

The Buses Will Wait

The Emergence and Rise of Neo-Evangelicalism (1940-1970)

Wayne Wager 8/10/2008

On September 9, 1942, 13 men and one woman sat down in the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York City to draft the founding documents of a new organization. It was to be called the National Association of Evangelicals. They were in fact the first of the “new” evangelicals and we now know that the organization they were founding would serve as catalyst for one of the most powerful religious movements in the history of the Christian church.

For me, the history of neo-evangelicalism is a fascinating story. It’s the story of my own spiritual roots. I am a neo-evangelical who was profoundly shaped by the life and ministry of neo-evangelicals. To study this movement is to study the spiritual awakening that completely changed my life.

But there is a second compelling reason for this study. In the words of Gordon Hugenberger, senior minister of Boston’s Park Street Church, evangelicalism is “in the midst of an identity crisis.” Over the last 5 years or so, I have heard mounting criticism of our evangelical tradition. It is said that evangelicalism lacks depth and that evangelicalism lacks the power to genuinely change lives or to change the world in any significant way. It is also said that evangelicalism has been built on a weak historical tradition and therefore lacks legitimacy a descendent of the ancient faith taught by Christ and the Apostles. In the face of these cultural and spiritual challenges, evangelicals themselves are re-examining their foundations. Perhaps a good place to start then, is by understand who we are as evangelical Christians.

Who are we as Evangelicals?

Before we can trace the path of evangelical history, it is important to define what we mean when we use the term “evangelical”. The roots of evangelicalism reach back all the way to the first Great Awakening. In his book *The American Evangelical Story*, Douglas Sweeney shows how the Great Awakening (1730s – 1740s) brought a renewed sense of humility to Protestantism that led many church leaders to a reach across sectarian boundaries. Church leaders both in America and in Europe began to work together in ways they never had before. The renewed respect between denominations resulted in better cooperation and a greater overall witness to the world. The result was a loose but enduring community of similar churches that we have come to describe as “evangelical”.

Evangelicalism has been defined in several different ways, but a few key elements remain central. Evangelicals generally believe in the need for personal conversion, have a high regard for Biblical authority, and place a strong emphasis on the saving power of the death and resurrection

of Christ. The term "evangelical" generally refers to Christians who hold to the belief that Jesus is the Messiah and who take seriously Christ's command to take the gospel message to the whole world. Evangelicalism is orthodox in its basic doctrines of faith, but differs from the early reformation belief in that it emphasizes greater activism, greater freedom of church governance, and more individual spirituality.

The Nineteenth century was clearly an evangelical age. In Britain, William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury and William E. Gladstone held major positions in government, while evangelical churches such as the Baptists (with a great preacher in Charles H. Spurgeon) and the Plymouth Brethren reached many with the gospel. Numerous ministries were founded in Britain in the late 1800s including the YMCA, The Salvation Army and the humanitarian ministries of George Mueller and Thomas Barnardo. The China Inland Mission was founded 1865 by Hudson Taylor, and the Keswick Higher Life movement began 1875.

In America, revivalism became the dominant mindset of evangelical religion. The evangelistic ministries of Charles Finney and D. L. Moody had a profound effect mainly in the cities, while the Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Presbyterians led the way in rural and frontier regions. The overall effect was that evangelicalism formed the nation's values and created a vision of America as God's new chosen people. Evangelical leaders campaigned against slavery and child labor while at the same time lobbying for women's rights and prison reform.

As the twentieth century began, signs of trouble began to emerge. An array of atheistic philosophies that had been proposed in the late 1800s were now making their way in the public discourse. These potent ideas combined with the shocking savagery of the First World War, had a chilling effect on the faith of millions:

"Orthodox Christians seemed unable to cope with the flood of new ideas – German higher criticism, Darwinian evolution, Freudian psychology, Marxist socialism, Nietzschean nihilism, and the naturalism of the new science – all of which undermined confidence in the infallibility of the Bible and the existence of the supernatural. The bloodbath of World War I shattered the optimistic, postmillennial vision of ushering in the kingdom of God as soon as the hold of social evil was broken at home and the Great Commission of carrying the gospel to all parts of the globe was fulfilled. (Pierard, Richard V. 1984, 456-458)

In addition to these challenges, Pierard writes, the world saw the rise of communism in the Soviet Union, Nazism in Germany, and secularism throughout the world. All of these things worked in concert to suppress church attendance and interest in Christianity around the world. It was the beginning of a long period of decline for evangelicalism.

Fundamentalism

As modernist thinking overwhelmed seminaries and the mainline denominations, there were those who stood their ground in defiance. They became known as the "fundamentalists" because they emphasized what they saw as the fundamentals of Christian truth.

The movement however, was laced with pugnacity. The resulting era became a toxic battleground between fundamentalist and modernist theologies with fundamentalism in the end opting for withdrawal and separation. They no longer would dialogue or associate with those of liberal persuasion and withdrew their scholars to separatist colleges they would sponsor independently. This left essentially no middle ground for thoughtful evangelicals.

Emerging from the struggle against theological liberalism and the social gospel in Britain and North America was a narrow fundamentalism that internalized the Christian message and withdrew from involvement in the world.” (Pierard, Richard V. 1984, 456-458)

It cannot be said that the early fundamentalists didn't have a legitimate case for their position. After giving ground for decades to modernist theologies, Fundamentalists simply saw themselves as getting back to biblical orthodoxy.

Just as fundamentalism was emerging as a distinctive movement, Kirsopp Lake (1872-1946), a leading British modernist recognized the connection between the basic ideas of fundamentalism and historic position of the early Christian church. In his *Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (1926), which presented a faith based on individual human experience rather than revelation, Lake wrote:

It is a mistake often made by educated men who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the sort; it is the practical and uneducated survival of a theology, which was once universally held by all Christians. . . . The fundamentalist may be wrong; I think he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with the fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the corpus theologicum of the church is on the fundamentalist's side. (Lake. 1926)

Beginning in the 1920's and into the 1930's, evangelical churches moved with great urgency into ministry to young people. This includes the Navigators (1933), the Young Life Campaign, (1937), Pioneer Girls, (1939), InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the United States (1941), and Word of Life, (1941). Jack Wordson's Word of Life held huge rallies in several major cities of the U.S. One held in New York's Madison Square Garden had 20,000 young people in attendance. These rallies featured many popular preachers including Billy Graham, Chuck Templeton, Merv Rosell, and Jack Schuler. Most of these new youth oriented groups, along with Campus Crusade for Christ, (1951) and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1954) are still alive and operating today. But this same period was a rough time for evangelicals.

In Europe, several fierce dictatorships had persecuted the church. Liberalism had resulted in a huge theological rift between modernists and more conservative Christians who began to stress the need to return to the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith. In addition to the trauma caused by the theological battles of the era, two world wars had left the church, especially in Europe, disillusioned and discouraged. Historian J. Edwin Orr referred to this period from the turn of the century to 1940's as the “forty years of dearth”. The world, however, was about to change.

The Third Great Awakening

On April 7, 1942, a National Conference for United Action Among Evangelicals was held at the Hotel Coronado in St. Louis, Missouri. Harold J. Ockenga, Senior Minister of the Park Street Congregational Church in Boston gave the plenary message. Entitled "The Unvoiced Multitudes," the address was enormously moving to the audience gathered that night.

"Gentlemen, we are gathered here today to consider momentous questions" and to "arrive at decisions that will affect the whole future course of evangelical Christianity in America. Evangelical Christianity has suffered nothing but a series of defeats for decades," In almost every sphere of its influence, evangelical Christianity had been on the defensive. The "terrible octopus of liberalism which spreads itself throughout our Protestant church, [has dominated] innumerable organizations, pulpits, and publications as well as seminaries and other schools." Added to these ecclesiastical evils was the "floods of iniquity" that have poured over our country "in a tidal wave of drunkenness, immorality, corruption, dishonesty and utter atheism." And then he asked the audience to consider what they saw in their own churches. Isn't what you see a "defeated, reticent, retiring and seemingly in despair" church of Jesus Christ?" (Rosell. 2008. 97)

Ockenga, in an early 1950's sermon, said, "from the early 1940's on through the end of the decade, everywhere he went he found churches and pastors praying for revival. When revival finally came in 1949, it hit like a sudden thunderstorm.

In 1941, Lutheran pastor Armon Gesswein began a weekly prayer meeting in Los Angeles for the purpose of praying for revival. The group stayed faithful to the task and by 1945, the group grew to nearly 50 pastors who had committed to prayer. Directly as a result of these prayer meetings, a Pacific Palisades Revival Conference was planned for 1948. The event drew 120 ministers of every type of evangelical group. They met to pray without "a breath of controversy or theological argument". The time was so successful they scheduled a second Pacific Palisades Conference, for the following year, and over 400 pastors attended.

The years of intercession were answered when Billy Graham held his Los Angeles Crusade beginning on September 25, 1949. Right from the start, crowds overflowed the 6,000-seat tent cathedral. The organizers original plan for a 22-day Crusade had to be extended to 8 weeks. In the end, 350,000 people attended the 72 meetings and over 3,000 people had made decisions for Christ. Charles Fuller commented that we have been "permitted to see that revival is (in our midst)."

No one at the time though realized how strong and widespread the revival would be. What historian J. Edwin Orr later would call the "mid-twentieth century awakening" was about to begin.

The Boston Revival

On New Year's Eve, 1949 arrangements were made at the 6,000-seat Mechanics Hall in Boston for an 8-day evangelistic crusade to be held in association with Park Street Church. Over 100 Boston-area Protestant churches joined to host the crusade, as did New England Youth for Christ. The 6,000 seats proved not enough with thousands of people being kept outside. The Sunday edition of the Boston Post, gave a full report.

What happened in Boston, Ockenga later said, was the “surprising work of God”. The revival they were experiencing was much the same as New Englanders had experienced 200 years before through the ministry of George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards.

Following the astounding Mechanics Hall New Year’s Eve meeting, Ockenga met with Billy Graham and Graham asked them to pray that “God would keep him from taking even the smallest credit for what had happened.” Graham said he knew that if he did, his “lips would turn to clay. No person or organization is needed to bring about a true revival.” Originally planners had reserved Park Street Church for the following eight days of meetings to be held that week. But on the second night, Mechanics Hall was again filled to capacity and this time 2,000 people were turned away. Amazingly, with little preparation or publicity, the response in Boston was matching the response in Los Angeles even though in Los Angeles, thousands of dollars and months of preparation had been invested to promote the crusades.

Later that week Graham told a capacity crowd at Boston’s Opera House, that the conditions for revival included repentance, prayer, the unity of God’s people and obedience to God’s word.

The response that January had been so dramatic, that a second crusade was organized for April 1950. The first four nights of the Spring event were held at Boston Garden, with the final service being held on Sunday afternoon on Boston Common. That day 50,000 people came out to hear Graham despite 46-degree temperatures and rain.

It might be easy for those of us who have a stereotypical view of revival sermons to overlook the significance of Graham’s message at the close of the second Boston crusade. He didn’t conclude with a “gospel” message, but with a 5-point peace plan for America. “The United States”, he said, “must maintain a “strong military power for defense”, must support organizations like the FBI for “internal protection”, must seek “economic stability for security”, and we must maintain “confidence in each other, race with race, creed with creed, color with color, remembering that we are all Americans and that America is the nation that has made every man a King.” He finished by asking the audience to waive white handkerchiefs as a “demonstration” to President Truman, that American Christians were for peace, not war.

The outpouring of enthusiasm in Los Angeles followed by the surprising outpouring of enthusiasm in Boston was, in the mind of the evangelical leaders of that time, a signal that a new and mighty work of God was on the move in America.

Between 1940 and 1960 for example, church affiliation in America increased by an incredible 20 percentage points. During roughly the same period, the amount of money spent by churches and synagogues on construction of buildings skyrocketed from 26 million dollars annually in 1945 to well over a billion dollars annually by 1960.

From 1949 until 1955, the evangelical movement in America proceeded quite smoothly. Signs of strain began to show however, beginning in 1955. Fundamentalist leaders within evangelicalism began to ask questions about Billy Graham and about Neo-Evangelicalism as a whole.

In 1957, [Graham] held a crusade in New York City, preaching to throngs in Times Square and Madison Square Garden. Some of the services were even aired on national television. So when his ushers seated mainline Protestant leaders on the platform, and Martin Luther King Jr. offered a prayer of invocation, the world was watching — and some of his erstwhile fundamentalist friends were fuming.” (Sweeney. 2005. 177)

Right-wing fundamentalist leaders were primarily based in the South. They looked to men such as Bob Jones Sr. (1883-1968), Bob Jones Jr. (1911-1997) and John R. Rice (1895-1980) as their spokesman. These men, beginning in the late 1950s, began to speak out against Billy Graham and the entire new evangelical movement. They spread the word through booklets such “Should a Christian support the Billy Graham Crusades?” which I was given a copy of in 1978 when I became a member of a Bob Jones affiliated church. I clearly remember several skillfully delivered anti-Neo-Evangelical messages given between 1978 and 1979 by Richard Prochnow of Calvary Baptist Church of Macomb, Illinois. His words were full of warning:

“Beloved we must be warned that we cannot compromise with any of the “ism’s” of our day that seek to water down the Gospel, no matter how well intentioned they mean to be. We are an old fashioned Bible preaching, Bible teaching church standing on the word of God and we make no apology for it! We must resist the spirit of compromise so prevalent today! Make no mistake – you cannot lay down with dogs and not get up with some fleas on ya! “

Richard Prochnow was a distinguished and faithful pastor who served Christ with great dignity. I still have great respect for the way he taught and led Calvary Baptist in the 1970s. But after three years of enjoyable membership in a fundamentalist church, I realized that my understanding of the gospel and of the Kingdom of God were more along the lines of the very Neo-Evangelicals Prochnow had warned me to avoid. In January 1979, I visited a new church meeting in the Willow Creek movie theater in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and soon afterward ended my life as a Fundamental Baptist.

Taking Issue with Fundamentalism

Many were grateful when Neo-evangelicalism emerged after WWII as a clear option for Protestant Christians who wished to avoid the weaknesses of both fundamentalism and modernism. Harold J. Ockenga, Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry, three Christian leaders who were disillusioned with fundamentalism became neo-evangelicalism’s founding leaders. Henry argued that fundamentalists were not holistic, in that they did not have a complete social vision included in their understanding of the gospel, but tended to concentrate on only one aspect of the Christian message, that being conversion. As a result, they presented an “impoverished and reduced gospel” to the world. He also noted that Fundamentalism was also too anti-intellectual to “gain a hearing among the educated public”.

Theologian Millard Erickson wrote that by the 1940s it had become increasingly clear that fundamentalism had totally failed to turn back the rising tide of modernism. It had not had much

of an influence on the way Americans thought about God or had made much of an effort to address the social problems of its time.

The foundation of Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) and Christianity Today (1956) were significant expressions of the “new evangelicalism”, a term coined by Harold J. Ockenga in 1947, to identify this new movement as taking issue with the older fundamentalism.

Ockenga noted that fundamentalism was flawed by its tone of criticism of all who did not hold to a long list of doctrine and practice they deemed essential.” Fundamentalism had “a wrong strategy (a separatism that aimed at a totally pure church on the local and denominational levels), and wrong results (it had not turned the tide of liberalism anywhere nor had it penetrated with its theology into the social problems of the day).

Edward J. Carnell wrote that fundamentalism was “orthodoxy gone cultic” because it based its core doctrines on an isolated set of key doctrines rather than the orthodox creeds of the church. It was in his view “more of a mentality than a movement.”

Carl F. Henry observed that Fundamentalism did not present a Christian faith with “a sufficient overall world view”. Instead it narrowed its message to an “otherworldly, anti-intellectual faith and became more and more unwilling to engage the world.”

In the late 1960’s Francis A. Schaeffer emerged as a major player in the rise of evangelicalism. In 1967, Time magazine introduced him as the “missionary to the intellectual”. Schaeffer pointed out that the term evangelical came to be used for Christians who were “Bible believing” but who also desired to maintain a vital interaction with the surrounding culture. Rather than separating themselves, Evangelicals sought to engage society and do so across the full spectrum of life including government, science and the arts. In this way he said, the church would obey Christ’s call to be salt and light in a fallen world. Schaeffer himself contributed significantly to this new mood.

Before moving on to the weaknesses of Neo-Evangelicalism, there are three strengths of this movement that deserve attention.

Emphasis

I believe the great strength of Neo-evangelicalism is its value system. As describe above, the core beliefs of Neo-Evangelicalism are Conversionism, Biblicism, Activism, and Crucicentrism, combined with a value of engaging the world and its culture. I would argue that this list best represents the purpose of the church described in the New Testament.

Unity

As evangelicals we have a shorter list of crucial doctrines on which we must agree. This makes it easier for us to unite together with a variety of other Christian ministries. This is certainly one of the great strengths of the Billy Graham Crusades and more recently the Promise Keepers movement. Since the early 1990s we have seen a phenomenal level of cooperation

between evangelical groups on the U of I campus. In recent years this partnership has included the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, and the local Eastern Orthodox campus ministry. Both of these groups consider themselves “evangelical” and have taken steps to adjust in their mission statements accordingly. While they are not full voting members, there is a spirit of real unity among us.

Balance

Another strength of neo-evangelicalism is that it has sought balance. A common feature of revivalist movements over the last three centuries has been extremism. Pentecostalism in the mid-twentieth century often asserted that tongues were a necessary sign of Christian conversion. The Holiness tradition often claimed to have found “sinless perfection”. Charismatic awakenings often preached that “anyone could be healed if they simply had enough faith”. Devout pietists tended to extreme views of separation and simplicity.

Revivals are intense, and for those involved, extreme views often appear holy. But extreme views are generally impossible to live. Not everyone is healed. Not everyone can speak in tongues. Married couples that find “sinless perfection” still aggravate one another! One of the strengths of neo-evangelicalism is its emphasis on combining deep faith with common sense.

The Weaknesses of Neo-Evangelicalism

No movement of the church is without flaws. Despite the phenomenal growth sparked by this 1950s awakening, weaknesses began to show in the overall vision of neo-evangelicalism. The first being its failure to engage more deeply the needs of the world’s poor and second, its tendency to be anti-intellectual.

Social Action

To meet the challenge of the Axis powers in WWII, the United States pushed itself to become the “arsenal of democracy”. What this meant was pushing the nation’s capacity to produce arms and war materials far beyond anything achieved in human history. When the war ended, this new industrial capacity was converted to production of peacetime consumer goods such as refrigerators, washing machines, and automobiles. Millions of veterans came home ready to take full advantage of the generous terms of the G.I. Bill. This meant free tuition for college, which stimulated an intense growth of American colleges and Universities, and paving the way for what would soon become an explosion of growth among evangelical campus ministries in the late 1960s and 1970s. The G.I Bill also meant cheap FHA financing for the purchase of new homes. This sparked a massive growth of suburbs and along with them the building of thousands of large, architecturally modern churches. As they concentrated on following the crowds into the rapidly expanding suburbs, the mainline churches mostly abandoned their work in the inner cities, leaving vast numbers of poor and racial minorities without solid neighborhood churches. It makes sense that in later years evangelicalism would be perceived as a white suburban religion.

"All, however, was not well. By and large, the mainline churches had abandoned the inner cities, now populated by the poor and by racial minorities. In spite of valiant efforts on the part of some, mainline Christianity had become so acculturated to the ethos of the newly affluent suburban areas, that it lost contact with the masses in the cities and with its rural roots and constituency. In rural areas, those who remained members of their traditional denominations were increasingly suspicious of the new leadership. In the cities, the Holiness churches sought to fill the gap, but vast numbers lost all contact with any form of organized Christianity. Twenty years after the great religious revival of the 1950's, the call was repeatedly heard for a renewed mission to the cities; but few had a clear idea how to accomplish that mission." (Gonzalez, Justo L. 2004, 380)

Few would disagree that what had occurred since 1949 was truly great. The gospel was pouring forth all over the world, Christian higher education was thriving, and a new generation of foreign missionaries was being recruited at world mission's conventions such as URBANA sponsored by InterVarsity. But within their own ranks, evangelicals heard the reproof that said the vision was too narrow. In a dynamic message given at the Wesleyan World Youth conference in 1979 at the University of Illinois, Tony Campolo passionately asked the unsettling question: *"Why is it ladies and gentleman, that within the city limits of Philadelphia, there is NOT ONE white, evangelical ministry reaching out to inner city kids?"* Clearly the cities that had been abandoned were not now being reached:

Although the new evangelicalism was open to ecumenical contacts, rejected excessive legalism and moralism, and revealed serious interest in the social dimension of the gospel, many of its spokesperson remained tied to the political and economic status quo. Groups of the more "radical" Christians within mainstream evangelicalism – e.g., the Chicago Declaration of 1973, the Sojourners community, and the British Shaftesbury Project – began calling attention to needs in this area. (Pierard, Richard V. 1984, 456-458)

Why had neo-evangelicalism been so weak in this important area of social action? It is not that ministry to the poor was foreign to evangelical understanding. There has always been a holistic thread running through evangelicalism. A holistic view of ministry traces all the way back to evangelicalism's pietistic roots. August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) trained pastors and scholars while at the same time founding social action ministries such as an orphanage, a school for the poor and a clinic. There were evangelical ministries reaching out to American slaves and even abolitionist movement had evangelical roots. The Mennonites were involved in social action in the 1920s and the Salvation Army has been serving the urban poor since 1865.

I believe there were two main reasons. First, evangelical experience still carried within its DNA the fear of modernism and its secular emphasis on the social gospel. We might wish that early on, insightful leaders like Ockenga and Henry might have fought for a more holistic perspective right from the start. Considering what they had been through during the "40 years of dearth" however, it makes sense that real holism might have been a difficult extra step to take in 1950. A second reason social action has been less a central part of neo-evangelicalism stems from the post-war demographic of neo-evangelical growth. The revivals of the 1950's did not primarily occur among the rural or urban poor. They happened first in the context of lower-middle and middle class youth rallies and later spread to the masses living in the post-war suburbs. Both

epicenters being primarily white and reasonably well off. The long-term effect of this weakness was to create a demographic gulf between the “revived” and the poor. The effects of this gulf are still being felt today.

As the evangelical movement progressed, it did see some sparks of compassion begin to take hold.

Compassion International

One early morning in 1952, the American evangelist Everett Swanson took an early morning walk through the war torn streets of Seoul South Korea. His preaching campaign had been a great success with hundreds of people coming to receive Christ. He could have easily departed for home knowing that his mission had been a success.

"The chug of a flatbed truck shook him out of his reverie. He glanced up as the truck came to a halt a few blocks ahead of him. Workers poured from the cab to gather what appeared to be a few piles of rags from doorways and alleys down the street. They threw the rags onto the truck bed.

As he drew closer to the truck, he noticed the workers gently kicking the rag piles as they came across them. That made sense, rats were common. One rag pile lay in a doorway not far from Everett. He was set to reach it at about the same time as one of the workers.

That's when Everett noticed that the pile had more than rags in it. A small arm extended from the pile and Everett began to make out the shape of a child sleeping in a fetal position under the rags. He ran to warn the worker not to kick those rags.

But somehow as he ran, Everett caught sight of the cargo on the flatbed truck. He stopped cold in his tracks as he realized what he was witnessing. The worker's mission had never been to gather rags. It had been to gather the bodies of abandoned children who had died on the streets overnight." (Compassion International 2002, 5-7)

As Everett flew across the Pacific to the United States he would later say that the hum of the propellers seemed to be saying "What do you intend to do about it?" He returned to the United States determined to do something to help those children. He did not know how or where the money would come from, but he had to do something.

What he did was begin Compassion International, a Christian child sponsorship organization that works to provide care and education for children living in poverty around the world. Today Compassion operates in 24 countries helping more than 1,000,000 children.

World Vision

When a Tsunami ravaged Southeast Asia the day after Christmas, 2004, World Vision had 3,700 staff in five of the most affected countries. In each affected country World Vision had pre-positioned emergency supplies. *"It's huge. It's impressive. It plays on an international field like no other Christian organization."* A U.S. ambassador once commented to World Vision's International president Dean Hirsch, "You've got more people in Mozambique than the U.S. government has in all of Africa!"

Wikipedia describes World Vision this way:

World Vision is an international Christian relief and development organization founded in the United States in 1950. Its goal is "working for the well being of all people, especially children." Working on six continents, World Vision is one of the largest Christian relief and development organizations in the world with a \$2.6 billion budget (2007).

World Vision was founded in 1950 by Dr. Bob Pierce, a young pastor and missionary, who had first been sent to China and South Korea in 1947 by the Youth for Christ missionary organization. Pierce remained at the head of World Vision for nearly two decades, but resigned from the organization in 1967. Pierce also founded the evangelical organization Samaritan's Purse.

World Vision began caring for orphans and other children in need first in South Korea, then expanding throughout Asia and, eventually, in more than 90 countries, embracing larger issues of community development and advocacy for the poor as part of its basic mission to help children and their families build a sustainable future.

Today World Vision focuses its efforts in five major areas; emergency relief, education, health care, economic development, and promotion of justice. World Vision believes witnessing for Christ is a fundamental part of their relief work. The organization believes that God, in the person of Jesus, offers hope of renewal, restoration, and reconciliation.

World Visions is a para-church ministry and their perspective on the importance of the local church has been controversial.

As World Vision grew, they concluded that working through churches was impractical. Churches were unsuited to run multi-million-dollar programs, which often overwhelmed their administrative expertise and distracted them from their primary church mission. Working with just one local church brought charges of discrimination and sectarianism from other churches. A church controlling so much cash could be accused—sometimes accurately—of using the money to induce people to join their church. If funding went through multiple churches, coordinating their efforts was a nightmare. (Stafford, Tim. 2005)

World Vision has, in recent years, re-engaged the church and the dialogue has proved fruitful. "We've helped the church to understand holism," Hirsch says, "that evangelism and social action can't be divorced."

HIV/AIDS provides a compelling example. A 2001 Barna Group survey showed only 8 percent of born-again American Christians (as Barna defines them) were willing to give to AIDS education and prevention. For evangelicals, World Vision's core donors, support was even weaker—3 percent. In many field situations, church leaders were prone to stigmatize victims of AIDS rather than to help them. Nevertheless, World Vision invested millions in launching programs and in convincing Christians to care. Now they see church attitudes turning around, both in America and in the developing world. A 2004 Barna study, commissioned by World Vision, shows that the proportion of American evangelicals willing to donate has grown to 14 percent. (Stafford, Tim. 2005)

Despite a massive investment of funds and effort in the two-thirds world, the efforts of the Christian church have failed to achieve authentic change in places like Africa. It is estimated that 70-80% of Africa is Christian and still, most of the continent lives on the edge of poverty and chaos. Why hasn't the teaching of the Christian faith lifted people out of poverty and restored African communities to peace and prosperity?

The Future of Social Action

As part of the research for this paper, I interviewed Darrow Miller, formerly with Food for the Hungry and now founder of Discipling Nations Alliance (DNA). I ask Miller why it is been hard for evangelicals to engage deeply in the work of justice and caring for the poor.

He explained that World Visions founder Bob Pierce was an evangelist who had his heart broken by the suffering he saw among the worlds poor. When he founded World Vision no one in evangelicalism was doing overseas development. To Pierce, the problem was fundamentally simple: the poor have an extreme need of goods; we have a great surplus of goods. So let us use our great surplus to meet their extreme need. As far as it went, his outlook was fine; as long as the goal was simply emergency assistance.

The problem with Evangelicalism, Miller says, stems from its deeply entrenched Gnostic mindset that splits the spiritual from the rest of life. It's this stubborn dualistic perspective that blocks a more holistic ministry models from proceeding unhindered in world missions.

“ . . . we live in a time of tragic paradox. Never have there been more churches, yet more brokenness, poverty, and despair. All too often, local churches are disengaged from culture, and thus, irrelevant to the needs of their communities and nations. Rather than discipling the nations, churches are being disciplined by their nations.

Thankfully, things are changing. We are convinced that we are living in a kairos moment—a pivotal time where old paradigms are giving way and new ones are emerging. The Church worldwide is reawakening to her historic role as God’s Kingdom ambassador and change-agent. (Disciple Nations Alliance. 2008)

Miller’s vision is to promote “a robust biblical worldview--bringing truth, justice and beauty into every sphere of society, and demonstrate Christ's love in practical ways, addressing the brokenness in their communities and nations beginning with their own resources.

Intellectual Vigor

In recent years it has been debated whether evangelicalism is characterized by intellectual vigor. Some of this depends on how you define evangelicalism.

A few years ago in a New York Times Op-Ed piece David Brooks highlighted the crisis American perception when it comes to Evangelicalism:

There is a world of difference between real-life people of faith and the made-for-TV, Elmer Gantry-style blowhards who are selected to represent them. Falwell and Pat Robertson are held up as spokesmen for evangelicals, which is ridiculous. Meanwhile people like John Stott, who are actually important, get ignored.

Yet, as Michael Cromartie of the Ethics and Public Policy Center notes, if evangelicals could elect a pope, Stott is the person they would likely choose. He was the framer of the Lausanne Covenant, a crucial organizing document for modern evangelicalism. He is the author of more than 40 books, which have been translated into over 72 languages and have sold in the millions. Now rector emeritus at All Souls, Langham Place, in London, he has traveled the world preaching and teaching.

Stott is so embracing it's always a bit of a shock - especially if you're a Jew like me - when you come across something on which he will not compromise. It's like being in "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," except he has a backbone of steel. He does not accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, and of course he believes in evangelizing among nonbelievers. He is pro-life and pro-death penalty, even though he is not a political conservative on most issues.

Most important, he does not believe truth is plural. He does not believe in relativizing good and evil or that all faiths are independently valid, or that truth is something humans are working toward. Instead, Truth has been revealed. (Brooks, David. 2004)

In other words, the true intellectual center of evangelicalism is not fundamentalist or Pentecostal, it is Neo-evangelical. In the past it was John Stott, Kenneth Kantzer, C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer. In recent years it has been N. T. Wright, William Lane Craig, and Eugene Peterson. So, while Mark Knoll is correct, that there has been a “Scandal of the Evangelical Mind”, what he actually means is a scandal of the post-fundamentalist evangelical mind. Neo-evangelicalism has genuinely been more scholastic than its predecessors.

While Neo-Evangelicalism has placed a high emphasis on an intelligent presentation and defense of the Christian faith, it has for the most part stopped there in its promotion of scholasticism. Probably due to its core value of activism, it has tended to offer little support for work in any of the liberal arts. Similarly, and also due in some part to its fundamentalist roots, Neo-evangelicalism until just recently has been reluctant to encourage its adherents to pursue

work in science. The combined effect has left neo-evangelicalism in much the same place as its fundamentalist ancestors — outside the academy and generally perceived as anti-intellectual. In recent decades, there have been signs of change, but the process will be slow.

Neo-Evangelicalism — A Concluding Assessment

It is interesting to look back on the criticisms of the protestant reformation made by Francis Schaeffer in the 1970s. He said the Reformation had three glaring weaknesses: it tolerated racial prejudice including slavery based upon race, it made a “non-compassionate use” of accumulated wealth, and it failed to take seriously the call to take the gospel message to the rest of the world.

So how has neo-evangelicalism done in righting these wrongs? The answer is quite mixed. While evangelicals were involved in ending slavery in Britain and America, neo-evangelical churches remain highly segregated and evangelical ministries to the poor and among racial minorities are still token in number. It appears that with regard to race, we have a similar weakness to our Reformation forefathers.

We evangelical Christians are among the most generous givers in the world. And yet, according to Barna, our giving still amounts to less than 5% of our overall income. It seems that in this area as well, the sins of our forefathers have been visited upon the sons.

Our efforts in taking the gospel to the rest of the world have gone much better. It's hard to know though whether this is because of our greater insight, our deeper repentance or whether it is simply a matter of world missions being easier in an affluent age. Missionaries today have the advantages of air travel, automobiles, modern medicine and digital communication. That being said, the American evangelical contribution to world missions has been impressive.

It would be easy to come away from this study longing to return to the days of large revival meetings. I'm sure it was exciting to see aisles filled with people making “decisions”. The days of mass evangelism may come again in the future, but for now, they are a thing of the past. What I sense we need is faithfulness to those few core values that make evangelicals what they are. Living true to the teachings of Scripture, being obedient to Jesus Christ, a brave engagement with the world as it is, and continuing to pray for the genuine conversion of people.

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