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Maintaining the Scripture Principle Today
Clark Pinnock 2

Reading the Bible as an Icon
Duane Christensen 5

Annie Dillard: Praying With Her Eyes Open
Eugene Peterson 7

Redeeming the Evangelical Experiment
William Abraham 11

Religion and the American Dream:
A Study in Confusion and Tension
Robert Linder 13

Evangelical Feminism: Reflections on the
State of the "Union" (Part II)
Harvie Conn 18

Diversity and Injunction in
New Testament Ethics
Stephen Charles Mott 21

NEWS
Evangelical Scholars Discuss
Women and the Bible 23

Book Reviews and Comments (Itemized on Back Cover) 23

the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does not one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares: they should lash us to our pews" (TST 40). Explorers unmindful of "conditions" died. Why don't similarly unprepared worshipers perish on the spot?

Never mind. She sheds her dignity, sloughs off schooling and scruples, abandons propriety. "I would rather, I think, undergo the famous dark night of the soul than encounter in church the dread hootenanny—but these purely personal preferences are of no account, and maladaptive to boot" (TST 33). So she manhauls her humanity to her pew, gives up her personal dignity and throws in her lot with random people (TST 31). She realizes that one can no more go to God alone than go to the Pole alone. She further realizes that even though the goal is pure, the people are not pure, and if we want to go to the Land we must go with the People, even when they are playing banjos, singing stupid songs, and giving vacuous sermons. "How often have I mounted this same expedition, has my absurd barque set out half-caulked for the Pole?" (TST 44).

So she worships. Weekly she sets out for the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility, "where the twin oceans of beauty and horror meet" (PTC 69). Dignity and culture abandoned, silence and solitude abandoned, she joins the motly sublime/ludicrous people who show up in polar expeditions and church congregations. "Week after week we witness the same miracle: that God, for reasons unfathomable, refrains from blowing our dancing bear act to smithereens. Week after week Christ washes the disciples' dirty feet, handles their very toes, and repeats, It is all right—believe it or not—to be people" (TST 20).

The spiritualities involved in going to the Pole (and the creek, and the mountains, and to Church) are essentially the same. Why choose between them? Annie Dillard embraces both, and she deals with the hard things in both ventures, the absurd vanities in the explorers and the embarrassing shabbiness in the worshipers, with immense charity: "We are clumped on an ice floe drifting over the black polar sea. Heaven and earth are full of our terrible singing"

(TST 34). She is blessedly free, whether in the wilderness or at worship, of sentimentalism and snobbery (the twin sins of touristy aesthetes). She is as accepting of absurdities in Christian worship as she is of absurdities in polar exploration. She is saying, I think, that we have put up with nature sentimentalism and liturgical snobbery long enough. If there are difficulties in going to church they are no greater than those encountered in going to the Pole. Besides, as she says, "nobody said things were going to be easy" (TST 18).

Annie Dillard Prays With Her Eyes Open

There are two great mystical traditions in the life of prayer, sometimes labeled apophatic and kataphatic. Kataphatic prayer uses: icons, symbols, ritual, incense. The creation is the way to the Creator. Apophatic prayer attempts emptiness: the creature distracts from the Creator and so the mind is systematically emptied of idea, image, sensation until there is only the simplicity of being. Kataphatic prayer is "praying with your eyes open"; apophatic prayer is "praying with your eyes shut." At our balanced best the two traditions intermingle, mix, and cross-fertilize. But we are not always at our best. The western church, and even more so the evangelical church, is heavily skewed on the side of the apophatic, "praying with your eyes shut." The rubric for prayer when I was a child was, "Fold your hands, bow your head, shut your eyes, and we'll pray." My early training carries over into my adult practice. Most of my praying still is with my eyes shut. I need balancing.

Annie Dillard prays with her eyes open. She says, Spread out your hands, lift your head, open your eyes, and we'll pray: "It is still the first week in January, and I've got great plans. I've been thinking about seeing. There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises" (PTC 15). We start out with her on what we suppose will be no more than a walk through the woods. It is not long before we find ourselves in the company of saints and monks, enlisted in the kind of contemplative seeing "requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle" (PTC 32). She gets us into the theater that Calvin told us about and we find ourselves in the solid biblical companionship of psalmists and prophets who watched the "hills skip like lambs" and heard the "trees clap their hands" alert to God everywhere, in everything, praising, praying with our eyes open: "I leap to my feet, I cheer and cheer." (PTC 32).

Redeeming the Evangelical Experiment

by William Abraham

It is becoming increasingly clear that the recent renaissance of the evangelical tradition is proving to be more ephemeral than its advocates ever realized. The renaissance itself was real enough. In the 1950's and 1960's, there was a remarkable attempt to develop a conservative version of the Christian faith which would shed the worst of the fundamentalism of an earlier generation, incorporate what was best in critical scholarship, and include a serious social ethic. Billy Graham, perhaps more than anyone, launched this effort when he broke with fundamentalism and established an inclusivist policy in evangelism. He ultimately became accepted across the world. The cost to Graham was considerable: theologically, he had to rework his views in ecclesiology and on the activity of the Holy Spirit; personally, he had to endure the wrath of his fundamentalist brethren.

Graham, however, could never have made it on his own. He is an evangelist rather than a serious theologian, so it was fortunate that around him there gathered a new generation of scholars who provided the conceptual tools to cope with his break from fundamentalism. Chief among these were figures like Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, Bernard Ramm, Harold Lindsell, Edward Carnell, and Francis Schaeffer.¹ Their efforts proved so successful that in a short time they had established themselves as the standard-bearers of

the evangelical tradition. Their vision of the heritage became rapidly institutionalized in educational centers like Fuller Theological Seminary and Wheaton College, magazines like *Christianity Today*, in para-church groups like IVCF, and in a host of media, from dictionaries to theological journals, publishing houses, conferences, and creedal announcements.

The material results and effects of the new vision are worthy of sustained applause. It spurred evangelicals to take academic scholarship seriously. It pressed evangelicals to heed the cry of a hurting world. It introduced evangelicals to the classical tradition of the church. It led to a much less suspicious attitude toward other Christians outside evangelicalism. It provided a host of Christians with a plausible body of doctrine. It called the church at large to take evangelism seriously. It gave hope to those who feared that Christianity required them to send their brains on a permanent holiday. Above all, it provided the resources and motivation that was needed by evangelicals if they were to think seriously and responsibly about their faith.

So successful was the shift out of fundamentalism into conservative evangelicalism that it is now very difficult to lump the two movements together and interpret them as one. James Barr has skillfully attempted to do this, but his efforts owe more to deliberate polemical intent than they do to historical accuracy. Barr has persistently failed to note that there was a deliberate break between conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism; he has either not

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seen or acknowledged that there was a genuine evangelical renaissance in the last generation.²

Yet the substance of Barr's proposals are correct.³ The modern evangelical crusade still owes so much to the theology of fundamentalism that in the contest to preserve what is best in the evangelical tradition there is value in insisting that the commonly known modern version of the tradition is a timid and inadequate reworking of fundamentalism. This claim deserves attention, for it is a much more radical criticism of the movement than the criticism normally offered by evangelical insiders. The usual criticism is social and moral.⁴ Evangelicals, it is repeatedly said, have failed to develop an adequate social ethic; they have ignored the structural character of evil and failed to develop a suitable orthopraxis. But this criticism leaves the theology of modern evangelicalism intact and secure. Yet it is precisely the theology of the tradition which is least secure and adequate.

There are two ways of developing this thesis: the high way and the low way. In taking the high way one does theology proper. One argues carefully that modern evangelical theology fails as a coherent, systematic, and biblical expression of the Christian message. For example, its internal weighting of the various elements

practice that lies behind the great evangelical revival of the eighteenth century which created Methodism and sustains the Wesleyan tradition, one very quickly begins to question the theological adequacy of fundamentalism and its modern evangelical offspring. In other words, modern evangelicals have as much to learn from Wesley as do modern apostate or nominal Methodists who are presently wont to rattle the theological bones of their esteemed founder, shiver a little in embarrassed silence, and then return to business as usual. In fact there is so much to learn that it will take at least a generation for its full implications to be recognized and digested.

The crucial source of the Wesleyan tradition is John Wesley. There is scarcely a single important theological issue where Wesley has not something illuminating to offer.⁷ In his own inimitable fashion he wrote succinctly and critically on the central themes of any balanced expression of the Christian message. Creation, redemption, justification, assurance, sin, sanctification, grace, predestination, revelation, reason, authority, the sacraments, prayer, and so on, were thought through rigorously. His short, devastating critique of unconditional predestination has been either ignored or quietly assimilated; it has never been adequately answered.⁸ His inclusivist approach to the issue of authority, an approach that is genuinely

There is scarcely a single important theological issue where Wesley has not something illuminating to offer.

of theology is fundamentally Cartesian in character. There is an obsession with intellectual foundations, reflected most clearly in the debate about inerrancy, which suffocates the actual articulation of essential Christian doctrine and relocates the center of Christianity not in the affections but in the mind. Equally one could argue that the actual work done on the foundations is conspicuously inadequate. Thus the claims proposed about the Bible cannot be reconciled with the actual character of the Bible as we know it; they betray a superficial awareness of the analogical character of religious discourse; they invariably confuse divine inspiration and divine speaking, and they rest on arguments which are narrowly historical in nature.⁵ So might one travel along the high road of theology proper.

This is a difficult road to negotiate. The relevant data are rich and open to varying interpretation, the arguments are complex and long-winded, and in time the debate reaches an impasse in the quicksands of contested philosophical and hermeneutical presuppositions. So proponents of the modern neo-evangelical experiment will deny or fend off theological criticism. If need be, the Goliaths of the movement can readily summon a new round of scholarly weapons and armor to ward off the enemy. So leaders of the tradition can trade on the complexity to claim that they have reached the desired goal of theological coherence.

Yet it is debatable whether the exponents of the present expression of the evangelical tradition have the resources to mount a really substantive, theological defense of their position. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that several of the key architects, rather than take this difficult route, have regressed into a classical fundamentalist position. It is surely no accident that Francis Schaeffer's last work announced that the modern evangelical movement was set on nothing less than a disaster course.⁶ Equally, it is no accident that Jerry Falwell, a real old-fashioned fundamentalist, both by name and by nature, can team up with Harold Lindsell and draw on his work in his efforts to revitalize the fundamentalism of the twenties and thirties. Schaeffer and Lindsell are regressing into fundamentalism as a way out of the intrinsic theological instability of the neoevangelical experiment. Sensitive historical perception can see this quite clearly despite the fact we are in the midst of the process we are observing.

In mounting this kind of criticism of modern evangelicalism, one has abandoned theology proper and turned to historical analysis for evidence. In other words, one has left the high road of theological appraisal and turned down the low road of historical study.

It is exactly at this juncture that the current celebrations of the founding of Methodism are so crucial. By exploring the vision and

open to relevant considerations drawn from tradition, reason and experience, is a fascinating attempt to integrate the insights of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment. His doctrine of sanctification, despite its initial strangeness and ambiguity, is a valiant effort to allow divine grace to have the primacy over human evil and thereby drive out both pessimism and moralism from Christian ethics. His emphasis on a catholic spirit sought to kill sectarianism at its foundations; equally it makes clear that the real heart and soul of Christianity lies in the seat of the affections and not in doctrinal orthodoxy. Steady, critical interaction with Wesley's writings will bring to light a unique configuration of the central ingredients of the classical Christian heritage. In short, Wesley constitutes a crucial theological exponent and theological model of the historic evangelical tradition. Like Calvin and Luther, he is one of the great doctors of the heritage.

He deserves this status not just because his writings intrinsically merit such a reading, but because he also initiated and inspired a body of theological reflection every whit as impressive as that developed by the successors of Luther and Calvin. This fact can no longer be ignored. From Fletcher, Clarke and Benson in his own day, through Watson, Miley, Pope, Nast and a host of others in the nineteenth century, down to Gamertsfelder, Wiley, Hildebrandt, Sangster and a goodly number in our own century, there is a long line of recognizably Wesleyan theologians who deserve to be taken seriously. We need not here decide either the pedigree or the boundaries of the tradition. All we need to do is recognize its existence and thereby implicitly acknowledge the intellectual stature of its founder and mentor.⁹

In insisting on the theological stature of Wesley, I am not of course seeking to deny the role commonly assigned to Wesley in evangelical circles. Wesley was an evangelist, a church-builder, a genius of an organizer, a sacramentalist, a prophet, a social activist and reformer, a hymn-writer, a friend of the poor, and the like. In his own way he was even a competent logician and philosopher. But these common designations not only serve to highlight that he is a fascinating figure in the history of the church, they show how informed and rich he was as a theologian. It is precisely this latter designation that modern evangelicals have ignored or suppressed. Perhaps they have suspected all along that if they travel the low road of historical study in the origins of Methodism they will find the central thesis of this paper abundantly vindicated.

At the very least, such study reveals that modern evangelicalism is a far cry from the version of the tradition articulated by Wesley. Wesley offers a different weighting of the central elements of the Christian message. He offers a different analysis of religious au-

thority. He openly rejects the much beloved doctrine of eternal security. He provides a very radical analysis of the pastoral needs of new converts. He shows a remarkable openness to the Enlightenment. He cares passionately for the writings of the early Fathers of the church. He is ecumenical in outlook. He has a very pronounced love for the eucharist. He is utterly determined that everyone think and let think. Compared to the Wesleyan paradigm of the tradition, the modern evangelical experiment offers a very different articulation of the evangelical heritage. Like its fundamentalist parent, it has reduced the high peaks of classical Christian doctrine to a narrow range of concerns. It has failed to convince its own adherents that the issue of authority can be solved by invoking Warfield's doctrine of inspiration. It has only reluctantly, if at all, come to terms with the insights of the Enlightenment. It has very little sense of a catholic spirit. It has added precious little to the church's liturgical life. It is conspicuously lacking in any deep love and understanding of the diverse riches of the Christian past.

No doubt the contrasts could be drawn very differently than I have drawn them here. The point, however, is that contrasts must be drawn. One cannot work honestly and intensively with the theological proposals of Wesley without noticing how he differs quite radically from the editions of evangelicalism currently available. This in itself has radical consequences for evangelicals today.

It means that we must provide a much richer analysis of the internal, theological contents of the heritage. To follow the normal course and offer a list of doctrinal propositions as the essence of the heritage is totally inadequate. Such an approach is not just superficial, it is downright misleading. What we have to do is develop a complex historical narrative which brings out the inescapably contested character of the tradition. To be sure there are elements in common. Evangelicals are committed to a set of specific theological proposals. But they have differed quite radically across the generations on how best to express and defend these. Once one looks carefully at, say, Calvin, Luther, and Wesley, one soon sees that they are locked in mortal combat in a fascinating contest to capture the riches of the Christian gospel. Thus the contrasts across the generations call us to a radical revision of evangelical self-understanding.

They also call us to alter the present climate of debate. Rather than go for the quick kill by verbally excommunicating each other from the tradition, evangelicals should joyously enter into a serious contest to work out the riches of the heritage in optimum fashion. This will not be easy. It will involve eschewing the temptation to regress into fundamentalism. It will mean facing up to the serious inadequacy of the neo-evangelical experiment. Above all, it will require a full acknowledgement of the fallible and experimental

character of the evangelical position. Whatever it costs, evangelicals must abandon the spirit of hostility and suspicion so generously fueled by modern fundamentalism and provoke one another to out-think both their friends and their opponents in a spirit of mutual love and friendly rivalry. Celebrating the contribution of Wesley to the tradition can provide the catalyst for such a healthy development.

It can also spur us all on to the theological renewal of the tradition. Following the low road of historical study of a Wesley (or a Calvin, or a Luther, or a Warfield) has its limits. Remembering Wesley's achievement can, of course, do much for us. It can establish the contested character of the heritage and highlight afresh the great riches of the past. It can chasten our theological reflection and enliven our theological judgement. It can relieve us of the guilt and burden of the recent past and breathe new life into weary hearts and minds. It can even call into question the theological adequacy of the present phase of the evangelical tradition. It cannot, however, conclusively demolish or conclusively establish the theological legitimacy of any version of the heritage. To do that we must return to the high road of theology proper.

It is to this task that a fresh awareness of Wesley ultimately points. As things stand, his position threatens and calls into question much that currently passes for evangelicalism. Those who share this assessment must attempt to show that this is not idle talk by articulating a theology that outwits and outshines the present paradigm. Those who reject it must back up their opposing claims by providing better proposals than those enunciated by Wesley and his present admirers. Either way we are summoned to optimum theological performance. Either way life shall not be boring. Either way we can hope and pray that God will in this process redeem the current evangelical experiment.

¹ This is a small sample of a host of theologians who could be mentioned.

² Barr's recent book *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1984) shows no improvement on his earlier *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) in this respect.

³ Most evangelicals have missed Barr's deep concern to encourage the development of a responsible evangelical tradition.

⁴ Other criticisms have focused on failure to pursue critical study of the Bible, failure to develop adequate liturgical practices, failure to be suitably ecumenical, and so on.

⁵ Nowhere is this more obvious than in the debate launched by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

⁶ *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1984).

⁷ The best place to begin the study of Wesley is with Wesley's own writings. For a useful selection consult Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁸ The full text of Wesley's "Predestination calmly considered" can be found in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler.

⁹ A useful descriptive survey of Wesleyan theology is provided by Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983). For a fascinating analysis of the "apostasy" of the Wesleyan tradition from its Wesleyan origins see Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965).

Religion and the American Dream: A Study in Confusion and Tension

by Robert D. Linder

"The American Dream" is an illusive concept.¹ Roughly speaking, it has something to do with freedom and equality of opportunity. As a matter of fact, in the political realm, it involves the shared dream of a free and equal society. The fact that the reality does not fit the dream is probably well known, for no society can be both free and equal at the same time. Even in a relatively open and mobile nation like America, there are still relatively few at the top of the heap, many more in the middle, and some at or near the bottom. Nevertheless, in the United States, even those who have the most reason to deny its reality still cling to its promise, if not for themselves, at least for their children. In any case, it can be said of the American Dream, in the words of sociologist W. Lloyd Warner, that "... though some of it is false, by virtue of our firm belief

in it, we have made some of it true."² What is true in the case of the American Dream and society-at-large also seems to be true in the realm of religion and the Dream.³

Puritan John Winthrop's oft-cited and well-known 1630 metaphor of "A City upon a Hill" and sometime Baptist and Seeker Roger Williams' less known but equally hallowed vision of a country in which, as he observed in 1644, "God requireth not an uniformity of Religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state . . ." provide the background for understanding the historic tension between two aspects of the American Dream in religion. Over the years, the Puritan sense of cosmic mission as God's New Israel eventually became part of America's national identity and the Radical stand for religious freedom developed into the American ideal of religious and cultural pluralism. And so the two dreams of Americans for a religiously harmonious nation and a religiously free nation have existed side-by-side down to the present-day—sometimes in relative peace but often in considerable tension.⁴

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