

## I Want a Principle Within

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

I want a principle within  
Of jealous godly fear,  
A sensibility of sin,  
A pain to feel it near.

That I from thee no more may part,  
No more thy goodness grieve,  
The filial awe, the fleshly heart,  
The tender conscience give.

Quick as the apple of an eye,  
O God, my conscience make;  
Awake my soul, when sin is nigh,  
And keep it still awake.

If to the right or left I stray,  
That moment, Lord, reprove;  
And let me weep my life away,  
For having griev'd thy love.

O may the least omission pain  
My well-instructed soul,  
And drive me to the blood again,  
Which makes the wounded whole.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### The Seventies: The Final Chapter

Kevin T. Bauder

The neoevangelical movement arose primarily after the end of the Second World War. Of course, the movement had antecedents. For example, when the National Association of Evangelicals was formed in 1942, it explicitly rejected fundamentalist ideas about separation from apostates. Furthermore, one of the leaders in founding the NAE, Harold John Ockenga, was also the leading figure in launching neoevangelicalism.

The most pivotal year for the movement was probably 1947. That was the year that Ockenga helped to establish Fuller Theological Seminary, which became the flagship institution of neoevangelicalism. It was the year in which L. Nelson Bell launched *Christianity Today*, the journal of the neoevangelical movement. It was also the year that the Conservative Baptist Association was organized. Like the NAE, the CBA refused to require separation from apostates.

The original neoevangelicals were a cadre of relatively young intellectuals who had earned doctorates from places like Pitt, Harvard, NYU, and Boston University. This cadre included names like Carl F. H. Henry, Edward John Carnell, and Harold Lindsell, as well as Ockenga and others. In 1948 Ockenga coined the label *neoevangelical* while delivering an address at a Fuller Seminary faculty convocation.

The engine that drove the neoevangelical movement was a widespread sense that Western civilization was teetering. Millions had died in a world war—the second within living memory. The world's most ostensibly civilized nation (Germany) had both begun the war and perpetrated the Holocaust. The war had ended with a literal bang as the world witnessed the power of atomic destruction. Many feared that the USSR would soon master the secrets of nuclear warfare, and the result was a profound anxiety. Most of Europe and much of Asia lay in ruins. Many wondered whether civilization could weather the storm.

The neoevangelicals were convinced that they had the solution. It lay, they thought, in orthodox Christianity, if only they could gain enough of a hearing to restore Christian ideals to dominance within civilized life. To do that they would need to establish themselves within the centers of cultural



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influence, and especially in the academy. They were encouraged by the collapse of old-line liberalism and the rise of a neoorthodoxy that superficially seemed much closer to biblical Christianity. They aimed to earn control of the culture by mounting an effective apologetic for orthodoxy. To gain a hearing, however, they would also need recognition and respectability. Thus, academic respectability became a primary goal.

Neoevangelicals exhibited disdain for their fundamentalist heritage—especially its ecclesiastical separatism. They intended to build a bridge movement, believing that many erstwhile liberals would come over into the evangelical camp if presented with a credible apologetic and a crossable ecclesiastical bridge. They *did* manage to build the bridge, but almost all the crossing over went in the other direction.

The problem was that the neoevangelicals' goals conflicted. Neoevangelicalism was a fusion of commitments, and in the long run, the commitment to orthodoxy and apologetics could not be reconciled with the yearning for intellectual respectability. Orthodoxy was never going to be respectable, no matter how sound their apologetic might be. The question was whether respectability or orthodoxy would prove the stronger commitment.

The test case became biblical inerrancy. In 1947, all the neoevangelicals were inerrantists. Inerrancy was a part of the orthodoxy that they were sworn to defend. By 1970, however, Fuller Seminary had capitulated on this issue, choosing respectability over orthodoxy. Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* was the equal and opposite reaction, opting for orthodoxy over respectability (though not abandoning hope of the latter). Both Fuller and Lindsell maintained half the neoevangelical fusion, and each was willing to surrender the other half.

Lindsell and others made the case that inerrancy was a watershed doctrine for evangelicalism. Their goal was to drive those who denied inerrancy out of the evangelical fold. They largely succeeded in doing that. The cost that they paid, however, was to lose much of the former neoevangelical movement and to surrender several degrees of respectability within the academic world. After all, one of the canons of academic life is collegiality, and Lindsell's attitude toward Fuller was now anything but collegial.

In other words, the neoevangelical project came to an end during the 1970s. From about 1975 onwards it became impossible for anyone to hold the entire synthesis of ideas that had characterized the original movement. Neoevangelicalism, whether viewed as a movement or a fusion of ideas, collapsed. To call anyone a neoevangelical after about 1980 is simply anachronistic.

The problem is that the heirs of neoevangelicalism on the Fuller side (i.e., the Evangelical Left) found new bases of support. They managed to establish themselves as a permanent halfway house between orthodoxy and whatever the real theological Left happened to be doing. In the process, they

managed to gain at least some of the respectability that they had coveted. The effect was to set up the Evangelical Left as a huge theological magnet that would continue to exert a powerful pull on the rest of the evangelical world. It still does.

For a while, the neoevangelicals who prioritized inerrancy gave a rightward bump to the mainstream evangelical world. In some ways that bump was only temporary as, under the influence of an increasingly magnetic Evangelical Left, much of the evangelical spectrum was eventually pulled leftward. Nevertheless, the rightward bump was adequate to crystalize a conservative evangelical movement that would, for example, aggressively reclaim the Southern Baptist Convention and would eventuate in the large, gospel-centered alliances of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Meanwhile, challenges have proliferated within the evangelical world. Inerrancy is now merely one of many theological and practical challenges to orthodoxy. Others include Open Theism, the Prosperity Gospel, certain versions of gender egalitarianism, openness toward and acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships, redefinitions of justification, person-relative theories of meaning and truth, and the increasing influence of a recrudescing Marxism appearing under the guise of Social Justice, Critical Theory, Intersectionality, and Wokeness. Even among many whose theology (or what is left of it) is still formally orthodox, pastors have become impresarios or CEOs, churches have become centers of amusement, biblical admonition has been displaced by popular psychology, worship has been converted into self-affirmation, biblical thinking about missions has been replaced by cultural anthropology, and friendship with the world has become *de rigueur*.

To those of us who were alive and awake during the 1970s, evangelicalism seemed like nothing so much as a rambunctious free-for-all. From today's perspective, however, the evangelical world of the 1970s appears amazingly homogeneous and sedate. Furthermore, for all the campaigns that it has waged and all the issues on which it has capitulated, evangelicalism (including fundamentalism) is smaller now than it was then, and it exerts only a fraction of the social and cultural influence that it did at that time. And that is something that nobody in the 1970s would have guessed.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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