

Post-war evangelical theology: a generational perspective

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The growth of evangelical scholarship and its relation to the academy is one of the remarkable phenomena of the theological scene since the Second World War. The current generation of evangelical theological students have little appreciation of the dearth of publications faced by their counterparts in the 1960s and 70s, nor of the road evangelical theology has travelled since then. This essay is an attempt to use a generational approach to map the development of postwar evangelical theology and to raise questions for the next generation. It is offered more as a research proposal than a completed thesis.¹ Karl Mannheim wrote a seminal essay on 'The Problem of Generations'² in 1923 that is still 'regarded as the most systematic and fully developed treatment of generation from a sociological perspective' today.³ Robert Wuthnow has summarised Mannheim's understanding of a generation unit as:

a biological age group which (a) shares a 'common location in the social and historical process' which limits it to 'a specific range of potential experience, predisposing it for a certain characteristic type of historically relevant action'; (b) has a 'common destiny' or interest just as that of a socioeconomic class; and (c) exhibits 'identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences.'⁴

Mannheim's use of generation has sometimes been said to describe more properly 'a cohort' since, properly speaking, generation does refer to the structure of the parent-child relationship in a kinship group rather than simply, as Mannheim defines it, being a group who have a shared common experience at

1 The initial outline of this paper was given at a conference on Evangelical Identities in April 2007, at a conference sponsored by Tyndale-Carey Graduate School in Auckland, New Zealand.

2 Published in English in K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: RKP, 1952).

3 Jane Pilcher, 'Mannheim's Sociology of Generations', *The British Journal of Sociology* 45.3 (1994), 482.

4 Robert Wuthnow, 'Recent Pattern of Secularization: A Problem of Generations?' *American Sociological Review* 41 (1976), 850-1.

a given time in history. But the word generation is used, both in academic disciplines and popular conversation, in a narrower sense to indicate a kinship group and a wider sense to refer to what might be strictly termed 'a social generation'.⁵ The use of the word cohort is currently used to describe a group, such as a student cohort, with a much more focused social experience than I describe here. The term generation, then, seems an appropriate word to use.

In the light of such a definition as Mannheim's, three clear generations of postwar evangelical theologians can be identified leading to a consideration of the nature of the fourth generation.

In discussing the nature of religion in America that had been formed by successive generations of immigrants, Will Herberg popularised Marcus Hansen's thesis of the 'principle of third-generation interest'.⁶ In ways which I shall develop it may serve as a model for the development of postwar evangelical theology through the generations.

The first generation of newly arrived immigrant families brought with them the language, customs, values and religion of the old country. They gradually assimilated to the larger community but were marked by a 'curious combination of foreignness and Americanness'.⁷ Truth to tell, the practice of the old customs and religion provided them with a safe haven in which to shelter in the face of the onslaught of storms of a foreign majority host culture and the pressures of assimilation that battered them. The second generation sought to overcome these tensions, mostly by forgetting the old country together with its language and customs and playing down their heritage at the expense of becoming true Americans. Not all sought to escape and pockets of the unreconstructed group survived and continued to assimilate new arrivals. But many of the second generation became much more at home in what was their land, America. The third generation were confident of being Americans and felt no need to prove themselves. They had overcome the alienation of the first and second generations. Even so, they needed some way of defining what sort of Americans they were. The Hansen/Herberg thesis posits that this freed them to return to and use some of their grandparents' customs, especially in the realm of religion as a key to defining their place in American life and their self-identity more exactly.

Expressed in a brief formula, the thesis states that 'what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember'.⁸

There would seem to be similarities between the process described by Hansen and Herberg and postwar evangelical theologians in relation to the wider academic, and particularly theological, community. In a preliminary way, this paper raises the following questions: (1) how accurate a model is the Hansen/Herberg

5 Pilcher, 'Mannheim's Sociology', 483.

6 Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: 1955, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p 30.

7 Herberg, *Protestant*, 28.

8 Herberg, *Protestant*, 30.

thesis to describe the story of recent evangelical theology, and (2) what of the fourth generation?

The background

Mark Noll has sketched the background to contemporary evangelical scholarship in a few bold but true brush-strokes. He writes:

Of most interest to outsiders is the record of traditional Bible-believers first competing in the intellectual market-place as full partners in the academic discussion of Scripture (roughly 1880 to 1900); then retreating from the world to the fortress of faith (roughly 1900 to 1935); then slowly realizing the values of some participation in the wider world (1935-1950), finding the strategies to put themselves back in the professional picture once again (1940-1975) and finally confronting new spiritual and intellectual dilemmas because of the success of those ventures (1960 to present).⁹

In using the framework I propose here I am not intending to suggest that evangelical scholarship began after the Second World War but rather that a new phase began at that stage. There had been evangelical theologians earlier in the twentieth century, notably in the UK, Bishop Handley Moule (1841-1920), W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) and, a little later, T. C. Hammond (1877-1961), but these were often seen as churchmen rather than academic theologians.¹⁰ In the United States, evangelical scholarship had been kept alive during the years of the rise of liberalism and the fundamentalist withdrawal from the mainstream. At Westminster Seminary, formed in 1929, a notable group of Reformed theologians and biblical scholars including Oswald Allis, J Gresham Machen, John Murray, Cornelius van Til and E. J. Young made their home.

There were, however, significant differences between the story in the USA and the UK earlier in the twentieth century¹¹ which, while they did not disappear, were lessened with the emergence of neo-evangelicalism, as it was termed in the USA,¹² and the renaissance of evangelicalism, as Hylson-Smith terms it, in the UK.¹³ The rebirth of an evangelicalism which sought to engage with, rather than withdraw from, the wider church and world led to the blossoming of a self-conscious evangelical scholarship that crossed denominational boundaries and

9 Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible* (Leicester: Apollon, 1991), 7.

10 On the background see Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 241-255 and 287-297 and Randle Manwaring, *From Controversy to Co-Existence: Evangelicals in the Church of England 1914-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 39-50. It should be noted that Thomas went to Canada and Hammond to Australia.

11 These are explored in Noll, *Between Faith & Criticism*, 11-90.

12 George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), passim.

13 Hylson Smith, *Evangelicals*, 287.

made an impact in the academic world. Reflecting on the period in 1997, James Barr commented that ‘it is indisputable that in recent decades scholarship has become more and more important for conservative evangelicals. At one time many of them might have been content to dismiss scholarship as a quite unimportant factor in our understanding of the Bible... but today there is visible a deep anxiety to have learning on one’s side.’¹⁴

A major contributory factor in the renaissance of evangelical scholarship was, no doubt, the founding of IVF in 1928, the establishment of IVF’s Biblical Research Committee in 1938, and the eventual opening of Tyndale House for Biblical Research in 1944.¹⁵ Nonetheless this would not have happened but for a generation of gifted scholars, some of whom were not primarily theologians but trained in an ancillary discipline, who had a vision for the reviving of evangelical theology. In the USA, a parallel story was unfolding with the rise of institutions such as Fuller Seminary that were key vehicles for the expression of neo-evangelicalism.¹⁶

The first generation

The first generation were all born in the 1910s. They include F. F. Bruce (1910-90); E. J. Carnell (1919-67); Donald Guthrie (1915-92); R. K. Harrison (1920-93); Carl Henry (1913-2003); Derek Kidner (b. 1913); George Eldon Ladd (1911-82); Leon Morris (1914-2006) and Donald Wiseman (b. 1918). J. I. Packer who was born in 1926 is the junior member of this generation. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but illustrative. Encouraging them from the boundaries of the academic world were the ‘organic intellectuals’¹⁷ Billy Graham (b. 1918) and Harold Ockenga (1905-85) in the States, and John Stott (b. 1921) and D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) in Britain. Behind the scenes in the UK, Douglas Johnson, like Lloyd-Jones, a medical doctor, was to prove a formidable organizing force as well as a doctrinal guardian. He served as General Secretary of IVF for forty years (1924-1964).

F. F. Bruce, in his autobiography, *In Retrospect*, claims that the main stimulus to the renewal of evangelical scholarship was the Biblical Research Committee founded by IVF in 1938. ‘The primary purpose of the formation of this Committee,’ he wrote, ‘was to do something to roll away the reproach of anti-intellectualism, if not outright obscurantism, which has for too long been attached to

14 James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (1977, London: SCM Press, 1981), 120.

15 The story of Tyndale House is told in T. A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: The first sixty years* (Leicester: IVP, 2006).

16 The story of Fuller is told in George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

17 Alister E McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: Apollon, 1996) 19-20. Organic intellectuals are ‘understood as thinkers who operate and are respected within a community, and who gain authority on account of their being seen to represent the outlook of that community’.

English evangelicalism.’¹⁸

A key task of this generation was to counter ‘Modern Criticism’¹⁹ which had undermined the authority of the Bible by calling into question both its historical accuracy and its unique status as inspired revelation. The purpose was to renew confidence in the Bible as an intellectually credible, true revelation of God and an infallible²⁰ guide to faith.

The very initial strategy seems to have been primarily directed to undermining the views of the critics. Thus, writing on higher and textual criticism in *The New Bible Handbook*, the unidentified author dwells mainly on Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis and calls into question its rationalistic presuppositions before pointing out that it is based on (a) a lack of external evidence, (b) unsound foundations regarding the writing in Israel and the religion of Israel, and (c) the relationship between the dating of the documents and a theory of religious development. It describes the method of analysis as ‘arbitrary and indeterminate’ before going on to list ‘further weaknesses’. The demolition job concludes with the statement that ‘A system reared upon foundations which are logically unsound and spiritual false cannot be saved from ultimate collapse, in spite of all the labour spent on it.’²¹

Significantly, although at this initial stage the counter-offensive against modern historical criticism gave great weight to spiritual and theological considerations, such as the ideas of inspiration and revelation, it was evident that evangelicals were already seeking to answer the modern critics on their own grounds and to cause the critics’ tools to rebound on them. Before long it was the tools of academic language, rather than of faith propositions, that were their major concern. There was also a move from the negative to a more positive attitude. Typically F. F. Bruce soon published *The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable?*²² The question, he stated, was of supreme importance because Christianity was a historical religion and if it could be undermined on the basis of history it could be undermined altogether. Writing as a classicist, he argued that ‘the grounds for accepting the New Testament as trustworthy compared very favourably with the grounds on which classical students accepted the authenticity and

18 F. F. Bruce, *In Retrospect: Remembrance of Things Past* (London and Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1980), 122.

19 This term is used deliberately because it is the term used in a watershed evangelical book called *The New Bible Handbook*, ed. G. T. Manley (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1947). Manley was another ‘organic intellectual’ who had been a Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge, a senior wrangler at Cambridge, a missionary in India with CMS, and, subsequently, Vicar of St. Luke’s, Hampstead. See Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: IVP, 1979), 93–96.

20 The word ‘infallible’ was the preferred word in the UK as opposed to ‘inerrant’ which was championed by many in the USA.

21 Manley (ed.) *Bible Handbook*, 56.

22 First published by IVP in 1943.

credibility of many ancient documents'.²³

Similarly, Donald Guthrie began his mammoth project of writing *New Testament Introduction* in which the arguments of dating, authorship, form and source criticism, the Synoptic Problem and so on are carefully weighed in the context of introducing the characteristics and message of each New Testament book. The first part was published in 1961 with the complete *Introduction* being produced in one volume in 1970. Guthrie wrote in an irenic manner²⁴ and yet his research led to uncompromisingly conservative conclusions. In class, Donald would present a view with which he profoundly disagreed as sympathetically as possible and then conclude, with a twinkle in his eye, 'Well, you may choose to believe that...' It was obvious where he stood.

These scholars were no longer content to assert faith propositions in a vacuum but to assert the truthfulness of the Bible and support its veracity by using the tools of history, archaeology and Egyptology, Assyriology or Classic Studies. Donald Wiseman's contribution, as an Assyriologist, to Old Testament Studies and F. F. Bruce's work, as a Classicist, to New Testament Studies are examples of this. Barr writes that a large part of conservative scholarship came, especially at the time, from 'the envioning fields', 'from the margins rather than the centre of the biblical field'.²⁵ Among other reasons for this he claims that in approaching biblical studies from the periphery, people felt they were able to be more neutral and objective in their study and only indirectly, rather than directly, confront some of the dogmatic faith issues.²⁶

While that argument has merit, it is also true that there was little other option open to them at the time. Evangelical scholars were the newly arrived immigrants in the academic community who, like virtually all immigrant groups, were suspect and have to start at the margins before becoming increasingly acceptable. There were few, if any, models for them to imitate. Bruce, in commenting on the start of the Biblical Research Committee admitted that, 'Few of us on the Committee could claim much in the way of theological expertise, but we saw what had to be done'.²⁷

Those who had theological expertise were for the most part working in evan-

23 F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable?* (1943, London: IVP, 1959), 5. This was the fifth edition.

24 Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 140. Barr contrasts Guthrie's style with that of Harrison in his companion *Introduction to the Old Testament*, London, IVP, 1970 of which he writes, 'the book is full of special pleading and the burning personal antagonism of the writer against the critical approach is evident throughout'.

25 Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 128.

26 Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 85, makes a similar but not identical point. Since many of the foundations for evangelical scholarship in the UK were laid by those in university posts they exhibited 'the blurring characteristic of the British acceptance of criticism during the last years of the nineteenth century'. Noll misses the point, at this stage of his argument, that many who made such a contribution were not biblical scholars but working in related fields or primarily trained in other disciplines.

27 Bruce, *In Retrospect*, 122.

gical institutions rather than the mainstream of academia – Carnell, Henry, to begin with, and Ladd at Fuller, Guthrie at London Bible College, Kidner at Tynedale House. Morris as Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne and R. K. Harrison at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto were closest to the University scene but in theological colleges. The two most integrated into academia were Bruce and Wiseman and although Bruce made an unprecedented mark as a Professor of Biblical Studies, first at Sheffield and then at Manchester, his entrée to the field was as a classics' scholar. If we cast the net wider we see the pattern repeated elsewhere with Basil Atkinson at Cambridge, for example, making a contribution to evangelical scholarship but from his post as Under-Librarian of the University of Cambridge rather than as a lecturer in theology.

Bruce was among the more adventurous of this generation of evangelical scholars, perhaps because he was a University man, not a theologian, or even because of his Brethren background which in some ways provided him with a greater freedom and individualism than those who belonged to other denominations.²⁸ He claims never to have been aware of any tension between his academic study and his personal and Christian handling of the Bible. He had a commitment to academic freedom and, in his autobiography, openly stated that the labels of conservative and liberal were irrelevant in a university setting. What mattered, he said, was scholarship that involved 'a commitment to truth, that one is free to follow the evidence wherever it leads, in an atmosphere of free enquiry'.²⁹

Not all were as at ease with the tension between academic theology and an a priori theological stance as Bruce evidently was. Donald Guthrie might, in this respect, be more typical. For example, his doctoral work was on pseudepigrapha and he was undoubtedly unhappy with evangelicals who concluded that certain biblical books were pseudepigraphic, as the second generation began to do. The reliability of the claims of scripture about authorship, dating and the apparent claims the documents made about themselves had to be right or else, as far as he was concerned, the rest of their teaching could be called into question.³⁰

The first generation were clearly seeking to establish themselves in new territory and, likely newly arrived immigrants, exhibited both a fascination with and a nervousness about their new home. They were nibbling at it from the edge rather than contributing to it from the centre, and frequently took refuge in conferences where they could relax among their own. But like the generation of the grandfathers who clung on to precious reminders of the land left behind, they provided their sons with openings in the land of new opportunities.

28 I recall that Bruce in his writings and personal support was very supportive of women in Christian teaching and leadership and wonder what many of his colleagues in the Brethren who were generally opposed to such a stance made of him in this and a few other regards.

29 Bruce, *In Retrospect*, 143.

30 Personal recollection. This paragraph is based on a number of personal conversations with Donald Guthrie.

The second generation

The second generation were born in the 1930s and were much more at home in the world of academic scholarship, adopting its methods with much more ease. They include Leslie Allen (b. 1935); David Clines (b. 1936?); James Dunn (b. 1939); R. T. France (b. 1938); Murray Harris (b. 1939); I Howard Marshall (b. 1934); Clark Pinnock (b. 1937) and, Anthony Thiselton (b. 1937). Stretching the boundaries of the decades somewhat we might note Ralph Martin (b. 1925) as something of a bridge from the first to the second generation and the second generation shading off into the early third generation in people like John Goldingay (b. 1942), Gordon Wenham (b. 1943) and Stephen Travis (b. 1944). The mere recitation of the names is enough to demonstrate what progress evangelical scholars had made. Four of the above held prestigious chairs in the Universities of Aberdeen, Durham, Nottingham and Sheffield and the names of the others were greatly respected in the academic world. When Bruce published his biography, in 1980, he claimed there were 'between thirty-five and thirty'³¹ teachers of biblical and related studies who (were) associated with Tyndale Fellowship' holding posts in British universities. It was, he said, 'an ample cause for wondering gratitude' that the aspirations of the Bible Research Committee had been fulfilled.³²

The transformation which evangelical scholarship has undergone is evident in a number of ways. A comparison between the various editions of IVP's *New Bible Commentary* is instructive as to the progress made. The first and second editions of *The New Bible Commentary*, edited by the first generation, with the fourth edition, known as the 21st Century edition, representative chiefly of the fruit of the second generation,³³ demonstrates some of the differences clearly. In the first edition of 1953, two-fifths of the contributors were in pastoral ministry and only four of those in academic posts held them, strictly speaking, in secular universities. In the 1970 (third) edition, a shift was evident but the roots were still very apparent. The number of ministerial authors had been reduced from twenty to fourteen and the number of academic authors increased from thirty to thirty-six. By the time of the 1994 edition only two of the forty-five contributors were in pastoral ministry, another two were in 'secular' work but forty-one were in academic posts of one sort or another. Five of the academic contributors were

31 This seems an odd expression and one wonders whether it should read 'between thirty-five and forty teachers...' There is another delightful misprint in the book with one chapter being listed in the Contents page as 'Some bore books'. On turning to the chapter one is disappointed to read about 'Some more books'. It would be interesting to know which books Bruce would have commented on if the Contents page had been correct!

32 Bruce, *In Retrospect*, 127. A similar comment is made about the state of scholarship at the end of the 1960s in Noble, 137.

33 R. T. France was the only editor who actually fell within the second generation with J. A. Motyer belonging to the earlier one and D. A. Carson and G. J. Wenham belonging to the third generation. The work however is representative of the position of the middle generation.

in secular university posts and thirteen bore the title of full Professor. The editors of this edition paid homage to the editors of earlier editions but commented that 'nothing remains from 1953 and little from 1970'.³⁴

Whereas the 1953 edition began with a robust article on 'The authority of Scripture' and immediately followed it with an article on 'Revelation and Inspiration', the 1994 edition began with a gentler, all-inclusive article which was entitled 'Approaching the Bible' and contained a much greater recognition of the Bible as a human, as well as divine, book.

The 21st Century edition, published in 1994, still reaches conservative conclusions but sometimes more tentatively than its predecessors and often with a greater use being made of non-conservative scholarship. So, for example, the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy is much more robustly defended in the first and second editions than the latest edition. According to the earlier edition, 'The claim is distinctly made that Moses "declared" the law and wrote it in a book...' Counter claims consist of arguments which nullify each other and the internal evidence for Mosaic authorship is said to be 'very strong'.³⁵ In 1994, however, Gordon McGonville³⁶ concludes that 'the data cannot prove conclusively any of the dates canvassed...' and he concludes more cautiously that the 'evidence is consistent with its composition in the period following Moses' death. This may have been quite soon after, or within a few generations'.³⁷

In the New Testament, Max Turner clearly affirms the Pauline authorship of Ephesians which, by then, some evangelical scholars were calling into question.³⁸ In terms of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, however, there is a marked difference of tone rather than of conclusion. The first edition argues strongly for Pauline authorship. It briefly alludes to the evidence but chiefly argues from the viewpoint of apostolicity being the ground of inclusion in the canon. If Paul did not write 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, they were to be considered fraudulent. Alan Stibbs, the commentator, comments 'For our part we accept them as Pauline, and desire with God's help to seek to understand them accordingly'.³⁹ In the 21st Century edition, Donald Guthrie is no less committed to Paul as the author of these epistles, but spends far more time on the evidence *pro* and *con* Pauline authorship and only briefly mentions the moral problem if the work is pseudonymous. It is hard to imagine him including the sort of pious conclusion which Stibbs' inserted.

Alan Stibbs' comment, it should be said, was entirely in line with the objectives of the early editions of the Commentary. In publishing the second edition

34 *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), vii. Hereinafter *21st Cent. NBC*.

35 F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs and E. F. Kevan (eds.), *The New Bible Commentary* (1953, London: IVE, 1954), 195-6. Hereinafter *NBC*.

36 In the terms of this paper, McGonville is strictly speaking a third generation postwar evangelical scholar.

37 *21st Cent. NBC*, 199.

38 *21st Cent. NBC*, 1222.

39 *NBC*, 1063.

just a year after launching the first, the editors commented that they had taken the opportunity to make a number of 'minor modifications' and to replace one article. But, significantly, they wrote,

Some of the reviews of the first edition seem to have been made without a clear understanding of the purpose of the Commentary, and it may be useful, therefore, to repeat that the aim of the work is to give help in the understanding of the contents of the Bible rather than indulge in speculative discussions of an introductory and critical kind.⁴⁰

Similar changes in emphasis and tone are evident in other publications. A comparison between the early Tyndale commentaries such as that of Tasker on *Matthew*, Blaiklock on *Acts*, and Stibbs on *1 Peter* by volumes authored by France, Marshall and Grudem provide ample evidence of the changes, even though the latter remain conservative in their conclusions. Tasker's *Matthew* did not engage seriously with critical scholarship. Blaiklock's *Acts* showed all the hallmarks of being written by a classicist. And Stibbs' *1 Peter*⁴¹ was a rich and spiritual exposition of the epistle rather than a critical commentary.

In like manner, Evangelicals have at least softened their stance on the authorship of 2 Peter. In 1968, Michael Green, a first generation scholar, who had researched the issue admitted it was complex but stated that he would 'assume, provisionally, that the author is Simon Peter'.⁴² Some of his argument in favour of Petrine authorship related to the moral question if it was pseudepigraphic and the lack of discrimination on the part of the church who inserted it in the canon of Scripture despite it having a number of problems. About such arguments against Petrine authorship his verdict was 'I find it very hard to believe'.⁴³ But R. T. France, in 1993, was much more relaxed about the possibility of 2 Peter being pseudonymous and argued that deceit would not have been involved. The real issue was one of interpretation rather than authorship.⁴⁴

France developed his position by expanding on the importance of hermeneutics to which many evangelicals had been introduced by Anthony Thiselton⁴⁵ at the Nottingham National Evangelical Anglican Congress in 1977. It may have created disquiet among evangelicals at a popular level but evangelical academics had found the perspective 'a liberating one for the evangelical scholarly en-

40 *NBC*, vi. Bruce, *In Retrospect*, 129, includes excerpts from the reviews of the first edition and concludes, 'The inference to be drawn from these varying assessments is that the Commentary was a reasonably sound piece of work'.

41 The introduction to this commentary which did contain a good deal of engagement with the critical was written by Andrew Walls rather than Alan Stibbs.

42 Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, London: Tyndale Press, 1968), p 35.

43 Green, 33.

44 R. T. France, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship (2) The New Testament', in *Evangelical Anglicans: The role and influence in the church today*, R. T. France and A. E. McGrath (eds) (London: SPCK, 1993), 52.

45 Thiselton had done his undergraduate theological training at London Bible College under Ernest Kevan, Dermot McDonald and Donald Guthrie.

terprise'.⁴⁶ Shibboleths that distinguished true evangelicals from others were a thing of the past and evangelical 'tradition' was no longer the arbiter of what was acceptable interpretation. He rejoiced in the freedom it brought, even if it meant evangelicalism was less coherent than once it was. In the same book of essays Gordon McConville had argued similarly saying that 'there can be no return for evangelicals to a "canon" of acceptable views about authorship' even if evangelical scholars still gained their direction from seeing the Bible as the Word of God. There were, he declared, no 'no-go areas' to investigation.⁴⁷

Both McConville and France accepted however that this opening up of evangelical scholarship led to border wars. Just exactly what was 'permissible in terms of critical scholarship'⁴⁸ if scholars were to be considered evangelical? There were certainly 'tensions', to use France's word. At various times, and with varying results, scholars like Ralph Martin, Leslie Allen, James Dunn, David Clines and Clark Pinnock⁴⁹ were all in the eye of the storm.⁵⁰ The storm hovered over Tyndale House in the early 1970s and related to the publications' policy of Tyndale Press. Graham Stanton asked whether Tyndale Press could broaden its appeal and publish more controversial material produced by the study groups. As a result of discussion, a memo drafted by Howard Marshall was distributed which pointed out the similarity between the Tyndale Fellowship and other academic professional societies but commented that 'T. F. would have no *raison d'être* if it simply duplicated these societies (which had no doctrinal tests and accepted a variety of presuppositions): it exists to do research from an agreed starting-point of conservative evangelical faith, summarized in the Doctrinal Basis of the I.V.F.'⁵¹ That did not, however, settle the matter and disquiet over the views of some members were to continue.⁵²

If further evidence was needed of the growing maturity of evangelical scholarship it would be gained from comparing the content and style of Manley's *The New Bible Handbook* with the volume of essays entitled *New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Principles and Methods* published in 1977. Edited by Howard Marshall and authored mostly by second generation postwar evangelical scholars, with a few first generation scholars also contributing, it is far less defensive in its approach and demonstrates that these scholars were beginning to feel very much at home in the scholarly world.

46 France, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship', 53.

47 Gordon McConville, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship (1) The Old Testament' in *Evangelical Anglicans*, France and McGrath (eds.), 42.

48 McConville, 'Evangelicalism and Biblical Scholarship', 42.

49 Pinnock studied under F. F. Bruce and has most recently been associated with the controversy regarding *The Openness of God*, the title of one of his books published by Paternoster Press, 1994.

50 On Ralph Martin and Leslie Allen see Ian Randall, *Educating Evangelicalism: The Origins, Development and Impact of London Bible College* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 126-30, 205-6, 274-6.

51 Noble, *Tyndale House*, 153.

52 Noble, *Tyndale House*, 164-5 and 178-81.

Another basis for reflection would be the Word Commentaries, or the New International Greek Testament Commentary Series when compared, for example, with the early New London Commentaries. Not only have evangelical commentators demonstrated greater and greater sophistication in their use of scholarly tools but (although admittedly this is a generalisation) they have also been willing to embrace positions which their predecessors would have rejected.⁵³

As with the Hansen/Herberg thesis of immigration not all the second generation were so keen to reject the symbols of the old country that had been left behind, but the majority were. The second generation worked hard to remove obstacles to acceptability by the majority host country and to integrate themselves as far as possible. So it was with the second generation of scholars, but what of the third generation?

The third generation

The Hansen/Herberg thesis argues that the third generation of immigrants know that they are Americans and have no need to prove it. This leaves them free to pick up some of the symbols of the country their families left behind: 'what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember'. It gives them a more particular identity than the generalised identity of 'being American'.

In the case of postwar evangelical theology the third generation are, I believe, more varied in their response. The third generation are currently senior evangelical scholars who are in their prime, perhaps approaching retirement but mostly not yet having reached it. They include Richard Bauckham, Don Carson, Joel Green, Andrew Lincoln, John Goldingay, Wayne Grudem, Gordon McConville, Alister McGrath, Stephen Travis, Max Turner, Kevin Vanhoozer, David Wells, Gordon Wenham, Chris Wright, Tom Wright, and would have included Stanley Grenz, but for his premature death.

Some of these display very conservative tendencies and conform to the Hansen/Herberg thesis. They are at home in the academy and produce scholarship which is widely respected even if labelled 'conservative'. They are big hitters. But they feel unashamed about identifying with some of the characteristics of the first generation and are robust in their defence, for example, of the inerrancy or infallibility of scripture, of the apostolic authorship of disputed epistles and of penal substitution, which was to become a matter of dispute. Carson, Grudem and Wells are vigorous protagonists for the traditional positions while others like Wenham or Wright use their scholarship energetically yet gently to reaffirm traditional positions.

Others, like Green, Goldingay, and Lincoln have no fear of taking a stand against the inherited traditional evangelical consensus. Green, for example,

⁵³ Space prohibits an examination of more examples that abound. See, for example, the several dismissive comments Alec Motyer makes in the footnotes of *The Message of Exodus* (Leicester: IVP, 2005) about John Durham's acceptance and use of the documentary hypothesis in his Word Commentary, *Exodus* (Waco: Word, 1987).

is a noted Luke-Acts scholar, an expert in literary and narrative criticism, but is also known for calling into question the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement.⁵⁴ Evangelicals differ markedly over Goldingay's writings on Scripture, some finding them refreshing and others holding them as suspect.⁵⁵ In his commentary on Daniel he is cautious about its historical value and asserts only that the 'stories reflect historical experiences and events'.⁵⁶ He claims the visions are pseudonymous and that the book is of a later date than it appears on the surface. A volume of essays that he edited on Atonement⁵⁷ was considered by some to soften the wrath of God and the nature of sin. It set such a variety of models of atonement before its readers that some considered it to speak with an uncertain sound and to set out a less than a robust biblical gospel. All these positions would have been questionable to the first generation of evangelical scholars. In reference to Ephesians, Lincoln advances positive arguments in favour of pseudonymity and does not see that it detracts from the authority or validity of a New Testament document. He is content that Ephesians is part of 'canonical Paul' but does not believe it comes from the 'pen' of the 'historical' Paul.⁵⁸

Stanley Grenz was engaged in a conscious enterprise of translating evangelical belief into the categories of postmodernity and to reinterpret what he believed to be traditional positions in language and forms that made sense to contemporary culture.⁵⁹ In doing so he became a victim of the inevitable boundary dispute, with Carson dismissing him on one occasion with the comment, 'With the best will in the world, I cannot see how Grenz's approach to Scripture can be called "evangelical" in any useful sense'.⁶⁰

It is impossible in this paper to do any justice to Tom Wright who is among the most original, prolific and influential New Testament scholars of today. He enjoys an international reputation second to none. Suffice it to say that he would place himself among the 'open evangelicals' in the Church of England.⁶¹ Firmly

54 Joel B Green and Mark D. Baker, *Rediscovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

55 Especially, John Goldingay, *Models of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994).

56 John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, 1989), 321.

57 *Atonement Today*, John Goldingay (ed.) (London: SPCK, 1995).

58 Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, 1990), lix-lxxiii.

59 See especially, Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), *Theology for the Community of God*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994) and *Renewing the Centre: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Area* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

60 D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 481. It was a comment that I know from personal conversation caused Stanley Grenz pain because here and elsewhere he felt his integrity called into question.

61 Evangelicals are often labelled as conservative, open or charismatic evangelicals in Anglican terms. On open evangelicals see Christina Baxter, 'Our Mission in Britain II,' *Anvil* 20.3 (2003) 191-6.

evangelical in so many respects, his championing of the new perspective on Paul, his writing on the doctrine of scripture and his freedom from a number of classic evangelical shibboleths leave him suspect in the eyes of some evangelicals.

The third generation is healthy in terms of the respect it has earned in the academy and the diversity and weight of contribution made. But a fissure has begun to open, akin to a division among third generation immigrants. One wing remains faithful to their origins and traditions and, although clearly different from the first generation, and confident in their use of scholarly engagement, are fairly uncompromising on issues on which the first generation took their stand. They are not embarrassed to revisit their grandparents' customs and values. The other wing is forging ahead with integrating into the host culture of academia. That culture is far from monochrome, yet it exerts some pressures to conformity which, if they are to be resisted, call for a vigorous evangelical commitment.

And the fourth generation?

Since the fourth generation are, to use the vogue word, 'emerging' it is too early to comment intelligently on what contribution they might make. It is evident that evangelical scholars are no longer the coherent tight-knit body they once were. The current generation are both very numerous and very diverse. Like many a fourth generation most think their roots may be interesting but consider them irrelevant to the questions currently faced. The current battles are largely driven by seeking to forge a post-enlightenment theology which is still meaningfully evangelical. The battlegrounds are chiefly epistemological, hermeneutical and ecclesiological. J. R. Middleton and Brian J Walsh's *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be*⁶² was seen by many as a breakthrough book for evangelicals. But it has been quickly followed by others. John Franke and Stanley Grenz's *Beyond Foundationalism*⁶³ is seminal, as are some of their other related writings. But so far, younger scholars, coming from a postmodern perspective, have made little contribution to Biblical Studies. Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmatt's *Colossians Remixed*⁶⁴ may serve as a harbinger of fruitful biblical research yet to be published. Perhaps it is inevitable that they should be less preoccupied with the text than previous generations. But wider biblical scholarship is in the process of freeing itself from the often deadening grip of historical criticism and it is an opportune time then for evangelicals to rediscover a way of releasing the Bible's message.

The current scene appears wide open with some reasserting the boundaries of evangelicalism in a reactionary way and others reaffirming a conservative, but not fundamentalist evangelicalism. At the same time there are those at the other end of the spectrum who are pushing the boundaries with equal vigour beyond traditional views of God, scripture, hell and the atonement, while still wanting to

62 Published in 1995 by IVP in the USA but significantly by SPCK in the UK.

63 Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

64 Downers Grove: IVP, 2005.

claim to be evangelicals. A recent publication, by Gregory MacDonald, for example, broadens the recent discussion of hell, annihilation and judgement to make a case for evangelical universalism.⁶⁵

The second generation leaves a home culture with a great deal of inside knowledge and can branch out having the security of deep roots. The third generation still has an active memory of the road travelled and finds some reassurance and identity through returning to the home culture. Both these generations have the luxury of drawing on deep roots as they venture deeper into academia, the second more than the third. But it is different for the fourth generation for whom the roots are tenuous and mostly only a distant memory, with very little seeming relevance for today. The danger is that many in the fourth generation cease in practice to be evangelical and simply merge with the mainstream, not because the mainstream has been converted, but because they have no appreciation of what their forebears stood for and what battles they thought were worth fighting. What the second generation may have taken for granted, unless clearly re-articulated by the third generation, is forgotten altogether by the fourth. The current generation of evangelical scholars face the peril of forgetting their distinctiveness and of becoming indistinguishable from others who merely share their orthodoxy.

Conclusion

In his study of evangelicalism, Christian Smith has emphasised the importance for evangelicalism of maintaining just the right distance between itself and the wider culture, if it is to thrive.⁶⁶ If the distance is too great, as in Fundamentalism, there is no meaningful communication between the religious minority and the main culture. It is either simply ridiculed or worst still ignored. If the distance is too little, as in liberalism, the religious minority have nothing distinctive to offer and so no one looks to them to have anything significant to say. They have become too comfortable in the host culture and can no longer critique it. There needs to be a right distance as well as a right engagement; a right engagement but a necessary distance as well. This is what leads evangelicalism to be both 'embattled and thriving' at the same time. The opposition and vitality belong together. It is difficult to have the one without the other. It is being on the edge, in the best sense of that phrase, which gives evangelicalism its vitality.

The challenge for the fourth generation is to maintain the right distance and the right engagement. Some show signs of wanting to create too big a distance with the result that the gains of the last fifty years may be lost and we find ourselves back in the situation of evangelical theology as it was early in the Twentieth Century. But the opposite danger, that danger of not keeping sufficient distance, is the greater one.

65 Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006).

66 Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998) *passim*.

The Hansen/Herberg thesis generally fits the experience of postwar evangelical scholarship. The new kids on the block are now well integrated into the academic world. They are no longer the newest immigrants. But their integration may have come at a cost, the cost of their losing their distinctive identity and of assimilating to the wider culture of academia uncritically, in a desire to be accepted. Perhaps it is foolish to think that the followers of Christ crucified could ever comfortably fit institutions where the presuppositions are determined by the philosophers of this age and which are so enmeshed in the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:20). History gives us plenty of warnings about the wide path being strewn with danger. As George Rawlyck stated, when commenting on the academic success of evangelical institutions in Canada, such progress 'may, as Finke and Stark, have contended, have at its heart *a deadly virus* – the powerful tendency to adjust the sacred to meet the demands of world success.'⁶⁷ What value is there in gaining the whole academic world, but losing one's soul?

Every generation of evangelical scholars, like every generation of evangelical disciples, have to work out anew what it means to be 'in, but not of' the host culture. And that is never an easy task. It is a special challenge that faces the fourth generation of postwar evangelical scholars since they are no longer the suspect immigrants on the margins of the academic world.

Abstract

This paper uses the Hansen/Herberg thesis of immigration as a model of the changing relationship between three generations of postwar evangelical theologians and the academy. The process has been one of gradual, but uneven, assimilation, as proposed by the Hansen/Herberg thesis, and raises questions about the challenge faced by the fourth generation. For this generation the historical roots of postwar evangelical scholarship are more distant, causing them to face the challenge of what distinguishes evangelical scholarship from other contemporary biblical or theological scholarship more acutely than for their predecessors.

67 George Rawlyck, *Is Jesus your Personal Saviour?: In search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 47. Italics mine.