentalism. Their theories regarding verbal inspiration, textual inerrancy, and the sanctity of the original manuscripts became prominent elements of the movement." Leonard, "The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism," 7-8.

²² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," in *Whatever Happened to Truth*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 100.

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At the turn of the twentieth century, two very different events were brewing in American Protestantism. On the intellectual front, German Biblical criticism inspired by modern philosophical ideas was eroding the authority of Scripture at the seminaries.²³ On the practical life experience front, Pentecostalism came to existence.²⁴ The former led to the rise of the Fundamentalist movement that defended the authority of the historical meaning of Scripture.²⁵ The latter led to the rise of the Charismatic movement that produced a revival in church attendance across denominational lines.²⁶

In time, modern ideas and the modern reinterpretations of Christian theology reached popular culture and challenged ministerial practice. This gave rise to what we know now as “Fundamentalism.” As with the words “Protestantism” and “Evangelicalism,” “Fundamentalism” also has a broad range of meanings and different referents. For instance, it can refer to any anti-intellectual, absolutist, and authoritarian position of any kind.²⁷ It can also refer to any religion in general, and to a particular period in the history of American Evangelicalism. In this article, I use the word “Fundamentalism” to refer to the mutation of American Protestantism that evolved during the first half of the twentieth century.

Some trace the origins of the “Fundamentalist” version of American Evangelicalism to the “Niagara Creed” in 1878.²⁸ A common enemy, modern culture and modern theologies united a diverse theological spectrum that included millenarians and advocates of Old Princeton theology.²⁹ Among the 14 affirmations included in the Niagara Creed, five became influential talking points against modernity: biblical

²³ McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 391.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 416-17.

²⁵ R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al., ed. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 4 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2009).

²⁶ McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 415-38.

²⁷ D. H. Watt, “The Meaning and End of Fundamentalism,” *Religious Studies Review* 33, no. 4 (2007): 269-73.

²⁸ Some report the Niagara Conference took place in 1895, see F. L. Cross, and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd. rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 650. Others report it in 1878 Leonard, “The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism,” 6.

²⁹ _____, “The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism,” 6.

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inerrancy, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, Christ's substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection, and the second coming. This action revealed a common *modus operandi*. Instead of arguing against modernity or showing the shortcomings of modern theology from solid biblical thinking, fundamentalists“contended that the Bible, Christian doctrine, and Christian experience did not need to be redefined in light of the scientific, philosophical, and literary assumptions of modern culture, but rather reaffirmed as the only legitimate challenge to its arrogance.³⁰ Ironically, according to some, Fundamentalism eventually led to a new version of American Evangelicalism.³¹

Two events became emblematic of the Fundamentalist movement, the publication of *The Fundamentals*³²between 1910 and 1915, and the “Scopes Monkey Trial” in 1925. The former, a theological initiative, “defended conservative evangelical Christianity”³³and the later, a cultural event, produced anti-Darwinian legislation in Tennessee.³⁴ Because of the theological controversy, several Protestant denominations split up into Fundamentalist and Modernist wings.³⁵ Because the media in the Scopes monkey trial “labeled theological conservatives as reactionary and anti-intellectual”³⁶ Evangelicals sought to distance themselves from the “Fundamentalism” label.

³⁰ Tom J. Nettles, “Fundamentalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Warren S. Benson Michael J. Anthony, Daryl Eldridge and Julie Gorman, *Baker Reference Library* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 304.

³¹ “[T]he fundamentalist agenda provided for a theological system which aided the faithful in sorting out the more sophisticated theological issues of the “modern” era. From biblicism to premillennialism, from christology to eschatology, fundamentalists gave the believers a basic and easily constructed system of belief. The security of such a system then and now accounts for much of the popular response to the movement.” Leonard, “The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism.”

³² See note 25.

³³ Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke and Grant Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 127.

³⁴ Alan G. Padgett, “Science and Theology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Eerdmans; Brill, 2005), 878.

³⁵ Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*: 650.

³⁶ W. H. Fuller, “From the Evangelical Alliance to the World Evangelical Fellowship: 150 Years of Unity with a Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 4 (1996): 160.

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In short, Fundamentalism came into existence as a response to the challenges Modernity leveled against Christianity in general and conservative Protestantism in particular. There was no new light from Scripture, spiritual revival, or systematical understanding behind it. By its origin and nature, Fundamentalism was an apologetical movement.³⁷

Neo-Evangelicalism

Several factors led to dissatisfaction with Evangelical Fundamentalism,³⁸ among them for instance, the fact that much of it was “populist, ignorant, and hostile to intellectual theology,”³⁹ and brought in isolationism from culture and withdrawal from the mainstream culture of America.⁴⁰ By the mid-1940s, “a number of influential thinkers emerged within fundamentalist ranks that sought a corrective to what they perceived as an increasing social and intellectual narrowness in the movement.”⁴¹ Out of this restlessness emerged the Neo-evangelical movement under the initial leadership of E. J. Carnell, Harold Ockenga, and Carl F. H. Henry.

³⁷ “Fundamentalism,” which originated in the United States, had from the beginning a very defensive character, since it considered its calling to be a defense against every liberal and modernistic criticism of Christian tenets (for example, those tenets regarding creation and evolution). Fundamentalists wished to defend the “fundamentals,” the objectivity of faith and the central truths of Christianity based on the absolute infallibility and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture.” G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 21.

³⁸ “Throughout the history of fundamentalism, several factors facilitated the cartoon genre of its public image. Its submission to the authority of Scripture in opposition to the antiauthoritarianism of the naturalistic scholarship of the post-Darwinian era has made it appear hopelessly out of touch with reality. Its relentless evangelism has brought in masses of people who gladly support strong personalities who appear to have deeply felt, biblically founded convictions. Personal idiosyncrasies, internal feuds, an increasingly narrow moralistic focus, and appeal to the masses have provided a large arena for caricature by the critics of fundamentalism. People like J. Frank Norris, Billy Sunday, and John R. Rice provided energetic leadership and appealed to a large segment of conservative Christians, but also presented an acute profile easily highlighted in comic-strip colors.” Nettles, “Fundamentalism,” 306.

³⁹ James Barr, “Fundamentalism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands Eerdmans; Brill, 2001), 364.

⁴⁰ McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 391.

⁴¹ Nettles, “Fundamentalism,” 306.

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They sought to reform Fundamentalism in the areas of scholarship, apologetics, and its social dimension. Yet, the new Evangelicals continued to fight against the neo-orthodox view of Scripture and the modernist theological system of Schleiermacher. Neo-evangelicals also distanced themselves from Fundamentalism by their social outreach and ecumenical engagement.⁴² While Fuller Theological Seminary embraced the reform and became the leading institution of neo-evangelicalism, *Christianity Today* came to be its unofficial voice.⁴³

The Neo-evangelical movement's deep historical roots go back to the middle of the nineteenth century. On the heels of the second Great Awakening in America, when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were debating their ideas and Charles Darwin was developing his evolutionary theory, Protestant evangelicals in Europe felt a growing desire to demonstrate spiritual unity. In 1846, this sentiment led eight hundred leaders from fifty-two Christian bodies in eight nations to convene in London and organize the World Evangelical Alliance.⁴⁴ The aim of this organization with a strong Pietistic orientation⁴⁵ was primarily ecumenical based on a non-authoritative and incomplete statement of beliefs.⁴⁶

⁴² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 616.

⁴³ James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 96–97.

⁴⁴ David M. Howard, *The Dream that Would not Die: The Birth and Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846-1986* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 5.

⁴⁵ Gustav Reingrabner, "Austria," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Eerdmans; Brill, 1999), 1:171.

⁴⁶ "That the parties composing the Alliance shall be such persons only as hold and maintain what are usually understood to be evangelical views, in regard to the matters of doctrine understated, viz: 1. The Divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. 2. The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. 3. The Unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of Persons therein. 4. The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall. 5. The incarnation of the Son of God, his work of atonement for sinners of mankind, and his mediatorial intercession and reign. 6. The justification of the sinner by faith alone. 7. The work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion and sanctification of the sinner. 8. The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the judgment of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous, and the eternal punishment of the wicked. 9. The Divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper." Howard, *The Dream that Would not Die: The Birth and Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846-1986*: 11.

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Over a century later at the Woudschoten Convention in Holland,⁴⁷ an international group of Evangelical leaders organized the World Evangelical Fellowship (1951) as an intra-evangelical ecumenical alternative to the World Council of Churches (1948). John Stott, renowned Anglican minister, helped in redacting the clearly ecumenical aims of the World Evangelical Fellowship: the furtherance, defense, and confirmation of the Gospel; and fellowship in the Gospel.⁴⁸ Its doctrinal basis⁴⁹ followed the same lines earlier adopted by the World Evangelical Alliance. Not surprisingly, there was little difference between Neo-evangelicals and Fundamentalists in the area of theology.⁵⁰ Theological debate on traditional unresolved issues continued.⁵¹

However, the conviction that Protestants should relate to scientific teachings challenging Evangelical doctrines and practices not by

⁴⁷ “An International Evangelical Convention of Churches met at the Woudschoten a student retreat hostel near Zeist in the Netherlands, on 5–11 August 1951. 91 delegates, visitors, and observers from 21 countries gathered for that week in a spirit of expectancy and hope.” *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ “The statement of faith included in the constitution was as follows: ‘We believe in the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. . . One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His personal return in power and glory. . . The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. . . the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ. . . The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ. . . The Resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of Damnation.’ (Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL; accession #67–17, Box 20, Summary of the International Conference at Woudschoten, Holland, Aug. 4–10, 1951, unpublished minutes). It is worthy of note that this doctrinal statement has remained unchanged since 1951 and today is, word for word, the doctrinal statement of the World Evangelical Fellowship.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Evangelical theology is synonymous with fundamentalism or orthodoxy. In doctrine the evangelicals and the fundamentalist are one,” Harold John Ockenga, “Resurgent Evangelical Leadership,” in *A Christianity Today Reader*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (New York: Meredith Press, 1966), p. 136. See also, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students’ Source Book*, ed. Don F. Neufeld and Julia Neuffer, vol. 9, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Series* (Washington, DC: 1962; 2002), 390.

⁵¹ Hart, *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 198.

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ignoring them but by engaging them intellectually was growing among evangelical intellectuals. Eventually, it became the watershed distinguishing Neo-evangelicals from Fundamentalists. Progressively embracing their evangelical doctrinal, theological, and ecumenical traditions, Neo-evangelicals engaged Modernity in areas such as social responsibility, ecclesiology, science, Scripture, and, theology.

In society, Neo-evangelicals engaged culture by pursuing the social application of the gospel. In ecclesiology, they faced Modernity from within their seminaries, churches, and mission organizations. In science, they moved from recent creationism to embrace the deep time of evolutionary history.⁵² In Scripture, they moved from full⁵³ to limited⁵⁴ inerrancy and use of the historical critical method. Arguably, with the passing of time, more evangelicals sided with Bernard Ramm's (1916-1992)⁵⁵ than with Carl Henry's (1913-2003) vision of evangelicalism. These were the hot issues at the time.

However, not all Neo-evangelicals were happy with the new trends described above. In theological circles, controversy over biblical inerrancy arose⁵⁶ and continues in the twenty-first century. This controversy takes place within evangelical institutions and seminaries. Norman Geisler, for instance, thinks that the new evangelical

⁵² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 617-18.

⁵³ Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 4:144.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4: 162-200.

⁵⁵ For an introduction to Ramm's view of Evangelicalism see, for instance, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Pattern of Evangelical Theology: Homage A Ramm* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1973), ix-xxvii. And, Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973).

⁵⁶ "As documented in Harold Lindsell's book *The Battle for the Bible*, Fuller Seminary has been a leader in the move to a neo-evangelical view of Scripture. The movement began in the 1960s when the faculty split over the inerrancy of the Bible, after the school eliminated it from its doctrinal position. Those who opposed this move left the seminary, including notable evangelicals such as Harold Lindsell, Carl Henry, Charles Woodbridge, Wilbur Smith, and Gleason Archer. The movement against inerrancy was championed by Daniel Fuller, George Ladd, Paul Jewett, and the president of the seminary, David Hubbard. The most significant work defending the neo-evangelical view was subsequently produced by faculty member Jack Rogers, titled *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*." Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005), 1: 394.

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accommodation to the historical critical method's demands is a "deviation from the longstanding evangelical teaching on Scripture."⁵⁷ In the midst of theological controversy, Protestant historical orthodoxy continued unchanged.

Overall, in the practice of ministry there was little change. Early enthusiasm stirred by Billy Graham's evangelistic campaigns in the 50's and 60's diminished with the passing of time and the secularization of American society. Fundamentalism survived in the ethos of evangelical ministry, with some describing this phenomenon as "Neo-fundamentalism."⁵⁸ Thus, while Evangelical theologians faced challenges springing from modern science, Evangelical ministers faced challenges springing from modern culture. Apparently, Evangelical theology and ministerial practice faced the same enemy, Modernity, without much interdisciplinary cooperation.

By the middle of the twentieth century, deep philosophical and cultural changes emerged in western culture triggered by the first (1914-1918) and second (1939-1945) World Wars. As the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) in Europe diminished the authority of Christian *faith* as a trusted guide for civilization and ushered in the Modern age of *reason*, the two World Wars produced a loss of trust in reason and human institutions paving the way for the Post-modern age of individual and communitarian *freedom*. Existentialism in Europe⁵⁹ (40's and 50's), and,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1: 388.

⁵⁸ "The neo-evangelical label on people, schools, or organizations meant disassociation; thus, neo-fundamentalists refused to cooperate with Billy Graham in his evangelistic campaigns, rejected the journal *Christianity Today*, and excoriated schools like Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary for inviting certain evangelical speakers. Other writers have identified the neo-fundamentalist movement with fundamentalist leaders like Jerry Falwell, Tim La Haye, Hal Lindsey, and Pat Robertson. These leaders have spoken out publicly Neo-fundamentalism may be identified as the modern movement that, while holding to the historic fundamental doctrines of Scripture, has evolved into a movement with different emphases and perspectives. Neofundamentalism has remained true to the historic doctrines of the Christian faith, steadfastly defending those doctrines in pulpits and classrooms. However, although historic fundamentalism has fielded intellectual giants like Robert Dick Wilson, W. H. Griffith Thomas, Bishop J. C. Ryle, J. Gresham Machen, and many others, neo-fundamentalism has tended to reject intellectualism and seminary training." Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*: 619-20.

⁵⁹ Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *The Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(2010), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/existentialism>.

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the Hippy⁶⁰ movement in America (60's and 70's) emphasized individual freedom and became forerunners of post-modernity. Evangelical ministers now faced the impact of modern secular culture with its materialism, individualism, and subjectivism in their own churches. As always, the new ideas reached first and transformed faster the younger generations.

By the same time, Protestantism was experiencing epochal changes as well. After the Second World War, Pentecostalism had “overtaken most of the mainline denominations that dominated the American religious landscape from 1800-1950.”⁶¹ The Charismatic⁶² renewal of Evangelicalism “has led to new informal worship styles, an explosion in “worship songs,” a new concern for the dynamics of worship, and an increasing dislike of the traditionalism of formal liturgical worship.”⁶³

⁶⁰ “At the same time another element emerged. The hippie movement cried out for absolute, autonomous freedom. They stood, whether consciously or not, in the stream of Rousseau, Thoreau, the Bohemian life and hedonism. Any authority was met with the cry of ‘fascist’ or ‘Cossack.’ In their definition a fascist or Cossack included anybody who suggested any restraint on freedom of the individual. Basically, with these students the rebellion was apolitical. The hippies simply dropped out of society, literally doing nothing much one way or another for or against society. They just opted out.” Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 4: 1. 2.

⁶¹ McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 418.

⁶² “The term ‘charismatic movement’ was coined by H. Bredesen and J. Stone in 1963 to designate what was at first called neo-Pentecostalism, that is, the occurrence of Pentecostal-type blessing within the historic Protestant denominations. This was the general connotation of ‘charismatic movement’ in the mid-1960s. By the late 1960s, however, there were independent groups and ministries, often calling themselves nondenominational, that identified more with the charismatic movement than with Pentecostalism per se. These nondenominational currents, which spread in the 1970s and mushroomed in the 1980s, are now generally recognized as part of the overall charismatic movement, in which we may distinguish three major strands: (1) charismatic renewal in the historic Protestant churches (from the 1950s); (2) charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church (from 1967); (3) charismatic renewal in the independent sector (from the late 1960s).” Peter Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 1: 404. For a brief historical outline of the Charismatic movement see, for instance, James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 97–98.

⁶³ McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*: 420.

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Yet, we find the distinctiveness of the Charismatic renewal not in the styles, but in the nature of worship that calls for them. Worship, according to Charismatism, is the “immediate encounter with God through the Holy Spirit and the ensuing transformation of the individuals.”⁶⁴ External miraculous manifestations in worship proved an irresistible attraction for many, including the unlearned, materialistic, secularized, and rationalistically minded. Direct access to God, unmediated by priest, pastor, church, doctrine, or creed was available just by going to church. As Alister McGrath correctly underlies, this phenomenon implied the need of a lot of rethinking in Christian theology and practices.⁶⁵

In time, Neo-evangelical pastors discovered that while biblical preaching and orthodox doctrine did not increase church attendance, Charismatic worship did. This discovery paved the way to a pragmatic use of worship styles to reach secular minded people⁶⁶ led by Bill Hybels of Willow Creek (1975-2000).⁶⁷

As the end of the twentieth century drew near, in the midst of these vertiginous changes culture was eclipsing Scripture in Evangelicalism; the changes were almost unnoticed, yet not quite. In 1984 Francis Schaeffer mused,

There is a growing acceptance of the neo-orthodox existential methodology. There is a growing infiltration of humanistic ideas into both *theology and practice*. There is a growing acceptance of pluralism

⁶⁴ Ibid., 424.

⁶⁵ “We see here a classical example of what the historian of science Thomas Kuhn famously described as a ‘paradigm shift’ in the development of the natural sciences—the emergence of new approaches when the capacity of older theories to account for new experiences and observations is seen to be defective.” Ibid.

⁶⁶ “In our modern day, seeker churches developed out of the church growth movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, as congregations looked for new ways to attract an increasingly secularized populace. Led by Willow Creek Community Church of Illinois, seeker services grew rapidly in the United States, particularly among charismatic denominations.” Jerry Chip MacGregor, “Seeker Services,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Warren S. Benson Michael J. Anthony, Daryl Eldridge and Julie Gorman, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 619.

⁶⁷ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing The Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2002), 15.

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and accommodation. . . . Here again we see the great evangelical disaster.⁶⁸

While Schaeffer decried the surrender of Evangelical leaders in their battle against Modernity, Modernity was evolving into Post-modernism, perhaps the greatest philosophical and cultural mutation since Plato. In 1988, Roman Catholic Theologian Hans Küng announced to fellow theologians that the advent of a new age in western civilization was underway. “After the paradigm changes of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and of modernity in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, we experience, as I believe, at the end of the twentieth century, a new paradigm change to a ‘New Age’ that we tentatively call ‘postmodern.’”⁶⁹ Everything was about to change.

Conclusions

From the brief and partial description of some points in the long, complex, and variegated history of Protestantism, we can underline the following points because they may help us to better understand present developments at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

- Protestantism emerged from Scripture as a reform of the Roman Catholic Church and a serious challenge to culture. For a variety of reasons, the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church evolved outside of its walls.
- The Reformation achieved during the sixteenth century was incomplete and continued during the seventeenth century notably with Puritan theologians.
- The Reformation was fragmentary due to its incapability to develop a coherent theological system based on the *sola Scriptura* principle.
- Luther and Calvin developed a system of Protestant Theology using Roman Catholic philosophical foundations. This system provides the center for Evangelical unity in denominational diversity even in postmodern times.

⁶⁸ Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*: 4:5.2.3. Learning from the Past.

⁶⁹ Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988), xiv.

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- Arguably, the development of the Protestant Reformation slowed down when Modern philosophy and science leveled serious challenges to the former's biblical foundation.
- The fact that Protestantism faced the challenges of Modernity by way of apologetics slowed down its development and distracted it from its evangelical mission. Moreover, Apologetics did not solve the intellectual problems that still stood unanswered confronting successive generations of evangelical intellectuals.
- In the absence of intellectual answers to modern scientific and philosophical challenges to Scripture, Bible believing Neo-evangelical leaders have progressively accommodated Bible interpretations and teachings to the dictates of science and popular culture in the areas of theology, doctrines, ministry, and worship. In short, Neo-evangelicals faced secularization by adopting a modernistic neo-Orthodox view of Scripture and secularizing worship music and liturgy.
- Springing from the Protestant heritage, the Charismatic renewal competes with Scripture and seems to divert Protestantism away from Scripture.
- Post-modern culture and philosophy add new challenges to Protestantism.
- After two centuries of gradually emerging from Scripture, Protestantism confronted challenges from science and culture during the last three centuries. Seemingly, the focus of the Protestant Reformation is switching progressively from Scripture to culture. Is the Protestant Reformation emerging from Scripture coming to an end?

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