

## **Evangelical Theology in the Twenty-First Century**

Steve W. Lemke  
*Provost and Professor of Philosophy*  
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary  
3939 Gentilly Blvd.  
New Orleans, LA 70126

(The following article was Dr. Lemke's Presidential address at the 2000 Southwest Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas)

Nearly three years ago, I was approached about the possibility of becoming the Provost and academic dean at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I quickly consulted friends such as Millard Erickson about whether or not academic deans could remain current in their own disciplines. He relayed to me the old adage that in their first year, deans stop writing; in their second year, they stop reading; and in their third year, they stop thinking. I have discovered over the past few years that this is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance. The time constraints placed on deans usually does not allow for in-depth research. So I find myself left with having only about six months of thinking left, and at that I'm fading fast.

Millard Erickson is a happy exception to this rule, of course, due principally to his wonderful discipline, time management, and love of theological scholarship. So a new dean may choose to be "in Adam" by following in the natural human inclination of deanship away from scholarship, or one may become "in Erickson" and make time for research and writing. Given my time constraints, however, I fear that I have become an "in Adam" dean. So in this presidential address, with my time running out, I would like to share from my vantage point of a seminary dean what the key issues are that evangelical theology will face in the next few decades.

I'll begin with a few caveats. First, I have discovered to my astonishment that technical papers in my chosen discipline of philosophy sometimes provoke yawns rather than interest among more general audiences. I thus offer this talk as a provocateur of discussion, rather than as a more typical research paper. My purpose is primarily to spur discussion and dialogue as we seek to address these issues together. Perhaps these ruminations will spark or provoke a helpful discussion. Second, perhaps as a partial mark of my impending mental poverty, I have organized what I believe to be seven major issues confronting evangelical theology in this new century as an acrostic according to the first seven letters of the English alphabet. By the way, my commentary in the various sections is not equal in length (A, B, and C are longer). I simply had more to say in some areas than in others. This should not suggest that the issues about which my comments are shorter are less important. I would be eager to discuss any of them during the discussion time. Third, while I am attempting to speak about evangelicalism in general, I do speak unapologetically from a Southern Baptist perspective. Please help me make applications to your own confessional fellowship. And fourth, I should note that many of my predictions are not the way I would hope theology will go, but how in fact I expect it to go. I must also insist that these predictions be understood as merely the prognostications of a seminary dean, not as prophecy. Please do not evaluate these best guesses according to the high standard of accuracy enunciated in Deuteronomy 13, not to mention its concordant harsh penalty of capital punishment if my predictions do not all come true.

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**A** is for **anthropology**. I had the privilege recently of participating in the Research Institute of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. The participants included evangelical thinkers such as Carl F. H. Henry, Timothy George of

Beeson Divinity School, David Dockery of Union University, Ben Mitchell of TEDS, Al Mohler from SBTS, and Paige Patterson from SEBTS. Our assignment was to identify the principal ethical issue or issues that Christians will confront in the new millennium. While we did address some specific ethical issues, we were unanimous in asserting that the most basic ethical issue confronting present-day Christians is rediscovering the implications of the biblical worldview for contemporary situations. In particular, we agreed that Christians needed more training about what Al Mohler called “embodiment,” that is, the significance of the body for the whole person. The majority of ethical dilemmas we currently face (in medical ethics—abortion, genetic engineering, fertility medicine, and euthanasia; in sexual ethics—promiscuity, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, and appropriate sexual expressions; in relational ethics—gender roles, racial prejudice, and genocide; in personal ethics—alcohol abuse, drug addiction, and obesity) must be addressed in terms of a distinctively biblical anthropology if we are to address these issues Christianly. The doctrine of anthropology also has important implications for issues such as personal worth, the mind-body problem, the relation of freewill and determinism, personal immortality, and the afterlife.

Anthropology has played a pivotal role in many important discussions in the secular world throughout the twentieth century, especially through the impact of modernism, humanism, existentialism, and postmodernism. Other sister theological disciplines have concerned themselves with relating to and integrating with contemporary anthropology. Missiologists have learned much from cultural anthropology. Christian counselors and psychologists have sought to integrate insights from both the Christian Scriptures and contemporary psychological methodology. Biblical studies has learned new readings of the text through utilization of the social sciences and cultural anthropology. I do have a few misgivings about this hermeneutical

project if the emphasis on anthropology becomes determinative rather than contributive. The Bible is, after all, a *divine*-human book. Reading Scripture in terms of the culture of its day, however, is always an appropriate hermeneutical tool. But while these larger theological disciplines have sought to integrate contemporary anthropology with their own disciplines, theology proper has remained largely silent on the doctrine of persons. However, the discipline of Christian theology has remained in its own ghetto of ideas, strangely silent on the doctrine of persons.

While all systematic theologies of course address anthropology as a topic, can you name a major or classic theological work in the past decade that addresses anthropology as its primary topic? A few neo-orthodox thinkers such as Emil Brunner addressed personhood in the 1930's and 1940's through such works as *God and Man: Four Essays on the Nature of Personality* and *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*. The Boston Personalists such as Edgar Sheffield Brightman and Peter Bertocci wrote about personhood from their distinctive perspective in the 1950's and 1960's. Wolfhart Pannenberg's *What Is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective* was translated into English in 1970. One classic evangelical contribution in the field of anthropology is Anthony Hoekema's *Created in God's Image: The Christian Doctrine of Man*. But this text is far from comprehensive, it is already a decade and a half old, and it does not address anthropology from an interdisciplinary approach. Two recent works edited by J. P. Moreland have made important contributions in this area. The excellent but now out of print volume edited by J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciochi, *Christian Perspectives on Being Human: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Integration*, approached anthropology from a variety of disciplines. The new work edited by J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics*, is probably the best recent contribution in this field.

Other books address one aspect of anthropology, such as two excellent books that investigate personal eternity—*Immortality: The Other Side of Death* by Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland, and John W. Cooper’s *Body, Soul and Everlasting Life*. But these works make no effort at a comprehensive anthropology. But evangelical theology must refocus its attention on the doctrine of humanity. If we are to appreciate fully the significance of the second Adam, we must understand the sinfulness of the first Adam; and if we are to understand the Son of Man we must first understand man.

**Prediction:** *There will be a dramatic increase of interest in anthropology, especially approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, in the first few decades of the Twenty-First century.*

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**B** is for the **Bible**. Evangelical Christians have been engaged for the past few decades in what one popular writer called *The Battle for the Bible*. However, I have noted a dramatic drop of interest in this doctrine among my students. One young prospective faculty member, when asked about his view of inerrancy, answered that while he was an inerrantist with respect to Scripture, he described inerrancy as “an old man’s battle.” In a recent meeting of inerrantists, I couldn’t help but notice that there were indeed a large number of gray heads in the assembly. It is an older generation who witnessed the dangerous fruit of higher critical methodology in hermeneutics, absolute freedom and subjectivity in existentialism, the authority and autonomy of the individual in modernism, and the dynamic views of biblical inspiration from neo-orthodoxy. It has been a long, hard fight. But the saying is true as ever: “Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” The Battle of the Bible, I fear, will have to be fought again in another few decades.

For now, the increasingly negative rhetoric against conservative Christians has focused on the question of biblical literalism. This nomenclature is a pet peeve of mine, since I know of no one who claims that title for herself. However, wooden literalism is projected on evangelical Christians by people with little theological acumen. It seems to me that for some reason, news reporters are particularly afflicted with this tendency. Jeffery L. Sheler, a religion writer for *U. S. News and World Report*, has written an intriguing book entitled *Is the Bible True? How Modern Debates and Discoveries Affirm the Essence of the Scriptures*. The book attempts primarily to discuss the truth of the Bible in light of recent archeological discoveries. Unfortunately, Sheler finds that the evidentiary value of the archeological findings to usually be minimal—the lack of scholarly consensus results in a deadlock. Furthermore, having dealt with the archeological evidence, Sheler goes into great detail about cracking the purported Bible code, for no other obvious reason than the fact that he had already written these articles, and he wanted something to come of them. But Sheler makes many interesting claims in his introductory material about Scripture. He warns that someone looking to find “a ringing defense of biblical literalism should look elsewhere,” and that the book “is not a fundamentalist manifesto.” The term “literalism” is not defined in the text, but such a negative attitude toward factual truth is incongruent in a volume whose title promises to affirm the essence and truth of Scripture through an examination of archeological evidences. This odd enterprise sets up conflicts within the book. For example, in the introduction Sheler admits that he is neither a biblical scholar nor a theologian (which is painfully evident in his bibliography), but seeks to approach the question as a journalist answering fundamentally journalistic questions: “What happened and why? What was really said? How reliable are the sources?”<sup>1</sup> Yet just a few pages later, Sheler admits that

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<sup>1</sup>Jeffery L. Sheler, *Is the Bible True? How Modern Debates and Discoveries Affirm the Essence of the*

“The Bible is not journalism, nor does it purport to be.”<sup>2</sup> Sheler can’t have it both ways. Either the events described in Scripture are factual or not. While it is appropriate to move from event to significance, it is difficult for me to understand how anything that didn’t happen could have much significance.

A similar confusion about literalism occurs in Vincent Crapanzano’s *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench*, a synopsis of which appeared in a recent edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled, “Literalism in America.” Crapanzano, professor of anthropology and comparative literature at the City University of New York, noted in a visit to South Africa that the more literal Dutch Reformed Church supported apartheid, while the more liberal Anglican Church did not. Imposing the pattern of South African church life on the American church, Crapanzano reached the following laughable conclusions:

When I returned to the United States, I began following the rise of evangelical Christianity and even attended a few services. I noticed the same allegiance to the literal word, the same intolerance of figurative understanding, the same denial of any possible error in the Bible, and of course the same—or at least figurative—political conservatism I had found in South Africa. Like the white South African evangelicals, the Americans were committed Calvinists. They insisted on their chosen status—the fact of being reborn, of being saved—and divided the world accordingly into the saved and the unsaved.<sup>3</sup>

I’m sure it would come as a surprise to the non-Calvinist membership of the Evangelical Theological Society that only Calvinists believed in the truthfulness of Scripture and had assurance of salvation (although perhaps this would not be surprising to the Calvinists—see C below). Crapanzano applies his rather rigid view of literalism to conservative readings of the

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*Scriptures* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco and Zondervan, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent Crapanzano, “Literalism in America,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (February 11, 2000), B4-B6. Crapanzano’s book is *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000).

Constitution, psychoanalytic treatments of real traumatic events, genetic accounts of humanity, social characterizations of persons, Marxism, positivism, and science. In short, Crapanzano eschews any affirmation that purports to be the actual truth. My only hope is that Crapanzano is consistent enough to drive over bridges designed by engineers who cast aspersions on narrow, literal readings on the principles of stress mechanics.

I never know quite how to respond to these non-theological writers who debunk “biblical literalism.” My first reaction, since I am apparently a literalist, is simply to take them at their word. They tell us that texts should not be taken literally. I have therefore come to the conclusion that Sheler’s book is actually an allegorical representation of a large section of the San Francisco Yellow Pages, and that Crapanzano’s account is a fairy tale about human *hubris*. With this reading, their accounts have nothing to say about the truthfulness of Scripture, and thus we may simply ignore them. If, however, they insist that their plain sense meaning should be taken more seriously, perhaps we could revisit how such a hermeneutic might also apply to interpreting Scripture.

My second reaction is to affirm the trivial truth they profess, and say, “Of course, I know of no one in the scholarly evangelical community would describe himself as a biblical literalist.” The closest approach to such a position of which I am aware was the provocative popular book written by W. A. Criswell entitled *Why I Preach that the Bible Is Literally True*. This book was written in the wake of a controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention which arose from the publication by the denominational publishing house of *The Message of Genesis* by Ralph Elliott, then a faculty member at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Elliott discounted “literal” readings of Genesis in favor of symbolic and mythological interpretations. The *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1963, the doctrinal confession of Southern Baptists, was written in large

measure to calm the tensions that resulted from the Elliott controversy. While Criswell's title affirms the literal truth of Scripture (a title, by the way, which was imposed by the publisher, not one he chose for himself), he is not advocating that every passage in the Bible be interpreted literally.

The Bible abounds in figurative language and these figures have in them tremendous spiritual meanings. To speak of those meanings in keeping with a figure or a type is a true method of interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

Criswell illustrated by saying that John the Baptist's affirmation that Jesus was "the Lamb of God" obviously did not imply that Jesus was a literal sheep. Timothy George notes that Criswell clearly did not favor the wooden literalism that his critics accused him of endorsing—that, for example, Psalm 91:4 teaches that God has feathers, or that Isaiah 55:12 affirms that trees literally clap their hands like in a Disney movie. George comments that such critics . . .

had clearly not read what he had written about the poetical, rhetorical, figurative, and metaphorical uses of language in the Bible. Nowhere does Criswell eschew the legitimate use of historical and critical techniques for elucidating the biblical text. What he does deplore is the kind of unbelieving criticism and hypothetical reconstructions which deny the divine authorship of Scripture and detract from its total truthfulness.<sup>5</sup>

Criswell's larger worry was the application of mythological, allegorical, or symbolical interpretations that robbed the text of its plain sense meaning. He advised caution about applying symbolic meanings without justification in the text:

A simple rule to follow in determining what is literal and what is figurative is this: If the literal meaning of any word or expression makes good sense in its connections, it is literal. But if the literal meaning does not make good sense, it is figurative. Since the literal is the most usual signification of a word and therefore occurs much more frequently than the figurative, any term ought to be regarded as literal until there is reason for a different

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<sup>4</sup>W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach that the Bible Is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969), 142.

<sup>5</sup>Timothy George, Introduction to *Why I Preach that the Bible Is Literally True*, by W. A. Criswell, Library of Baptist Classics (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 11.

understanding, and that understanding will become clear as we read the context and background of the passage in the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

The kind of literalism that Criswell is endorsing is not the simplistic literalism attributed to conservative Christians by our critics, which would suggest that Jesus swings on hinges since He is the Door. The literalism that Criswell does endorse is a default commitment to the most forthright reading of the text, unless there are linguistic or theological clues that suggest to us that a more symbolic interpretation would be appropriate for the passage (although I think that “plain sense” is better descriptive nomenclature than “literally true.” Furthermore, Criswell means by “literal” that events actually took place; that the Bible is primarily a record of God’s action in history.

Perhaps a helpful way of addressing the question of the actual truth of Scripture is to employ two terms from the language of causation—type and token events. Type events describe a type of event that may have many different instantiations, such as the type event “getting in the car.” Token events are events that occur at a specific place and a time. So the person who affirms the plain sense of Scripture believes that the token events recorded in the Bible actually took place; and aside from clear use of typology the biblical accounts were not merely type events that may or may not have ever happened.

***Prediction:*** *The controversy over the inerrancy of Scripture will lose steam over the first few decades of the twenty-first century, and readings of Scripture which take its plain sense meaning seriously will be under attack.*

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**C** is for **Calvinism**. Arisen from my dogmatic slumbers by recently reading a biography of Jacob Arminius, I had originally thought of making a critique of Calvinism the topic of this

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<sup>6</sup>Criswell, 142.

address. My topic was to be “I Know Arminius, and He Was No Pelagius,” or, “How to Be a Two and a Half Point Calvinist.” However, having discussed at length with a few of my colleagues some of the weighty historical, theological, and biblical issues that arise from this issue, I felt inadequate to the task. But in this section, my remarks will attempt primarily to provide a description of the influence of Calvinism in my denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, although certainly its influence is relevant in other confessional communities as well. Among Southern Baptists, at least, Calvinism has been on the rise for the past two decades. The resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC is one of the few trends that I correctly predicted twenty years ago. I encountered this movement early in my teaching career while I was interviewing for a faculty position at Williams Baptist College, when a hyper-Calvinist trustee posed me this question: “Are you a hyper-Calvinist, or are you an Arminian?” Fortunately for me, my father’s name is Calvin, so I am more than glad to identify myself as a Calvinist.

Throughout its history, the Southern Baptist Convention has swung periodically toward and away from Calvinism. In the 1980’s, while a few faculty members at the six SBC seminaries had Calvinistic commitments, none of the faculties of were predominantly Calvinistic. Some faculty members were vocally anti-Calvinist. However, the number of Calvinist faculty dramatically increased over the next twenty years. Two major factors contributed to the resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC. First, presidents with strong Calvinist commitments were elected to two of the six institutions. Second, most Calvinists hold to a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and were thus attractive faculty candidates in a denomination in the midst of controversy over the inerrancy of Scripture. There are more Calvinist faculty members at the SBC seminaries than at any time in my lifetime. One seminary

even published a dialogue on the question of whether or not it was appropriate to give an invitation. The suggestion that invitations are unnecessary because human response is irrelevant is about as heretical to typical Baptists as denying the virgin birth.

I believe that Calvinism is nearing its high water mark in the SBC, but it will not go away quickly. One of the two staunch Calvinist SBC seminary presidents was removed from his position, and the academic deans of both institutions are not five point Calvinists. If the Synod of Dort (or at least the popular acronym which has some affinity with the actual affirmations of the synod) were taken as the measuring stick of Calvinism, most Baptists come out to be about two and a half point Calvinists (as do I). We usually affirm *total depravity*, although often not in the same sense that Dortian Calvinists intend. While affirming the sinfulness of all mankind, Baptists usually see some role for human response or something like Brunner's "point of addressibility," along the lines of Romans 1 and 2. *Unconditional election* is largely affirmed by Baptists, again with some adjustments. While Baptists believe that salvation is wholly from God, they also believe that in the economy of God's salvation He has chosen for human response to be prerequisite to actualizing salvation. Baptists view *limited atonement* as the least scriptural of the five affirmations, and this doctrine is rejected by most Baptists, except in a merely functional sense that Christ's atonement is sufficient for all, but actualized only by the elect. *Irresistible grace* is also flatly denied by most Baptists, except for the affirmation that salvation is through grace alone. All Southern Baptists, however, affirm *perseverance of the saints*. So, since most Baptists fall between two and three point Calvinists, there are countervailing forces in the SBC which will limit Calvinism from dramatic further increase. To paraphrase the words of the musical *Oklahoma!*, "it's gone about as far as it can go." (Perhaps it is only coincidence that

the song is entitled, “Everything Is Up to Date in Kansas City,” the location of one of these Calvinistic leaning SBC seminaries).

But neither will Calvinism go away anytime soon. The addition of a dozen or more Calvinist faculty will continue to have an influence on their institutions and students. The renewed emphasis on the doctrines of grace has provided a healthy counterbalance to the recent Baptist obsession with evangelism, revivalism, and church growth. We must never fall into the heresy that our actions or methods accomplish salvation. However, God has invited us to have the privilege of taking part in His harvest.

***Prediction:*** *The resurgence of Calvinism will slow over the next few decades, but will exert a stronger influence than has been the case in many years.*

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**D** is for **doctrine**. I believe we are entering a doctrineless era, an age in which not only are specific traditional doctrinal commitments viewed negatively, but the very notion of having a doctrine falls into disfavor as narrow-minded bigotry. I have seen in my students over the past decade at Southwestern Seminary and New Orleans Seminary a significant move away from an interest in doctrinal matters. Interest in theological issues that were of great interest in the past, such as soteriology, pneumatology, and eschatology, no longer incite great student interest. The fact that we have entered a new millennium without any best selling books on biblical prophecy (even Dr. Walvoord) would have been shocking to those of us who were seminary students in the 1970’s. One recent event at our seminary is illustrative, although I hope not representative of this anti-doctrinal spirit. In the midst of a Systematic Theology class that was discussing a theological issue in some detail, one student exclaimed in frustration, “I didn’t come hear to

learn all this theology. I came here to learn how to grow a church.” The topic of the discussion that day was the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We have many young ministers who have focused their interest not on theological or biblical foundations, but on church growth methodology. Rather than discussing views of the millennium, they compare the Willow Creek model versus the Saddleback model. It is not that church growth is necessarily untheological or unbiblical, although I do have reservations on a few points. But the commendable emphasis on *praxis* in the church growth movement is exacerbated by our American obsession with pragmatism. Sometimes it is difficult to tell much difference between the commitments of many young ministers from William James—if it works, it’s true. If it reaches people, it’s good. And while they claim that they are trying to be flexible in methodology without changing the central message of the gospel, the means often determines the message, and this effort is more easily said than done. Not everything that grows is good. Cancer results when cells grow faster than the body can incorporate them. The same can be true in the religious world. Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are among the fastest growing religious groups in the world, but they are not Christian. Cell groups become cultic cell groups, resulting not in a church growth movement or a church planting movement, but in an aberration of Christianity.

This anti-doctrinal bias is also an unintended consequence of nondenominational groups such as Promise Keepers. Of course, we would all celebrate the wonderful impact that Promise Keepers on the men of our nation. However, there are close similarities between the situation of the Promise Keepers movement and the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening. Most denominations participated in the camp meeting revivals, and many were led to salvation in Christ. All the Christians at the camp meeting would rejoice. But then, inevitably, theological

questions arose in order to provide an adequate interpretation of the salvation experience of these new believers. Do I need to experience a second blessing to be really saved? Was salvation something that I chose or God chose? Is sprinkling or immersion the correct manner of baptism? Am I assured of my salvation regardless of my actions, or not? Each of the denominations answered these questions differently, undercutting the notion that doctrine really didn't make a difference. Eventually the ecumenical coalition broke down.

As a staunch denominationalist, I am aware that many of you prefer an interdenominational approach. If I were in a church with a hierarchical structure, perhaps I could appreciate the denominational/nondenominational distinction more fully. However, since Southern Baptist polity is in the Free Church tradition, it is difficult to see much difference between a Free Church denomination and a nondenominational denomination. Every local Southern Baptist church has maximal freedom in all its decisions, without any necessity of responding to the direction of convention officers. I call them nondenominational denominations because they seem to have all the characteristics of a free church denomination—a funding mechanism for missions, Christian colleges and seminaries, publishing houses, regional and national meetings and events, benevolence and social agencies, etc. So, to utilize the old saw, “If it walks like a denomination, and quacks like a denomination, perhaps it really is a denomination.” However, I am convinced that nondenominational approaches will be viewed in a more positive light for at least the next few decades.

***Prediction:*** *Great pressures will be brought to bear from both within and without the church to minimize doctrine. Nondenominational approaches (even applied within denominational settings) will be favored for the foreseeable future.*

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**E** stands for **evangelicalism and epistemology**. The evangelical coalition arose out of a common commitment to at least two doctrines: the authority of Scripture and the objectivity of truth. However, the ongoing commitment of evangelicals to these two doctrines is waning. There are many factors and issues that contribute to this evangelical division, such as the doctrine of inerrancy, biblically defined gender roles, the openness of God, and the contribution of postmodernism. Some seminaries that were paradigmatic evangelical seminaries have drifted away from their earlier evangelical commitments. While they may have a form of evangelicalism, they have not the power thereof. Some evangelicals have drunk deep of the relativism and subjectivity of postmodernism, especially its epistemology. While evangelicals were insisting on the statements in Scripture as propositional, absolute truth just a decade ago, now multiple readings of narrative texts are seen by many as paradigmatic. Most of our theological students come to us after a collegiate education that at virtually every point called into question the possibility of objective truth. Postmodernity will impact the church, and it will reshape our standard of truth.

Like most coalitions, the evangelical coalition will break down, probably within the next ten years. I do not know which issue or issues will drive this division—biblical inerrancy, the openness of God, ordination of women—but I believe that a Neo-Evangelical Theological Society or a Really Neo-Evangelical Theological Society will come into existence soon.

***Prediction:*** *Some formerly evangelical seminaries and publishing houses will seek to move beyond the evangelical circle. ETS will effectively split within the next decade into a more traditional group, on the one hand, and a group affirming divine openness and some insights of postmodern thought, on the other hand. The ultimate root of the division (though not necessarily the presenting problem, will be epistemology.*

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**F** represents **feminism**. The feminist movement has already impacted Christianity in many significant ways. While perusing book displays and programs at several recent national AAR/SBL meetings, I have been amazed at the books and papers being produced advocating feminist theology in one form or another. The females in student bodies at some mainline denominational seminaries are nearing two-thirds, such that the institutions are quietly recruiting male students to achieve more balance. The feminist movement has impacted evangelicalism in two very specific ways—the question of gender roles and the question of women’s ordination. At this point in time, these issues are probably the most divisive and potentially destructive of any issue in the evangelical community. Of course, some more liberal feminists recommend either radically reinterpreting the biblical texts relating to women, or abandoning the biblical texts altogether as irrelevant to modern life. These thinkers have little influence on evangelicals. However, there are many conservative evangelicals with a high view of scriptural authority who reach similar conclusions about egalitarian relationships between men and women, and the appropriateness of women in the ministry. Others, such as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, advocate a complementarian approach. At national ETS meetings, the two rival camps set up their tents and attempt to influence the conferees for their position. Unfortunately, this is not an issue that admits of an easy compromise, and it is difficult to see it resulting in anything other than a confrontation. It is fundamentally an issue of interpretation.

Culture is already bringing intense pressure to bear on the church to change the traditional view of the role of women. When the Southern Baptist Convention adopted the family amendment about two years ago, the secular press savaged us. But this problem is not merely driven by the media. Many conservative evangelical churches find themselves trapped between two positions. On the left, most mainline denominations already have significant

numbers of women pastors. But on the right, many churches in the Assembly and black church traditions often have female co-pastors, usually the pastor's wife, who may preach as much as does the pastor. This cultural pressure was illustrated to me when a friend invited a female bank executive to come with her to church. When the service began, the male church staff members processed up to the podium. The bank executive turned to her friend and asked, "Where are the female staff members?" When her host admitted that Baptists don't usually have women in leadership positions in the church, the bank executive got up and left the service. My fear is that we may allow pragmatism rather than biblical guidelines to determine our practice.

***Prediction:*** *Gender roles will be the most divisive issue in the evangelical church in the next few years, and differences of opinion over these issues will cause realignments and splits within confessional communities.*

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**G** stands for **God**, or more specifically the doctrine of God. There are many issues related to the doctrine of God that will be addressed in the next few decades. I will mention three. First of all, the church will be under tremendous pressure from culture to relent from our exclusivism and give in to pluralism and syncretism. Already many persons in the pew of even the most conservative churches are functional universalists. In the media, the assertion that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ is and will be depicted as hopelessly narrow-minded bigotry. When Southern Baptists sought to undertake a focused mission effort in the city of Chicago, numerous religious leaders decried the effort, asserting that it would inevitably lead to violence.

Not only is this the case with basic evangelism, but also even when evangelicals are victims, they are still depicted as violent. For example, one commentary on the tragedy at nearby Wedgewood Baptist Church was the worry that this would become a provocation for conservative Christians to resort to violent means to overthrow Washington. Robert M. Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, disputes that "martyrdom" is an

appropriate description of the killing of the young people who had gathered at the church for the expressed purpose of taking a stand as youth for God. Parham argues that this does not count as martyrdom because there was some evidence that the shooter was mentally ill. Personally, I would enjoy seeing Parham try to make this same argument in heaven to others in history who have been martyred by madmen such as Nero, Caligula, and Hitler. The reason that Parham is so worried about using “martyrdom” language is that he thinks that discrimination against conservative Christians will lead to persecution, their persecution will lead to victim status, their victim status will lead to martyrdom, and their martyrdom will lead to holy war. Parham claims that this holy war is not to be understood as merely a culture war or a battle of ideas, for “Holy wars are shooting wars, promising more violence and harm to the innocent.”<sup>7</sup> Parham supports his claim by citing quotations by a parent of a murdered Columbine High School student, United States House Majority Whip Tom Delay, Southwestern Seminary President Ken Hemphill, “another seminary president” in Louisville, Kentucky (apparently Southern Seminary President Al Mohler), and “a noted Presbyterian fundamentalist pastor (apparently Dr. D. James Kennedy) to the effect that evangelical Christians are increasingly the object of violence.” This paranoia about evangelical Christianity is deeply disturbing. It is so unspeakably absurd to imagine the grieving parent, Representative Delay, and Drs. Hemphill, Mohler, and Kennedy charging Washington with Uzzi submachine guns, but this is the paranoid image of conservative evangelicals that is being presented, and it will apparently be depicted for years to come.

Second, the openness of God theology, and the cluster of issues surrounding it (Calvinism, human freedom, divine omniscience, divine foreknowledge, divine omnipotence, the problem of evil, divine impassibility and immutability, etc.) will continue to divide the evangelical community. Panel discussions on postmodernism and openness of God theology have been the most popular sessions in recent ETS national meetings. While I do not think that openness of God theology will win the day, it will win some converts, and provoke countless discussions. It seems to me that at the root of most contemporary theologies (openness theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, etc.) is a misunderstanding about the doctrine of divine

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<sup>7</sup>Robert M. Parham, “Is the Cry of Martyrdom One Short Step from Holy War?” in an opinion article printed by Associated Baptist Press in October, 1999.

holiness in reference to the problem of evil. The newer views cannot conceive that a holy God could allow the suffering of this world, much less eternal damnation. Such views would do well to take God at His Word when He describes His response to sin.

Third, the doctrine of creation will continue to be a major topic of discussion. The evangelical community is widely divided about the manner in which the Creator God brought about creation, ranging from creation science to theistic evolution. This issue will continue to be a bone of contention. I see the evangelical community sliding away from a literal six-day creation model and against the scientific creationism movement. Any compromise with evolutionism, however, will be destructive to Christian theology.

By the way, I think it is refreshing that there seems to be a return of interest to the doctrine of God. I believe this area has been neglected for the past few years, and these new discussions will afford a welcome refocus on this doctrine.

***Prediction:*** *Various aspects of the doctrine of God, especially the holiness, omniscience, and exclusivism of God, will be topics of great interest for the next few decades.*