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Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era

Brian Harris

Bebbington suggests that evangelicalism is characterised by a quadrilateral of priorities that transcend any particular era or context, namely conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism and activism. This paper asks if these remain valid descriptors of the movement, and explores the relevance of each for contemporary evangelicalism through both a sociological and a theological lens. Special attention is paid to the theological method of Stanley Grenz, who is seen to be representative of recent trends in evangelical theology. The paper concludes that current evangelicalism is best described as a movement of passionate piety, but argues that by claiming a holistic understanding of each of Bebbington's characteristics, it is possible to forge an evangelical identity better suited to a postmodern era.

Introduction

Evangelicalism is in danger of becoming a hyphenated movement. Increasingly its adherents find it necessary to qualify what kind of evangelical they are.¹ Some are conservative evangelicals, others post-conservative evangelicals,² yet others are post-evangelicals³ while some prefer to think of themselves as the younger evangelicals.⁴ Diversity is not new to the evangelical movement, Stewart in his analysis of evangelical history advocating 'we be more prepared than formerly to speak about Evangelicalisms, i.e. varying expressions or manifestations of the evangelical faith in different centuries or eras as well as in diverse cultures'.⁵ In spite of this diversity, significant common ground has usually been found, with David Bebbington able to confidently claim in what is now often referred to as the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral'⁶ that—

There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be termed *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.⁷

Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* has been rightly lauded for its careful and extensive research and its winsome style. The wide acceptance of this text has helped to establish Bebbington as one of the leading interpreters of evangelical history. In his study Bebbington establishes the close connection between context and the expression of evangelical faith, thereby meeting one of the stated goals of his work to explore 'the ways in which Evangelical religion has been moulded by its environment'.

More controversially, Bebbington argues that the origins of the Evangelical Movement should be linked to the renewal movements of the eighteenth century and that evangelicalism should be dated to the pivotal events of the 1730s that marked the start of an extended period of spiritual awakenings. As this challenges the notion of gospel successionism popularized by leading evangelicals such as Packer and Stott, who argue that evangelicalism is essentially New Testament Christianity, as recovered by the Reformation, reinforced by the Puritans and popularized by the awakenings from the 1730s onwards, it is not surprising that some have been critical of Bebbington's work.¹⁰

While noting the debate that Bebbington's work has occasioned, from the perspective of this paper, what is of special interest is Bebbington's suggestion that the quadrilateral of priorities that forms the basis of evangelicalism is conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. More particularly, this paper asks if it is now appropriate to move beyond Bebbington, and to embark on a quest for evangelical identity that will be better suited to a postmodern era. In asking the question, the paper shifts between two lenses, the one theological, the other sociological. While the two are neither necessarily in conflict nor in harmony, it is desirable to don both to ensure we are not statically located in either the world of theological theory, or in the world of unexamined practice, but that we attempt to straddle both. The theological lens will be largely shaped by the work of Stanley Grenz, whom I have selected to serve as representative of current trends amongst evangelical theologians. To pose the question then, is contemporary evangelicalism (or are contemporary evangelicals) characterised by the priority placed on conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism, and if so, is this a valid characterisation of both belief and practice? If not, would other descriptors prove more accurate, more desirable or both?

A test run of the question to a class of theology students, all of who belong to evangelical churches, was made.¹¹ The question was phrased: ‘Do you think your church places special emphasis upon or could be characterised by placing a priority upon: (1) Conversion; (2) Activism/ Christian Service; (3) The Bible; (4) The Cross.’ Respondents had to answer yes or no to each.

Do you think your church places special emphasis upon or can be characterized by placing a priority upon...	Yes	No
Conversion	9 (47%)	10 (53%)
Activism/Christian Service	14 (74%)	5 (26%)
The Bible	11 (58%)	8 (42%)
The Cross	9 (47%)	10 (53%)

The sample was small and the results should be seen as suggestive rather than definitive. Though acknowledging the small size of the sample and the looseness of the test question, the affirmation of Bebbington’s quadrilateral in this instance, is clearly underwhelming. If this group is representative, a shifting of priorities could well be underway. The only clear remaining distinctive (affirmed by 74%, though denied by 26%) is activism. Perhaps we could provocatively suggest that contemporary evangelicals know that they are busy, albeit that they are not entirely clear as to what they are busy about. Let’s move to examining Bebbington’s quadrilateral more systematically.

Priority 1: Conversion

The nature of conversion has provoked much thought and controversy. The classical evangelical view of conversion has stressed conversion as a crisis event in which the individual accepts Jesus as personal Saviour and Lord, an experience through which they are justified in a moment, albeit that the journey of sanctification remains for the rest of the earthly pilgrimage. The stakes of conversion are staggeringly high, with one’s eternal destination hanging in the balance. Conversion and salvation are seen as closely related categories (the converted are the saved and the saved are the converted). Experientially, the Charles Wesley hymn “And Can It Be” expresses the transformation well.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

The outcome is celebrated in the inspiring ending, 'Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown through Christ, my own'.¹²

So strong has the emphasis on conversion been in evangelicalism that Donald Dayton suggests that it is a movement characterised by 'convertive piety'.¹³ What matters is that individuals are saved from their sin. The evangelical missionary movement was birthed from a passionate desire to see the heathen converted. Indeed conversion was the chief goal of the evangelical enterprise. To quote Fanny J. Crosby's "Rescue the Perishing"—

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
 snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
 weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
 tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.¹⁴

Brian McLaren, whom Webber classifies as the representative pastor for younger evangelicals,¹⁵ writes of his growing unease with the limitations of this paradigm.

I used to think that Jesus' primary focus was on saving *me* as an individual and on saving other 'me's' as individuals. For this reason I often spoke of Jesus as my 'personal Savior', and I urged others to believe in Jesus in the same way. I still believe that Jesus is vitally interested in saving me and you by individually judging us, by forgiving us our wrongs, and teaching us to live in a better way. But I fear that for too many Christians, 'personal salvation' has become another personal consumer product ... and Christianity has become its marketing program. If so, salvation is 'all about me,'... I think we need another song.¹⁶

Dimensions of the new song include a holistic understanding of salvation. Instead of salvation from the world, we are also saved for the world, including the poor, the oppressed and the environment. The shift could be seen as moving from a focus on evangelism (with its individualistic focus) to mission (with its

expansive and inclusive agenda). The holism embraced by the 1974 Lausanne Covenant can be seen as representing a significant stride in this journey.¹⁷ A greater tentativeness about the process of salvation is also evident. While evangelicals have never limited conversion to a stereotypical crisis event where the convert raises his or her hand at the evangelist's plea, there is a greater openness to conversion as a journey towards the cross and an embrace of its message.¹⁸ At what point one is close enough to avoid a Christless eternity is not entirely clear, but there is a move away from the boundary setting that has characterised evangelicalism, to a greater inclusivity.¹⁹

With the shift has come a gentler touch. The influential Willowcreek movement has convinced most evangelicals of the need to be 'seeker sensitive'. While the spirituality of Willowcreek clearly reflects Dayton's 'convertive piety', what is noteworthy is its commitment to creating an environment where those who are not yet Christians are most likely to feel at home and thus be responsive to invitations to follow Christ.

Some are concerned that this is overly accommodating, David Wells lamenting—

We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfil our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God *for* us, for our satisfaction—not because we have learned to think of him in this way through Christ but because we have learned to think of him this way through the marketplace. In the marketplace, everything is for us, for our pleasure, for our satisfaction, and we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy.²⁰

There is also less certainty as to the plight of the unevangelized and of those who reject the gospel.²¹ There are divergent views as to the nature of judgement.²² As opposed to Augustine's view of hell as eternal punishment in the lake of fire, views of judgement as annihilation have been gaining in popularity.²³

Priority 2: Activism

Bebbington suggests that the quality of activism is of special importance in that it helps to separate evangelicalism from earlier forms of Protestant Orthodoxy. While activism is more a sociological than a theological distinctive, it arises from theological convictions. Bebbington argues that the assurance of salvation that flowed from evangelicalism's stress on conversion, led to the active sharing of faith in the attempt to get others to experience a similar assurance of salvation.²⁴ This urgent mandate saw a working week of between 90 and 100 hours being expected of those in the nineteenth-century Wesleyan ministry.²⁵ Bebbington contrasts this with the non-evangelical English-parish clergyman of the later eighteenth century who 'was very like a member of the gentry in how he spent his time'.²⁶

While activism is the one feature of evangelicalism clearly affirmed by our sample group, shifts are noticeable. There has been a steady increase in the staff required to serve congregations of the same size.²⁷ Specialization in a particular form of ministry is increasingly common. Volunteers are more difficult to source in an environment where two incomes are usually needed to service the average home mortgage. Rather than get members to work harder, it is not uncommon to encourage church members to give more so that additional staff can be employed. The professionalization of ministry rather than the priesthood of all believers, appears to be an emphasis. It could be that Frances Havergal's plea, 'Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love' could be replaced by 'Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.'²⁸ One's giving, rather than one's activity, is needed to meet the salary budget.

In addition there is a greater awareness that churches can place unreasonable demands on their members and clergy. Most seminaries teach the importance of establishing boundaries in ministry. Wesley's demand for a clergy working week of 90–100 hours would now meet with accusations of spiritual abuse and legal action. Likewise, missionary practices of an earlier era would be seen as an abdication of the duty of care for employees. The contours of activism thus have to be shaped against the protective boundaries of the twenty-first century. In spite of a changed context, at an emotional level there seems to be a common denominator amongst evangelicals. McLaren speaks of the passionate nature of evangelicalism, perhaps thereby articulating the twenty-first century equivalent to Bebbington's activism. He writes—

When I say I cherish an evangelical identity, I mean something beyond a belief system or doctrinal array or even a practice. I mean an attitude—an attitude towards God and our neighbour and our mission that is *passionate*. When evangelicals (at their best) sing, they *sing*. When evangelicals pray, they *pray*. When evangelicals preach, they *preach*.²

Priority 3: Biblicism

While Bebbington is undoubtedly correct to suggest that evangelicals have historically placed a priority on the Bible and have viewed it as the authoritative source for theological affirmations, a marked shift in the attitude of evangelicals towards the Bible is underway.³⁰ Stanley Grenz' model for theological construction can be seen as representative of the move.

Grenz has proposed a model that utilizes Scripture, tradition and culture as the sources for theology, and the Trinity, community and eschatology as its focal motifs. He supplements these with the belief that the Spirit guides the church as it communally attempts to discern truth in changing contexts. Grenz believes that his method moves beyond foundationalism as it appeals to a trio of interacting, conversing sources that are guided by three related motifs, rather than to the single source of Scripture. The need for this might have been questioned in the past, but is seen by Grenz as a non-negotiable if a theology relevant to a postmodern era is to be constructed.³¹

Suggesting Scripture as a source for theological construction is somewhat obligatory for any theological method that wishes to be considered evangelical. For evangelical method, the debate is more over seeing Scripture as *a* source or *the* source for theological conclusions, with the latter serving as the historic default drive. There is therefore nothing inherently novel in Grenz' model when he suggests that Scripture should serve as theology's norming norm.³² Of greater interest are the shifts in emphasis proposed by Grenz.

Grenz argues that post-fundamentalist evangelical theology has continued to adopt a propositionalist approach, with the theological task being conceived as the discovery and articulation of the one doctrinal system embedded in the Bible.³³ We should not accept Grenz' analysis uncritically, as he is a little one-sided in his presentation of propositionalist approaches.³⁴ Rather than follow a propositional programme, Grenz suggests that theology should be conceived

as the ‘reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community’.³⁵ He suggests that the Bible’s authority derives from it being, ‘the source for the symbols, stories, teachings and doctrines that form the cognitive framework for the worldview of the believing community’.³⁶

Second, he believes that many evangelicals ‘take loyalty to the Bible to heights not intended by the Reformers and not in keeping with the broader trajectory of the evangelical movement’.³⁷ He argues that such loyalty is misguided and unnecessary because the Bible’s status as the foundational text of the faith community guarantees its place of importance in the theological enterprise. Grenz’ approach is essentially pragmatic and functional. If theology is the reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community, it is a reflection that cannot begin without an understanding of the ‘book of the community’.³⁸

From a traditional evangelical perspective, this is provocative. Evangelicals assign a place of prominence to the Bible out of a conviction that its message is the truth, and its revelation the sole surety for statements made about the nature and character of God.³⁹ The constituting role of the Bible in the life of the church is seen as of secondary importance to the claim that it is an accurate and authoritative revelation of the character, will and actions of God. Grenz’ stance seems a short step from relegating the Bible to a text of historical (but not authoritative) importance. His argument, that the Bible’s role as the repository of the original *kerygma* of the faith community guarantees it a role of ongoing importance, is not self evidently true. Belief systems can change and evolve, and most would not consider a stance definitive simply because it was the one originally adopted.

A third aspect of Grenz’ proposal on Scripture, and one which reflects something of the heartbeat of his concern, is expressed in his approving discussion of the Pietists. He notes—

For the Pietists, talk about the truth claims of the Bible was less important than the fact that ‘truth claims’—that the Scriptures lay hold of the life of the reader and call that life into divine service.⁴⁰

While this would seem to be a false dichotomy, Grenz’ approving emphasis on the devotional rather than the doctrinal should be noted.⁴¹ Grenz moves to an

important stage in his thinking, *viz.* that the meaning and impact of Scripture is pneumatologically mediated. He laments that the theological method of most Protestant theologians separates bibliology and pneumatology.⁴² In practical terms, Grenz calls evangelicals to pay as much attention to the doctrine of illumination as they do to inspiration. By placing the emphasis on the inspiration of Scripture, a static view of Scripture can dominate. Arguments revolve around the once for all divinely given message of Scripture, rather than around the need to listen to the ongoing voice of the Spirit speaking through Scripture (illumination). This focus on illumination shifts the subject–object locus. So long as we have an inspired text to study, the theologian can approach Scripture as an objective text whose message can be interpreted and explained. If, however, the focus shifts to Scripture as a Spirit illuminated text dynamically interacting with the life of the community, the static ‘given’ of the text is replaced by uncertainty, ambiguity and the subjectivity of a required response.

Grenz’ pneumatologically mediated approach to Scripture has led to concerns being expressed. A major refrain is that the approach is subjective and undermines the concept of the authority of Scripture by taking the locus of authority from the text and placing it within the contextualized, Spirit guided, community of faith. Consequently some evangelicals have been dismissive of Grenz’ proposal, Carson complaining, ‘I cannot see how Grenz’s approach to Scripture can be called ‘evangelical’ in any useful sense’.⁴³

While the academy debates an appropriate understanding of biblical authority, at a popular level, most evangelicals appear to be content with an emotional rather than a substantial commitment to Scripture. Ben Witherington III has accurately observed that three of the most successful and lauded evangelical communications, *viz.* *The Passion of the Christ*, the “Left Behind” book series, and Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life*, are all deeply flawed from a biblical perspective—but that little has been said of this.⁴⁴

In the past, small groups in most evangelical churches focused on Bible study, now most see themselves as accountability and share groups. Where material is studied, it is more commonly the text of a popular evangelical author than a book of the Bible.⁴⁵ David Wells has noted that in spite of highly emotional debates about biblical inerrancy within evangelicalism, ‘while the nature of the Bible was being debated, the Bible itself was quietly falling into disuse in the church’.⁴⁶

The consequence appears to be a form of selective Biblicism. Passages that deal with the dangers of wealth receive scant attention, as until recently, did those that deal with the environment.⁴⁷ While pastoral concern prevents a focus on passages that deal with divorce, a comparable editing is forbidden for those passages that mention homosexual behaviour. The result at a popular level is a somewhat muddled and inconsistent ethic, more often the source of ridicule than respect.

Priority 4: Crucicentrism

If we consider Grenz to be representative of trends amongst evangelical theologians, it is helpful to compare his model for theological construction with Bebbington's identity conferring priority of crucicentrism. If the cross is central to all evangelical theology, in what way is it represented in Grenz' theological model? Grenz supplements his three theological sources of Scripture, tradition and culture with three focal motifs, the structuring motif of the Trinity, the integrating motif of community and the orienting motif of eschatology. Notably missing is the motif of the cross. This is surprising as Grenz' goal is to revision *evangelical* theology for a postmodern era.⁴⁸

Grenz argues that theology needs to be for the community of God. But what brings the community into existence and how is it held together? Evangelical piety insists that this is the result of Christ's work on the cross. Overlooking the cross as one of the focal motifs in theological construction not only risks alienating the evangelical community for whom Grenz is suggesting a revised theology, but also neglects to answer the motivational question. When asked why they would forsake all to follow Jesus, evangelicals have traditionally responded, 'because he loved me enough to die for me'.⁴⁹ Christian allegiance begins with the capture of the heart. Assuming such commitment as a given is presumptuous. It also robs theological construction of one of its richest motifs.

Not that Grenz ignores the cross. At times he attaches a broad and inclusive significance to it. He links it to the creating of community, painting community in expansive terms when he writes—

Jesus died to purchase our redemption and bring us to God. These images come together in the metaphor of interpersonal relationships. Jesus died in

order that we who were enemies to creation, to each other, and above all to God might enjoy reconciliation and fellowship—that is, ‘community’.⁵⁰

In spite of the significance Grenz attaches to the cross in passages such as this, taken as a whole, the cross is not a dominant theme in his theology. The absence is puzzling. He could, for example, have suggested that the cross should serve as a gathering motif in theological construction. The cross as a gathering motif would serve as a reminder of the manner of life to which the Christian community is called. The constructed theology would be both incarnational and prophetic. Moltmann reminds us that ‘the theology of the cross is none other than the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope’.⁵¹ Willing to serve, to suffer and to challenge, it would be quietly hopeful of resurrection, and would thus ultimately be a theology of glory. It would interpret the tradition of the church in the light of its faithfulness in walking the way of the cross. It would remember that resurrection follows crucifixion, but cannot bypass it. The cross is a reminder of the cost of establishing community, and of the value that should therefore be attached to it. The cross is a reminder that salvific, communal liberation is not an optional extra, but the agenda of the triune God.

Outside of an emphasis on the cross, Grenz’ focal motifs can fall into abuse. Grenz’ attempt at Trinitarian structuring runs the risk of being inadequately directed without the christological focus implicit in the cross as theology’s gathering motif. In a similar manner, his integrative motif of community lacks substance if seen outside of the context of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Outside of the gathering motif of the cross, Grenz’ stress on eschatology can be reduced to trite triumphalism, which would then be a dangerous orienting motif.

Without wishing to attach too much significance to the absence of a specific motif by a particular, albeit representative, evangelical theologian, the underlying question to be asked is—Are evangelicals needing to broaden their understanding of the cross? Alternatively, does crucicentrism need to be understood more holistically? Certainly some of the hymnody of the past seems limited. Cowper’s ‘There is a fountain filled with blood’ might catch the imagination of *Braveheart* enthusiasts, but it seems poorly suited to the sensibilities of the twenty-first century.⁵² There is slowly a shift away from a

focus on the cross as a substitutionary act of atonement to appease an offended Deity (or the cross as retributive justice), to an exploration of the cross as a vehicle of restorative justice. Rather than ask if the cross represents a victory over sin, death or the devil, it would seem appropriate for postmodern evangelicals to respond ‘all of the above, and more beside...’

From passionate piety to missional communities of invitation and embrace...

We have been exploring whether contemporary evangelicalism (or evangelicalisms) is characterised by Bebbington’s quadrilateral of identity conferring priorities, namely conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. Each priority has been shown to be the source of at least some ferment and revisioning. How should we interpret the portrait that emerges?

If Bebbington is correct in asserting that evangelicalism is best traced to the popular religious awakenings from the 1730s onwards, a key feature of evangelicalism is that it is a popular grass roots movement.⁵³ This explains its adaptability.⁵⁴ Whilst the many issues facing the movement might lead some to question whether it has a viable future, the evidence points in the opposite direction. Alister McGrath, in assessing the rapid growth of evangelicalism, claims that it is now ‘the largest and most actively committed form of Christianity in the West’.⁵⁵ Sociologist James Hunter speaks of the changing status of evangelical theology when he speaks of its ‘de-ghettoization’.⁵⁶ Packer writes of the—

mutation of the former self-image of evangelicals as the marginalized faithful remnant within liberal-led Protestantism into a sense of being truly the core of God’s church on earth. Evangelicalism is more and more viewing itself as the main stream in relation to which non-evangelicals, whether so by adding to the biblical faith or subtracting from it, are deviating eddies....⁵⁷

All this speaks of a movement grappling to come to terms with *success*, rather than with obscurity or failure. In short, as a popular movement evangelicalism has learned to be adaptable. Thus, for example, while in modernity evangelical apologetics could deal in certainties and sure proofs, in a postmodern era, a relational apologetic has been birthed. As the season, so the emphasis.

While Bebbington's priorities remain relevant, contemporary evangelicalism might be better characterised as being a community of *passionate piety*. While at a popular level, the doctrinal focus of the past has receded, the experience of a transforming encounter with Christ remains. Although Dayton has argued for evangelicalism to be characterised by its convertive piety,⁵⁸ postmodern reservations against trying to co-op converts for a particular narrative have seen a slight shift in focus. Piety remains, and it is passionate piety.

While *passionate piety* might validly characterise the movement at the start of the third millennium, it is possible to hope for more. Those of us who are the theologians of evangelicalism would do well to ask ourselves how we might aid the movement to re-imagine itself. There is enough in our heritage to entitle us to strive for more than a slightly vacuous passionate piety. Perhaps we could theologise in such a way that our diverse constituencies capture a vision of what it might mean to be missional communities of invitation, welcome and embrace. Gathered around an expansive theology of the cross (a deeper embrace of the crucicentrism Bebbington notes), and committed to a holistic view of salvation (including but moving beyond mere conversionism), and shaped by the transforming narrative of the acts of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as illuminated in the Spirit inspired Scriptures (more than mere biblicism),⁵⁹ such a community would have every reason to be actively passionate. It would be a community where the title 'Evangelical' names not an identity, but an aspiration.⁶⁰ It would also be a community that having gained much from Bebbington's insights, now seeks to constructively move beyond them....

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ENDNOTES

1. In addition to the labels about to be mentioned, Gabriel Fackre describes six varieties of evangelicalism: fundamentalists, old evangelicals, new evangelicals, justice and peace evangelicals, charismatic evangelicals and ecumenical evangelicals. Gabriel Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 22-23.

2. Though the term is unlikely to have originated with Roger Olson, it is often associated with him. See Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," *Christian Century* 112 (1995). For a critical review of the movement, see Justin Taylor, "An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).
3. While they are presumably, therefore, no longer really evangelicals, they are nevertheless willing to recognise their roots. See Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995). For a response, see Graham Cray *et al.*, *The Post-Evangelical Debate* (London: Triangle, 1997).
4. As in the title of Webber's book. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).
5. Kenneth J. Stewart, "Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis," *Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2005): 152.
6. Ward speaks of "the famous Bebbington Quadrilateral". W. R. Ward, "Evangelical Identity in the Eighteenth Century," in *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), p. 11. Bebbington's suggestion that evangelicalism as a movement only began after pivotal events in the 1730s is more controversial. See Stewart, "Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis."
7. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), pp. 2-3.
8. *Ibid.* ix.
9. See, for example, J. I. Packer, "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ: Some Evangelical Reflections," *Churchman* 92 (1978): 102. Stott expresses the view clearly when he writes "if evangelical theology is biblical theology, it follows that it is not a new-fangled 'ism', a modern brand of Christianity, but an ancient form, indeed the original." John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Leicester: IVP, 1970), p. 33.
10. See Stewart, "Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis."
11. The Foundations of Theology class, 24 Oct, 2007, Baptist Theological College of Western Australia. Note that students were characterising the churches they come from, not their personal stance.
12. Wesley, Charles "And Can It Be" (In Public Domain).

13. Donald W. Dayton, "The Limits of Evangelicalism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), p. 48.
14. Fanny J. Crosby, "Rescue the Perishing," (in Public Domain).
15. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*, p. 92.
16. Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 107.
17. For the covenant and a discussion of its significance, see C. René Padilla, ed., *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).
18. It would be inaccurate to claim that this is an entirely new phenomenon. Bebbington quotes Jonathan Edwards, "as to fixing on the precise time when they put forth the very first act of grace, there is a great deal of difference in different persons; in some it seems to be very discernible when the very time was; but others are more at a loss." Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, p. 7.
19. See, for example, Stanley J. Grenz, "Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft ('the Boundaried People') and the Character of Evangelical Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, No. 2 (2002).
20. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 114.
21. Grenz, while affirming that "Our witness in the world is based on the universal intention of God's activity in human history," warns against "making the reality of judgment the sole motivation for our proclamation. It is simply not our prerogative to speculate as to the final outcome of the eschatological judgment, which will be a day of surprises." Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 285-6.
22. For a popular overview see William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).
23. See, for example, Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the Twenty First Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994).
24. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, p. 74.
25. A consequence was the need to establish a "Worn-Out Ministers' Fund." *Ibid.* p. 11.
26. *Ibid.*
27. See, e.g., Thumma, Travis and Bird's study of megachurches in the USA. They found that between 2000 and 2005, the average number of fulltime professional staff at

- megachurches (defined as having a congregation in excess of 2000) increased from 13 to 20, while the number of volunteers decreased from 297 to 284. There was also a significant increase in the number of part time staff employed (from 3 to 9). See <<http://www.leadnet.org/downloads/megasummaryreportFINAL.pdf>>, cited 25 Oct., 2007.
28. From Frances Havergal, "Take My Life" (in Public Domain).
 29. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 130.
 30. Thus Stackhouse writes, "The Bible has played an enormous and complex role in evangelical life. Almost every feature of that role, however, is under challenge today." John G. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 48.
 31. Grenz and Franke speak confidently of "the demise of foundationalism" and being "This side of the demise of foundationalism." Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, pp. 26, 229.
 32. Together with Franke, Grenz unpacks his understanding of this in *Ibid.* pp. 57-92.
 33. *Ibid.* pp. 60-63.
 34. See e.g. Helseth's critique of Grenz' historical reconstruction in Paul Kjoss Helseth, "Are Postconservative Evangelicals Fundamentalists? Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton and the Rise of Neo-Fundamentalism," in *Reclaiming the Center* (2004).
 35. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), p. 87. The adequacy of this definition must be questioned. It implies a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, role for the theologian. Perhaps a church historian might be willing to be limited to a descriptive role, but it is improbable that many systematic theologians would be willing to accept such an abbreviated description of their task. Indeed, Grenz himself does not, for in spite of this definition, he carves out a far more ambitious role in his own theological work. Perhaps it should be enlarged to be a 'reflection on the adequacy of the faith commitment of the believing community in the light of...' with relevant theological criteria inserted (e.g. Scripture, the tradition of the church, certain ethical criteria, etc.)
 36. *Ibid.* 88.
 37. *Ibid.* 93.
 38. *Ibid.* 94.
 39. The understanding of truth would be of truth as correspondence with objective reality.

40. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, p. 112. While hard to dispute, this does seem to beg the question. Is it not the task of the theologian to articulate why this happens and how to evaluate the validity of such an “encounter”? In addition, this presentation of the Pietists is one sided according to Travis. See William G. Travis, “Pietism and the History of American Evangelicalism,” in *Reclaiming the Center*.
41. Brand accuses Grenz of driving an artificial wedge between those who focus on the Bible as a source of correct doctrine and those whose focus is on the Bible as a source of spiritual sustenance. Dismissing this typology as overly simplistic, Brand argues that balance between the two has usually characterised evangelicalism. Chad O. Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, p. 298. Smith, in his work of the relationship between Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, is more nuanced when he distinguishes between evangelical theology and grass-roots evangelical experience. He writes: “This issue (the relationship between Pentecostalism and evangelicalism) situates us in the midst of an ongoing historiographic debate between Donald Dayton and George Marsden Dayton has been insisting on a ‘pentecostal paradigm’ for understanding evangelicalism over against what he calls Marsden’s ‘presbyterian paradigm’. I think both of them are right, but on different levels. I think Marsden is correct in asserting the dominant influence of the Princeton tradition on mainstream evangelical theology; but in agreement with Dayton, I think evangelicalism at a grass-roots level has been significantly influenced by a more Wesleyan-holiness piety as found, for instance, in Finney.” James K. A. Smith, “The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997): 61.
42. Grenz follows up on his own suggestion in *Theology for the Community of God*, and his discussion of Scripture in the middle of the book within the section on the work of the Spirit, makes for a refreshing point of difference. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).
43. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 481.
44. Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor, 2005), ix-xi. Thus, for example, about a third of the content of *The Passion of the Christ* is to be found no-where in Scripture. It includes some non-Biblical and troubling anti-semitic material—for example, of Jewish children turning into demons as they badger Judas into hanging himself. The *Left Behind* series propagates a form of American Zionism while *The Purpose Driven Life* reflects a radically individualistic brand of Calvinism.

45. Stackhouse wonders, “where, if not in these groups, evangelicals are engaged in an ongoing study of the Bible.” Stackhouse, *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* 63.
46. Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, p. 150.
47. Though the Washington Post (Feb. 2, 2006) reported that the 30 million member strong National Association of Evangelicals was unable to reach a consensus on global climate change and therefore unable to take a stand on the matter. Alan Cooperman, “Evangelicals Will Not Take a Stand on Global Warming”.
48. Thus the title of his book. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century*.
49. Or, to quote Isaac Watt’s hymn, “Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all!” Watts, Isaac, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, in Public Domain.
50. Stanley J. Grenz, “Salvation and God’s Program in Establishing Community,” *Review and Expositor* 91, no. 4 (1994): 510.
51. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson & J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), p. 5.
52. The opening lines read, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stain.” Cowper, William There is a Fountain Filled with Blood. In Public Domain.
53. Nigel Wright suggests that ‘Evangelical culture, despite the claims that it is middle class, is largely generated from the grassroots, even more so since the impact of the charismatic renewal. It is a folk culture...’. Nigel Wright, “Re-Imagining Evangelicalism,” in *The Post-Evangelical Debate*, Graham Cray, et al. (eds.) London: Triangle, 1997), p. 108.
54. Noll, Bebbington and Rawlyk argue that since its origin in the mid-eighteenth century, evangelicalism has always been a diverse, flexible, adaptable and multiform movement. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk, (eds.), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 8.
55. Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollon, 1996). Hart speaks disparagingly of ‘this overachieving religious movement’. Darryl G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 14.
56. Equating evangelicalism with Protestant orthodoxy, he later expands: “As a religious tradition conforms to the modern paradigm, it gains a legitimacy and respectability. The response of Protestant orthodoxy to the increasing dominance of

these cultural realities (and particularly to their influence within Protestantism) was a retreat to a sociocultural ghetto. Isolated and insulated, it was able to maintain a certain version of theological orthodoxy alive and protected. But in many ways, the history of Evangelicalism in the latter half of the twentieth century has been the history of its passage out of this ghetto.” James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 46, 48.

57. J. I. Packer, “A Stunted Ecclesiology?,” in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century. Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden.*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher Hall (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), p. 120.
58. Dayton, “The Limits of Evangelicalism,” p. 48.
59. Johnson articulates something of what I am trying to convey when he writes: “...those who practice theology must become less preoccupied with the world that produced Scripture and learn how to live in the world Scripture produces. This will be a matter of imagination, and perhaps of leaping.” Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” in *Theology and Scriptural Imagination*, ed. L.Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 3.
60. For an expansion of this concept, see Jonathan R. Wilson, “Theological Imagination: Evangelical and Ecclesial,” (Vancouver: Carey Theological College, 2006).