

Appendix

This appendix complements Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

Issue 1: How Should Evangelicals “Do” Theology? The Theological Method Debate

A central debate among evangelical theologians concerns the question of theological method. In other words, how should we “do” theology?

All evangelical Christians believe the Bible is God-inspired revelation. Thus, evangelicals agree that Scripture must form the foundation for theological thought. But Scripture is not the only factor to consider when doing theology. Many evangelicals have adopted the Wesleyan quadrilateral (named after the eighteenth-century British revivalist and founder of Methodism, John Wesley) as a way to explain the various sources of theology and how they relate to each other. The quadrilateral, as the name suggests, presents theology as rooted in four sources: Scripture, church tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is viewed as the foundation of theology, with each of the other three aspects helping to clarify and interpret Scripture in a faithful manner for the purpose of doing theology.

The debate arises when the question is asked, How are we to balance the four aspects of the quadrilateral, and to what degree do tradition, reason, and experience shape and determine our understanding of the Bible? Although there is a spectrum of views on the question of evangelical theological method, the two basic models can be described as follows.

According to the traditional evangelical model, the task of theology is to systematize and articulate the doctrinal truths found in the Bible. The emphasis is on the Bible as the unchanging, transcultural revelation of God. In the words of Carl F. H. Henry, “Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included. . . . The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.”¹ This view of the theological task is rooted in an understanding of the Bible known as propositionalism. For those who hold to a propositionalist understanding, the Bible is seen primarily as containing and offering information about God. In Henry’s words, “Scriptures contain a body of divinely given information actually expressed or capable of being expressed in propositions.”²

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In contrast to the traditional view is the postfoundationalist evangelical model of theological method. Like other expressions of the postmodern perspective, the postfoundationalist approach emphasizes the culturally conditioned nature of all human intellectual enterprises—theology included. Simply put, the postfoundationalist method, while still recognizing the Bible as the primary theological norm, places greater emphasis on the way human reason and experience structure and shape any given theology. Stanley Grenz expresses this conviction when he writes that “the categories we employ in our theology are by necessity culturally and historically conditioned, and as theologians each of us is both ‘a child of the times’ and a communicator to those times.”³

While the fundamental Christian faith-commitment does not change, the conceptualization and articulation of this faith-commitment does change over time and across cultures. Thus, there is no expectation of ever arriving at a single evangelical “theology”; there will always be a number of diverse evangelical “theologies.” This is true both because God, the primary object of theology, is beyond any human system of thought, and because every human theological system will always be conditioned by its cultural context.

From a postfoundationalist perspective, the Bible is the inspired *narrative* of the saving acts and message of God. This means that the central locus of revelation is the narrative itself, not a set of propositions that can be distilled from and expressed outside of that narrative. The truths of God and his character are expressed in the unchanging story of Christian faith. A systematic theology, then, being necessarily and dramatically shaped by the components of human reason and experience, is always a culturally conditioned conceptualization and articulation of the implications of the unchanging biblical narrative for a particular people at a particular time and place.

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Issue 2: The Psychological and Social Models of the Trinity

The Bible teaches that there is only one God. At the same time, it teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God. For this reason the church has always affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that God has one substance (*ousia*) but eternally and fully exists as three distinct Persons (*hypostases personae*).

The question left unanswered is how we are to understand the relationship between the substantial unity and personal plurality within the Godhead. Throughout church history, two distinct models have been proposed.

The first model goes back to the second-century apologists and was made famous by Augustine. It is usually called the psychological model of the Trinity, for it likens the unity and diversity of the Godhead to the unity and diversity of the human self. According to Augustine, the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is like the unity of the mind (thoughts), heart (emotions), and volition (will) of a person. A different version was put forth by Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century. He argued that as the human psyche consists of a self, a self-image, and a relationship between the self and the self-image, so the Godhead consists of a self (Father), a perfect self-image (Son), and a perfect loving relationship (Spirit) between the self and the self-image.

While many have found the psychological model helpful, others have objected to it on the grounds that it is not faithful to the biblical data. The Bible depicts the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct Persons, they argue, not three distinct aspects of one Person. Hence, they have proposed that we should think of the unity of the Trinity more like the unity of mind, heart, and will of three people. This has been labeled the social model of the Trinity.

To some defenders of the psychological model, the social model borders on tri-theism (the belief in three separate gods). To some defenders of the social model, the psychological model borders on modalism (reducing the three Persons to modes of one person). Still others argue that since models are only models, not exact replicas of reality, we may affirm both models as valid in capturing distinct perspectives on a God whose full reality defies exhaustive description.

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Issue 3: Was Noah's Flood Global or Local?

Though many regard the biblical story of a great flood in the days of Noah to be an ancient legend, evangelical Christians affirm it as historical fact because Scripture presents it as such. However, a debate has arisen during the last two hundred years as to whether the flood was global or local. Those who defend the traditional position that the flood was global argue that the language used in the Genesis narrative requires this interpretation. For example, the narrative says, "All the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered" with water (Gen. 7:19). When one considers the height of the Himalayas or Mount Everest, it is clear that the flood was global. The Bible even names the mountain the ark came to rest on (Mount Ararat), and it alone is high enough to require a global flood (Gen. 8:4).

Defenders of the traditional view also point out that if the flood were only local, it would have been unnecessary for Noah to build a gigantic ark and house all species of animals for a year (Gen. 7:2–4). Not only this, but Scripture says the flood was intended to destroy all humanity. A local flood could not have accomplished this (Gen. 6:7, 13). Besides, the New Testament cites the flood episode as an example of the judgment *upon the whole earth* that is yet to come (2 Peter 2:5).

Not all are convinced by these arguments, however. Some evangelicals argue that the language of the flood narrative may be interpreted phenomenologi-

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cally (in terms of appearance) and hyperbolically (exaggeration for emphasis) rather than literally. In this case, the “high mountains” (7:19) that were covered by the flood may be understood as the hills in Noah’s region—probably the low-lying hills of Shinar or Babylon (cf. 11:2)—not as the mile-high mountains of the Himalayas. Moreover, there is no evidence that the mountain presently named Mount Ararat is the mountain referred to in Genesis, since this mountain received its name in recent times. Defenders of a local flood also argue that the purpose for the ark need not have been that there was no other way to save a remnant of animals or humans. It may have served as a warning for and witness against the generation that was to undergo judgment.

The main driving force behind the local flood theory, however, are the problems some find with the global flood theory. Local flood defenders customarily point to six major problems with the idea of a global flood. (1) Water high enough to cover the Himalayas and Mount Everest would have nowhere to run off. Yet the Bible describes the flood as abating with wind over several hundred days (Gen. 8:1). (2) A global flood in the recent past (10,000 years or less) would have left easily discernible evidence. Local flood defenders argue that while there is indisputable evidence for a mass local flood in the Mesopotamian region, there is no evidence for a global flood. (3) The mingling of freshwater and salt water produced by a global flood would have killed all freshwater life. Yet freshwater life, including freshwater fish, still exists. (4) A blanket of water thick enough to cover all mountains would have destroyed dry land vegetation. Where did the dove find a “freshly plucked olive leaf” (8:11)? (5) There is no way a pair of every species of animal could have traveled around the globe to the ark. (6) As large as the ark was, there is no way that tens of thousands of different species of animals could have fit on it—along with food sufficient to feed them (Gen. 6:21). Nor could this variety of animals have survived in closed quarters without sunlight for a year, according to local flood advocates.

Defenders of the traditional view argue that the reinterpretation of the Genesis narrative required by local flood theorists is unnatural. They also insist that the six objections to the traditional view are answerable, especially when one allows for the reality of a miracle-working God. It may in fact be, for example, that there is no way to account for the disappearance of all the water that once blanketed the earth on a strictly natural basis, but this would be a small feat for the omnipotent Creator to accomplish. Something similar may be said of the transportation of the animals to the ark and their survival on the ark.

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Issue 4: Must Wives Submit to Their Husbands?

In the New Testament, Paul writes:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

EPHESIANS 5:22–24

Along similar lines, Peter writes:

Wives . . . accept the authority of your husbands. . . . It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

1 PETER 3:1, 5–6

Many evangelicals (labeled complementarians) maintain that these words are as applicable today as they were in the first century. Male headship is part of God's timeless design for creation (Gen. 2:21–24; 3:16; Eph. 5:22). Much of the trouble modern families are experiencing, they argue, is due to the confusion that now exists concerning this very issue.

This, of course, does not mean that husbands are allowed to tyrannize their wives. On the contrary, Scripture commands that they lead with a gentle, self-sacrificial spirit. Indeed, though they have authority over their wives, as Christ does over the church, husbands must be willing to lay down their lives for their wives, as Christ did for the church (Eph. 5:25–28). Male headship without male sacrifice is no closer to God's ideal than no headship at all.

Other evangelicals (labeled egalitarians) disagree with this view, however. In their view, these passages represent God working within a non-ideal culture to change it from the inside out. The instruction of wives to submit to their husbands is thus on the same level as Paul's instruction to Philemon to take back his slave Onesimus (Philem. 12–16). Though God's desire was to do away with slavery, in this culture, at this time, the most he could do was "Christianize" it, as it were. Hence, God transformed the master-slave relationship by having Paul command the one who holds the power (Philemon) to use it in a Christlike way. In the same way, adherents of this view argue, God's desire was to do away

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with gender-based authority and replace it with gift-based authority. But in this culture, at this time, the most he could do was “Christianize” the gender-based authority. Hence, Paul tells the one in power (the husband) to use his power in a Christlike way. He is to subject himself to his wife (Eph. 5:21) and be willing to give himself sacrificially for his wife, even as Christ did for the church (5:25–28). As with all relationships among believers, husbands and wives should not be concerned with who is boss but should rather seek to serve and defer to one another (Luke 22:24–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

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Issue 5: Christians and Politics: Three Views

Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson were leaders in the Moral Majority, a conservative evangelical social and political movement in the 1980s that attempted to rally “moral” people to change public policy on a number of issues. The

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movement died out in the 1990s. In 1999, Thomas and Dobson wrote a book entitled *Blinded by Might* in which they declare that they now believe Christians should not try to change culture primarily by influencing the political system. They should rather rely on the power of the gospel to change lives, one at a time. Christianity becomes corrupted, they argue, when it becomes overly involved in the politics of the world.

How involved should Christians be in secular politics? Throughout history, Christians have embraced a number of perspectives on this issue. These perspectives can be broken down into three groups.

First, some Christians believe that one of the church's jobs is to transform and ultimately control politics. This view has often been labeled the transformational model and has been the dominant model among Calvinists. It was also popular with most nineteenth-century revivalists (e.g., Charles Finney, Dwight Moody) and the church throughout the Middle Ages. Since God is Lord of everything, Christians should seek to manifest this lordship in everything, including politics. They should therefore use any righteous means possible to sanctify the political system and seek to pass laws that reflect God's will for people as revealed in Scripture.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are Christians who believe that Christians should not involve themselves at all in secular politics or at least should be wary of doing so. This oppositional model has been the traditional view among anabaptists and is embraced by a number of noteworthy evangelical leaders today, including Cal Thomas. Christ said his kingdom was not of this world, and he never involved himself in the political debates of his day (John 18:36). Christians are called to be loyal to Christ's kingdom alone and to see themselves as citizens and ambassadors of the kingdom of God living in a "foreign" land (e.g., Phil. 3:20). This present world, including its political systems, is under the control of Satan. Therefore, trying to conform it to God's will is futile and even dangerous. The power of the gospel is found in evangelism and prayer, not in influencing the political process.

In between these two positions is the two-kingdoms model of church and state. This has been the dominant view of Lutherans and arguably the dominant view among American Christians. Unlike the oppositional model, this model holds that "secular" politics are under God's authority. Unlike the transformational model, however, it does not hold that the politics of the world should be or can be transformed into a Christian system. Rather, secular government and the church are two ways that God works in the world, and they accomplish different purposes. The purpose of secular government is to keep sin in check and rule over sinners by force. The purpose of the church is to transform sinners into saints who do not need to be ruled by law, and to do so by the power of the gospel and prayer. Christians may or may not get involved in government, depending on their calling from God. But they should not think that any alterations they make in government, however laudable, will

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further the purpose of transforming lives the way God wants to transform them.

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Issue 6: What Happens to Babies Who Die?

The Bible does not directly address the issue of what happens to babies who die before being able to make a decision for or against Christ. People have thus had to arrive at conclusions about this matter on the basis of other beliefs they hold to be true.

The majority of evangelicals today assume that all who die before “the age of accountability” automatically go to heaven. (The same holds true for severely mentally incapacitated adults, though historically this topic has rarely been addressed). What drives this view is the conviction that babies are not guilty of any explicit sin, and therefore, it would be unjust for God not to save them. The view is so self-evident to some today that they are surprised to learn that few church spokespersons throughout history have shared this assumption.

The prevailing opinion from Augustine through the medieval period was that all babies who had received Christian baptism went to heaven, but all others went to hell. This view was driven by a particular understanding of inherited original sin and the belief that baptism washed away this sin. The difficulty of accepting this conclusion led to the qualification that the level of hell babies go to (limbo) was devoid of pain. Some evangelicals within liturgical traditions hold a form of this belief.

Some Christians in the late Middle Ages and Reformation period, focusing on the importance of family covenants in Scripture, maintained that the fate

of babies was directly connected to the faith or unbelief of their parents. This view is embraced by some evangelicals today.

Yet another view has traditionally been espoused by Reformed theologians. Rooted in a particular understanding of divine election, this view maintains that the fate of babies is decided in the same way as the fate of adults. As spelled out in the Westminster Confession of Faith, elect babies are predestined to salvation; nonelect babies are not. Often this view is combined with the above mentioned covenantal theology, assuring Christian parents that their deceased babies are indeed elect.

Finally, evangelicals who are convinced that love must be freely chosen suggest that perhaps babies who die are somehow allowed to mature in the after-life, at which point they, like the rest of us, decide for themselves whether they want to submit to Christ.

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Issue 7: The Debate over the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Evangelicals believe that all believers are *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, but there is debate over whether all believers are *baptized* in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist prophesied that while he baptized with water, the one who would come after him (Jesus) would "baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11). Jesus reminded his disciples of this prophecy before he ascended, telling them to wait for this baptism in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4–8). This occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). The question is, Do all believers now receive this Spirit baptism when they believe, or should believers seek to be baptized in the Spirit as an experience subsequent to salvation?

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The classic Protestant position, embraced by a majority of evangelicals, is that people are baptized with the Spirit when they believe. This position argues that the New Testament does not distinguish between the act of receiving the Holy Spirit and being baptized in the Spirit. All believers are “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,” which is “the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption” (Eph. 1:13–14). All who believe are “baptized into one body” by “one Spirit” and are “made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). If one is not baptized by the Spirit, this view maintains, that person is not part of Christ’s body and does not drink of the Spirit. Either a person has the Holy Spirit, in which case he or she is saved, or a person does not have the Holy Spirit, in which case “Christ does not belong to [him]” (Rom. 8:9).

This position argues that the equating of Spirit baptism with conversion is found throughout Acts. True, the disciples had to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit for forty days, even though they already believed in Jesus. But this is only because the Holy Spirit had not yet been given (cf. John 7:38–39). Since Pentecost, this position maintains, the Holy Spirit comes immediately when a person believes. On the day of Pentecost, Peter promised his audience that all who would repent and be baptized would receive what they had just witnessed the disciples receive: They would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). When Cornelius and his household heard the gospel for the first time, they believed and “the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Similarly, when the disciples of John the Baptist first heard Paul preach the gospel, “the Holy Spirit came upon them” (Acts 19:6). The fact that there is no interval in these episodes between believing and receiving the Holy Spirit, and the fact that the Holy Spirit falls on everyone at the same time (none were left out who were not yet “ready” for the full baptism) demonstrate that being baptized in the Spirit is not an experience subsequent to salvation.

The only time there is an apparent interval between people believing and receiving the Spirit occurs when Philip preaches to the Samaritans in Acts 8. Luke says that many Samaritans “believed Philip,” including the sorcerer Simon (8:11–13). Yet they did not receive the Holy Spirit until John and Peter came from Jerusalem and prayed over them (8:17).

According to adherents of the classic Protestant position, the Acts 8 episode should not be taken as normative for all believers. The interval took place because God wanted to demonstrate that the Samaritan mission had apostolic authority behind it. Hence, God wanted the Spirit to come as Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans (8:17). Others argue that the interval took place because there was something defective about the Samaritans’ faith. It is significant, they argue, that Luke says the Samaritans “believed Philip,” not that they believed in Jesus (8:12). It is also significant that Luke says the Samaritans believed Philip immediately, after noting that they previously were amazed at Simon’s magic, to the point of calling him “the power of God that is called Great” (8:9–10). This suggests that the Samaritans simply transferred their carnal allegiance from Simon to Philip. Most importantly, it is significant that

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Luke says Simon himself also “believed” (8:13), while also recording that Simon wanted to buy the apostles’ power to dispense the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (8:18–19). Peter replied to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money!” (8:20). As in the case of the other Samaritans, Simon’s belief was not a genuine faith in Christ but an external infatuation with power. In any event, the apparent interval between belief and Spirit baptism in this narrative should not be taken as normative for Christians, according to the classic Protestant position.

Other evangelicals disagree, however, and maintain that the New Testament distinguishes between receiving the Holy Spirit and being baptized in the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit occurs at some point subsequent to salvation and is for the purpose of empowering believers for ministry. Hence, Jesus told his disciples that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit” came upon them and that they would be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The disciples already believed in Jesus and thus already had the Holy Spirit present in their lives, for no one can authentically confess Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). But they were not yet empowered for ministry.

This position argues that the distinction is found throughout Acts as well as in some of Paul’s epistles. For example, in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter commands his audience to “repent, and be baptized” and then “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The gift is promised *after* repentance and obedience. In Acts 6, the apostles tell the Christians in Jerusalem to find “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” to help with some of the tasks of ministry (6:3). According to advocates of this position, this implies a distinction between those who are “full of the Spirit” and others who are not. The distinction is further shown in Paul’s dialogue with the disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus. Before he knew that these disciples had not received the full gospel, Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” (Acts 19:2). The question does not make sense, defenders of this position argue, if all who believe automatically receive the full empowering of the Holy Spirit. Paul later wrote to the church at Ephesus, encouraging them not to “get drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). How could Paul command this if all believers are automatically filled with the Spirit?

The distinctiveness of Spirit baptism is also clearly evidenced in Acts 8, according to advocates of this position. They argue that the attempts to explain away the interval between faith and Holy Spirit baptism in this passage are forced. More to the point, advocates of the view that Spirit baptism is subsequent to salvation ask, How could Philip or the apostles have considered the possibility that the Samaritans had not been filled with the Spirit if being filled with the Spirit is synonymous with conversion?

For all these reasons, advocates of the view that Holy Spirit baptism is subsequent to salvation encourage all believers to seek to be filled with or baptized

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with the Holy Spirit. Only when this occurs will they be fully empowered to carry out the work of the kingdom.

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Issue 8: Is Speaking in Tongues the Initial Evidence of Receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Some Christians (called cessationists) believe that all the charismatic gifts ceased when the New Testament was completed and disseminated to all Christian churches (namely, in the second and third centuries). Other Christians (called continuationists) believe that the charismatic gifts are still available today. There is much debate among continuationists regarding the role of speaking in tongues, however. Pentecostals have traditionally taught that speaking in tongues is evidence that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit. If a person has not spoken in tongues, he or she cannot claim to be filled with or baptized in the Spirit. This is usually labeled the initial evidence doctrine. Most non-Pentecostal continuationists deny this doctrine, stating that as with the other charismatic gifts, some people may be given the gift of speaking in tongues and others not. It is not a special indication that a person has been filled with or baptized in the Spirit.

Those who defend the classic Pentecostal position do so primarily on the basis of a pattern they discern in Acts. They note that when the disciples were first baptized in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, "all of them . . . began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:4). Similarly, when the Gentiles were initially filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter and the other Jewish Christians recognized it, "for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (Acts 10:46). And when the disciples of John the Baptist first received this blessing from God after Paul preached to them and prayed with them, they all "spoke in tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:6).

The only other explicit account in Acts of an initial in-filling of the Spirit concerns Samaritan believers who were prayed over by Peter and John. Speak-

ing in tongues is not mentioned, but something remarkable obviously happened, for “Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands,” and he foolishly “offered them money” to get this ability (Acts 8:18). What he saw could not have been joy or even miracles, for Simon had himself already witnessed this among the Samaritan believers (8:6, 13). Defenders of the initial evidence doctrine argue that it is reasonable to assume that what Simon saw was Pentecost repeated: The Samaritans must have spoken in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostles’ hands.

On the basis of these four accounts, defenders of the initial evidence doctrine say that believers should expect the same initial evidence as that witnessed by the earliest disciples. All should seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and they will know they are filled when they speak in tongues.

Most evangelicals reject this line of argumentation on a number of grounds. First and foremost, detractors of the initial evidence doctrine argue that it is illegitimate hermeneutics to base a doctrine on historical narrative. As a historian, Luke reported what happened; he did not teach what should always happen. His narrative is descriptive, not prescriptive. If we took everything Luke recorded as a prescription for how the church is always supposed to believe and behave, we would have to insist that all congregations be communistic (Acts 2:44–45) and that prayer clothes be sent out to heal people (Acts 19:11–12).

Defenders of the initial evidence doctrine reply that in certain cases historical precedent can form the foundation for a doctrine. For example, Christian theology of communion is rooted more in the example given in the Gospels than in any explicit New Testament teaching.

Second, non-Pentecostal evangelicals believe that the Bible provides a good amount of explicit teaching about the evidence of being filled with the Spirit, and none of it centers on speaking in tongues. As people are filled with the Holy Spirit, they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, especially love (Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 13; Rom. 5:5). Their lives are characterized by a zeal for the Lord, a boldness to proclaim truth, and holiness (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:2–6; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; Gal. 5:16–18). If any charismatic phenomenon is to be associated with being filled with the Spirit, it is prophecy—to speak the word of the Lord with a powerful anointing—and revelatory visions, for Peter *taught* that these would follow the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17–18). It is worth noting that even based on the New Testament, it does not seem that speaking in tongues requires a unique spiritual maturity or presence. The Corinthians spoke in tongues a great deal, but Paul chastises them for being spiritual babies (1 Cor. 3:1–4).

Defenders of the initial evidence doctrine reply that things such as love, holiness, and boldness are indeed evidence of the Spirit’s presence in a believer’s life, but they are not to be confused with the distinct initial evidence of the baptism or in-filling of the Holy Spirit that Luke talks about in Acts.

Third, to those who deny the initial evidence doctrine, it seems clear from Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians that he did not assume that all believers spoke

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in tongues at some point. Paul asks, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? . . . Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?” (1 Cor. 12:29–30). The answer, of course, is no. Yet Paul encourages all believers continually to seek to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). This clearly demonstrates that Paul did not associate tongues with being filled with the Spirit.

Defenders of the initial evidence doctrine reply that Paul is talking about the use of charismatic gifts here, not the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All who are filled with the Spirit will evidence this by speaking in tongues, though they may not have the gift of speaking in tongues after this time.

Finally, on a more practical note, those who oppose the initial evidence doctrine argue that it sets up a two-class Christianity between those who have spoken in tongues and those who have not. The New Testament knows of no such classification. Those in Pentecostal circles who have not spoken in tongues are encouraged to seek this initial evidence. Yet the New Testament contains no accounts of believers seeking the experience of speaking in tongues. Even in the episodes in Acts that Pentecostals cite in support of their position, the act of speaking in tongues just happens. No one is looking for it.

Defenders of the initial evidence doctrine reply that the New Testament recognizes that not all believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. For example, the apostles told the Jerusalem Christians to find “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This clearly implies that not everyone was full of the Spirit. So, too, the fact that the apostles recognized that the Holy Spirit “had not yet come upon any of [the Samaritan believers]”—which is why they went down to pray with them (Acts 8:16–17)—presupposes that not all believers are baptized with the Spirit and that others can recognize this. This distinction results in a two-class Christianity only when Christians violate the biblical prohibition of judging one another (Matt. 7:1; Rom. 14:4).

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Issue 9: Can a Christian Be Demonized?

Because the Bible teaches that spirits exist—both good and evil, angelic and demonic—evangelical Christians across the board acknowledge the reality of Satan and demons (e.g., Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 11:14–26; Eph. 6:10–18). However, a number of issues connected to the demonic—including the nature of spiritual warfare, methods of deliverance, the question of territorial spirits and spiritual mapping, and the degree to which demons can influence Christians—have caused vigorous debate within evangelicalism. All parties agree that every human being, even the most mature Christian, is subject to temptations from the enemy—just as Jesus was (Matt. 4:1–11). As a result, Jesus taught his followers to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13 NIV). But when it comes to the question of the degree to which the demonic can influence a Christian, there is significant disagreement.

On the one hand, some believe that while it is possible for non-Christians to be demon possessed, Christians never have to fear this condition. Biblical support for this view comes from those passages that proclaim the defeat of Satan and the victory of Christians through Jesus Christ (e.g., John 12:31; Col. 2:13–15; 2 Thess. 3:3; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 5:18). Colossians 1:13 assures believers that God “has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.” If we are delivered from Satan’s kingdom, we certainly cannot be possessed by the evil spirits of that kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 10:21, the apostle Paul emphasizes that a person is either in one kingdom or the other: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”

Finally, 1 John 4:4 tells us that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” Christians have been redeemed from the power of the evil one and are now “possessed” by the Holy Spirit of God. How could they be owned by God and yet at the same time be “possessed” by a demon? Evil cannot dwell in the presence of God. Since we know that a Christian is one in whom the presence of God dwells by the Holy Spirit, we can be assured that no demon would be able to inhabit the body of a believer at the same time. Each believer’s body is a temple of God, and God does not share his temple with demons (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Thus, while acknowledging that believers can be tempted, harassed, and even oppressed at times by demons, this view states that no true Christian can be indwelt by a demon such that he or she would need spiritual deliverance (exorcism).

On the other hand, some evangelicals claim that Christians can have a demonic presence in their lives to such a degree that deliverance ministry is required. This view typically clarifies its position by pointing out that the Greek word usually translated “demon possessed” in the New Testament (*daimonizomai*) is actually best translated “demonized”—which simply means to be under the influence of a demon. Thus, there is no connotation of possession or ownership. Demonized Christians are saved and redeemed members of

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Christ's body. However, either through evil done to them or through their own choices, a doorway has been opened to the demonic.

For scriptural support, adherents of this view point to passages that indicate the possibility of demonic influence and attack in the lives of individual Christians and the church in general (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 4:26–27; 6:10–12; 1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Peter 5:6–8). Specific biblical examples of the demonization of believers include King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14–23), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–3), the Corinthian believer involved in an incestuous relationship (1 Cor. 5:1–13), and Judas Iscariot (John 13:27). Perhaps the strongest case is that of the woman in Luke 13:11–16. This woman had been ill for eighteen years with an ailment caused by a demon. Jesus prayed for her, and she was healed. In verse 16, Jesus explains the situation: “And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage?” By referring to her as a “daughter of Abraham,” Jesus indicates her authentic faith—she is a true believer. And yet she was afflicted with a demon until Jesus prayed for her healing and deliverance. Those who hold to this view point out that many of the great saints in church history, including Martin Luther, John Wesley, Jesse Penn-Lewis, V. Raymond Edman, and Chuck Swindoll, acknowledged that Christians could be demonized and in need of deliverance prayer.

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Issue 10: The Debate over the Book of Revelation

Few biblical topics have captured the imagination of contemporary evangelicals like the Book of Revelation. The recent unprecedented success of the *Left Behind* series is evidence of this popular fascination. Many evangelicals do not realize that the futuristic interpretation of Revelation advocated in this popular novel series is only one of several interpretations evangelicals espouse. This section looks at the three major evangelical options as well as some alternative perspectives.

The Preterist View

The term *preterist* comes from the Latin word *praeteritus*, which means “gone by.” The preterist interpretation of Revelation holds that the events spoken of in this book were all specifically fulfilled in the first century. This view has precedent in the early church, but it did not become widespread until the nineteenth century. With the advent of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, it became the dominant interpretation among New Testament scholars, though it has been less popular among evangelical scholars.

According to preterism, Revelation is a heavily symbolic, apocalyptic, and prophetic book that was written primarily to warn readers of impending persecution, to encourage them to persevere in the face of suffering, and to reassure them that God is in control and will overcome evil in the end. Preterists argue that most of the symbolic events in this book can be correlated with first-century figures and events. For example, “the beast” refers to Nero, whose “number” is 666 (the numerical value of “Nero Caesar” in Hebrew [*NRWN QSR*]). Similarly, the forty-two months of his horrifying reign (13:5) happen to be the exact duration of the Roman siege on Jerusalem beginning in A.D. 66.

In defense of their position, preterists contend that we must not abandon sound hermeneutical principles when we consider Revelation. As with every book in the Bible, we must attempt to read Revelation from the perspective of the first-century Christians to whom it was originally written. Revelation was written to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4) about matters that “must soon take place” (1:1) because “the time is near” (1:3, cf. 22:6, 10). Throughout the book, there is an urgency for the readers to respond quickly (e.g., 2:16; 3:10–11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20). According to preterists, these statements require that we look for fulfillments in the lifetime of the original audience. The spiritual themes of Revelation are timeless, but the specific events of which this book speaks were all fulfilled in the first century.

The Idealist View

Many Christians throughout history held to the idealist (sometimes called the spiritualist) interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and many evangelicals today continue to support this view. What is most distinctive about the idealist interpretation is that it denies that the events and figures recorded in this book have a direct correlation either with events and figures in the past (as the preterist believes) or the future (as the futurist believes). To search for such specific fulfillments, they argue, is to fundamentally misunderstand the apocalyptic genre of this book. Revelation should be read as a heavily symbolic dramatization of the ongoing battle between God and evil.

According to the idealist view, Revelation is a spiritual paradigmatic work that summons Christians to faithful living in the face of persecution and reassures believers that, however dire their circumstances, God will win in the end and their perseverance will be rewarded. Hence, the multitude of symbols employed

in this book, most of which are drawn directly from the Old Testament, are in various ways “fulfilled” whenever Christians find themselves in spiritual conflict.

Idealists defend their interpretation on a number of fronts. Most emphasize that the nature of the apocalyptic genre does not require and may actually rule out locating specific correlations with the symbols it employs. They frequently point out that attempts to find such fulfillments in the past, and even more so in the future, are guesses at best. They often argue that absurdity results from attempts to interpret Revelation literally (e.g., Rev. 6:13; 8:12; 12:4). Perhaps most importantly, they emphasize that the spiritual application of this book’s message does not hinge on and may even be compromised by trying to locate specific fulfillments for the dramatizations it presents.

The Futurist View

By far, the view that is most popular among the evangelical masses today is the futurist view (sometimes called the dispensational view). According to this view, almost all of Revelation (chaps. 4–22) records events that will take place at the end of time. While many early church fathers believed segments of Revelation concerned the end of history, the understanding that the bulk of this book concerns the end of history is almost without precedent until the nineteenth century.

A key verse for the futurist interpretation is 1:19, in which the Lord tells John, “Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.” According to most futurists, “what you have seen” refers to the vision recorded in chapter 1. “What is” refers to the seven letters written to the seven churches in Asia minor in his day, recorded in chapters 2 and 3. “What is to take place after this” refers to all the end-times events recorded throughout the rest of the book (chaps. 4–22). While there is disagreement about this matter, the fact that the church is not mentioned in these chapters leads many futurists to conclude that these events will occur after the rapture, when the church is literally taken out of the world (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Futurists usually grant that there are apocalyptic elements in Revelation that cannot be interpreted literally, but they insist that Revelation is first and foremost a prophecy (1:3). The things that will take place are literal events that have yet to be fulfilled. Indeed, futurists argue that many of the events prophetically recorded in this book are such that they could not have taken place before modern times (e.g., the reference to an army numbering two hundred million in 9:16).

Alternative Interpretations

These three options do not exhaust the possible interpretations of Revelation. In the late Middle Ages, for example, a number of leaders entertained what is sometimes called a historicist interpretation of Revelation. According to this view, Revelation records the gradual unfolding of God’s plan for history up to the present. The majority of Protestant Reformers held to a version

of this view. They viewed Revelation as a prophetic survey of church history and used this interpretation to argue that the pope of their day was the Antichrist. While one finds occasional popular commentaries yet espousing some version of this approach, it has fallen far out of favor with evangelicals.

Some contemporary scholars combine preterist and idealist interpretations. The symbolic dramatizations of Revelation may have first-century correlations, but they are written with paradigmatic significance. For example, Nero may in fact have been the specific Antichrist referred to in Revelation 13:8, but the reference to him is cosmic in significance, covering all Antichrist movements that resist God's purposes in the world. Other scholars have sought to combine elements of all three views. They say that the dramatic events of Revelation have been fulfilled, are continuing to be fulfilled, and will at the end of time be climatically fulfilled as the Lord concludes history and ushers in his reign as king.

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Issue 11: Has Jesus Already Returned? The Preterist Debate

Almost all Christians throughout history have believed that the Lord is coming back some time in the future to finish the work of building his kingdom.

They have disagreed about the details of this return but not about the fact of the return. Recently, however, a small group of evangelicals has argued that all the teachings and prophecies about the Lord's return were fulfilled in the first century. They are usually labeled preterists. However, they do not merely hold to a preterist interpretation of the Book of Revelation, a view shared by a number of evangelicals. (See "The Debate over the Book of Revelation.") These Christians believe that *everything* the New Testament has to say about the end-times—including Jesus' return, the resurrection of the dead, and God's ultimate victory over Satan—was fulfilled in the first century.

Three fundamental convictions drive the preterist perspective. First, preterists are impressed by the repeated statements in the New Testament that "the end is near" (e.g., 1 Peter 4:7). First-century disciples seemed to believe that Jesus would return and that all the end-times predictions they had been given would come to pass in their lifetime. Indeed, Jesus explicitly taught that "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place" (Matt. 24:34)—referring, it seems, to all the apocalyptic events he spoke of in his Olivet discourse (Matt. 24:1–33). If it is impossible either for Jesus or his inspired disciples to err, preterists argue, then we must look to the fulfillment of the end-times in the lifetime of the disciples.

Second, preterists argue that the apocalyptic imagery used throughout the Bible to describe the end-times is figurative. None of it should be taken literally. For example, language about cosmic disturbances (e.g., earthquakes, sun darkening, etc.) and about the Son coming in "the clouds of glory" must be interpreted as typical biblical symbolic depictions of judgment (e.g., Matt. 24:29–31; cf. Isa. 13:6–13; 34:2–15; Ezek. 32:1–10; Micah 1:3–5). The non-literal nature of these apocalyptic images is clearly seen in the simple fact that Peter understood them to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when God poured out his Spirit "upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17–21)!

Third, preterists believe that all end-times predictions were ultimately fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was at this point that Israel ceased to be a distinct nation and that Old Testament Judaism came to an end. In their view, the Lord returned at this time, judged Israel, defeated Satan, and established his permanent presence in the world through the church. Therefore, according to preterists, there is no future return of the Lord to look forward to. There are no future battles for him to fight. He has already returned and has already won.

The majority of evangelicals reject the preterist interpretation of the New Testament for a variety of reasons. First, they argue that the New Testament teaches that Jesus will return in a visible, indeed bodily form. For example, after Jesus' bodily ascension, two angels announced to the disciples, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come *in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11, emphasis added). It is difficult to reconcile this teaching with the preterist view that Jesus returned in A.D. 70.

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Second, preterists make too much out of the disciples' belief that Jesus would return in their lifetime. The disciples' zeal, which flowed from their expectation that the Lord could return at any moment, was godly and should be imitated by all believers. This, most evangelicals argue, is the point of these passages. But we do not need to conclude that the disciples were wrong because Jesus has not yet returned. Some in the early church apparently were drawing this very conclusion, for Peter corrected them by reminding them that "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Peter 3:8). We must live as though today were our last day, all the while knowing that the Lord might not bring history to a close for another thousand years (or more).

Third, most evangelicals believe that preterists stretch apocalyptic imagery too far. While most scholars agree that the imagery of cosmic cataclysms is symbolic, this cannot be applied to, say, New Testament talk about people rising from the dead (e.g., John 5:28–29; Rom. 6:5; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:35–52; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). When the New Testament speaks of a future resurrection of the dead, it clearly means what most Jews of the time took it to mean: namely, a literal, bodily resurrection. The preterists' attempt to spiritualize the resurrection is often regarded as one of the weakest points of their theological system.

Finally, the majority of evangelical scholars argue that preterists make too much of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and too little of the ongoing battle with evil that has characterized the world since that time. True, the destruction of Jerusalem and especially the desecration and obliteration of the temple were earth-shattering events. Everything about Judaism changed at that time. Much of the apocalyptic imagery Jesus uses in his Olivet discourse, and perhaps (some would argue) much of the Book of Revelation, is about this monumentally important event. But it requires an enormous stretch of the imagination to suppose that the kingdom of God was established at that time. Though we may concede that there are symbolic elements in the New Testament vision of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1), the fact that evil still reigns with intensity throughout the world suggests that Satan is still "the god of this world" and "the ruler of the power of the air" (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2). The kingdom of God has in principle been established on the earth through the church. Satan was in principle defeated at Calvary. But this victory is clearly not yet perfectly manifested. Hence, the vast majority of evangelicals yet look forward to the time when Christ will unambiguously reign victorious over all his foes.

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Issue 12: When Will Jesus Return? The Rapture Debate

When it comes to the issue of the end-times, most evangelical believers wholeheartedly agree on at least one thing: Jesus Christ is going to return one day! Jesus himself promised his return (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; John 14:3). At Jesus' ascension, two angels proclaimed, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This hope is consistently witnessed to throughout the New Testament (e.g., Acts 3:19–21; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Thess. 4:15–16; Titus 2:13).

It is when we turn to the question of when in the course of end-times events Jesus will return that we find an array of differing perspectives. One central debate, especially among premillennialists, is whether Christ will return before or after the tribulation period. Many believe this future period was prophesied by Jesus when he said:

For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

MATTHEW 24:21–22

The two major views are pre-tribulationism and post-tribulationism. Pre-tribulationists have several core convictions. First, they have a two-stage under-

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standing of Christ's return. They believe that Christ will return to remove (or rapture) his church out of the world before the tribulation. He will then return with his saints to judge the world after the tribulation. In the first stage, Christ will not be seen by the world, though the world will of course notice the miraculous and instantaneous disappearance of every Christian. In the second stage, everyone will behold the Lord returning in glory. Pre-tribulationists find support for their belief in a literal rapture, prior to the tribulation period, in the words of Paul:

For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16–17

Pre-tribulationists emphasize the difference between passages they believe refer to the rapture (e.g., Matt. 24:40) and those that all agree refer to the *final* coming of Christ (Revelation 19). The rapture passages speak of a secret, instantaneous snatching-away of believers—one shall be “taken” and one “left behind”—while other passages speak of an event that everyone will see.

Second, pre-tribulationists point to passages in the Bible that they believe teach that believers will be kept from having to endure the wrath of God. For example, Paul states that Jesus will “[rescue] us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thess. 1:10; see also 1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 3:10). Since the tribulation period is a time when God's wrath will be poured out in judgment on the wicked, they believe the rapture must take place before this time.

Finally, pre-tribulationists highlight the fact that many texts clearly state that Christ's return could happen at any moment and that Christians are not to be caught off guard (e.g., Matt. 24:42–51; 25:1–30; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 4:5; Titus 2:13). But if Christ will not return until after the tribulation period, as post-tribulationists maintain, how could his return be imminent or surprising? If the post-tribulationists are correct, we should not expect Christ to return until after the rather obvious events of Christ's prophecy are fulfilled.

Post-tribulationists deny that there are two stages to Christ's return. He will return once, after a final tribulation period, at which time he will set up his millennial kingdom. Post-tribulationists support their view with several lines of argument.

First, many passages of Scripture tell believers to expect persecution (e.g., Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 1 Thess. 3:3). Jesus told his disciples, “In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33). What is more, post-tribulationists emphasize the fact that Jesus explicitly prayed that his Father would *not* take his church out of the world. He asked that he protect them from the enemy in the midst of a hostile world (John 17:15).

Appendix

Indeed, according to post-tribulationists, Jesus explicitly taught that the church would endure the tribulation period, for he said, “at that time there will be great suffering. . . . And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but *for the sake of the elect* those days will be cut short” (Matt. 24:21–22, emphasis added). The elect are clearly present during the tribulation period.

Second, post-tribulationists argue that the passages cited in support of a pre-tribulation rapture do not teach what the pre-tribulationists suggest. For example, Paul’s teaching that the church will meet “the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) does not mean that Christians will literally ascend into the clouds. The passage rather refers to the common ancient practice of people going outside the gates of their city to welcome home a victorious general with triumphant jubilation. The imagery of the Lord coming in clouds was frequently used to speak of the Lord coming in glory and power (e.g., Ps. 68:4; Jer. 4:13; Dan. 7:13). What is more, if the passage is taken literally, it can hardly refer to an unnoticed coming. Paul says the Lord will descend with “a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet” (1 Thess. 4:16). The images suggest that the return will be loud—like the call of a general returning home.

Finally, passages that speak of one being taken while another is left behind (e.g., Matt. 24:40) do not refer to a secret rapture. If read in context, post-tribulationists argue, the one taken is likened to those who were judged in Noah’s flood, not to one who is rescued from judgment (Matt. 24:38–39). Jesus is speaking about how suddenly people will disappear under persecution during the tribulation period, not how they will be raptured away from persecution before the rapture. Hence, post-tribulationists argue that Christ will return only once, and he will come after the world has gone through a final tribulation period.

Further Reading

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Appendix

Walvood, John F. *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.

Notes

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1976), 215.
2. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 457.
3. Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty-first Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 83.