

The theological corruption of the Evangelical Church

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In a world that has become increasingly skeptical of, and hostile to, Christianity, where do evangelicals stand? What happened to evangelical churches? What does it mean to be an evangelical? This paper argues that the evangelical movement has lost its way. Despite its creeds and confessions and high view of Scripture, many evangelicals—including evangelical leaders—pay lip-service to biblical teaching. Many evangelicals no longer steadfastly proclaim biblical truth, neither do they appear to expend much effort in preaching the Gospel and reaching the lost. Many evangelical leaders now seem more interested in being liked by the public or obtaining a media profile, or building mutually respectful relationships with their ideological adversaries. The causes of these disturbing trends are examined and a call to self-examination and repentance is issued.

Whatever happened to the Evangelical Church?

In a world that has become increasingly skeptical of, and hostile to, Christianity, where do evangelicals and evangelical churches stand? Many large churches, organizations and leaders in the evangelical fold have significant public profiles or public and political influence, but how effective have they really been in promoting the Christian faith?

I put it to readers that the evangelical church in Australia and around the world has lost its way and is suffering a crisis of identity (figure 1). Many who call themselves evangelicals have little idea what they believe or why—or even what we are meant to be doing. As former Australian Evangelical Alliance chief Tom Slater put it: “[W]hat is the Christian cause? Is it the survival of the church? Is it the ‘success’ of the church? Is it the maintenance of whatever power the church has in the decision-making structures of society? Is it the proclamation of the gospel? Is it social transformation? Is it the Kingdom of God? Our answer to that question shapes how we think we’re going.”¹ That such questions need to be asked is itself an indictment.

Joel Edwards has asserted that evangelicalism “always takes seriously Jesus as the living Word, reigning at the centre of the universe and our lives” and that evangelicals “will not swap his Lordship for our culture”. According to Edwards, evangelicals “are absolutely passionate about renewed people and communities which treat sin and forgiveness seriously. Evangelicals really do want to see God ruling everything The twenty-first century will pull us in many different directions, but these are the things we should die for.”² These are great sentiments, but they do not reflect the true state of many evangelical communities either in Australia or around the world.

An idolatrous view of God

For many Christians, God simply meets a previously unmet need: a father, a best mate, a provider, or a gentle, loving sugar daddy! While many non-Christians see God as nasty and vindictive, or a cosmic party-pooper, many Christians hold to equally erroneous conceptions of God that bear little resemblance to the biblical revelation.

Some years ago, A.W. Tozer rightly chastized the church on this very point: “Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.” It does not matter what we or our creeds say. What matters is what we actually do.

Tozer pointed out that a true conception of God is fundamental “not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse.” Indeed, “there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.” John Dickson, for example, points out that “most mainstream Christians are very comfortable with science and with all of the discoveries of science, including the [sic] 13.72 billion years ago there was a bang and evolution by natural selection.”³ Theistic evolutionists such as Dickson and progressive creationists such as Hugh Ross deny that the Genesis account of creation is a historical record of God creating the universe and everything in it by divine fiat in six days. Instead, they posit that God’s *only* activity in bringing about the present world has been maintenance, not special miraculous acts of creation in history. In essence, theistic



Figure 1. Sign of the times. The church's declining influence has led to declining numbers. Many once vibrant churches have now been converted to restaurants and even nightclubs.

evolution borders on deism since the god of the theistic evolutionist is distant and impersonal.

Theistic evolution comprises the following basic beliefs: (1) the first human couple (if there even was one) shared a common ancestor (pre-Adamites) with the apes; (2) the first human couple were highly evolved hominids who were imparted with God's image; (3) death, decay, and suffering are an integral part of the world God created, and therefore, the teaching that physical death is a direct consequence and penalty of Adam's sin is denied; (4) the penalty for sin is 'spiritual death'. Theistic evolution casts doubt upon God's omniscience, omnipotence, efficiency, and goodness. Why would an omniscient God, who surely knows exactly what He wants, create a scenario where nature aimlessly gropes around trying to find the path of least resistance in an upward direction? Why would an omnipotent God employ such a wasteful and cruel method to 'create' life? Why would a just and loving God design a process which requires the strong to usurp the weak? As Nobel Prize winner and atheist Jacques Monod (1910–1976) put it:

“Selection is the blindest, and most cruel way of evolving new species, and more and more complex and refined organisms ... the more cruel because it is a process of elimination, of destruction. The struggle for life and the elimination of the weakest is a horrible process, against which our whole modern ethic revolts. An ideal society is a non-selective society, it is one where the weak are protected; which is exactly the reverse of the so-called natural law. I am surprised that a Christian would defend the idea that this is the process which God more or less set up in order to have evolution.”⁴

Moreover, rather than being an evil and a curse arising as a result of the Fall as Scripture teaches (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12), human physical death is credited as being an integral part of God's plan to 'evolve' His creation. Thus, we end up with a distant, impersonal God who is not all-knowing, not all-powerful, not very efficient, and not all that good! A god that endorses the exploitation and subjugation of the weak by the strong and employs indiscriminate pain, suffering, and death to bring about the world they desire can hardly be called just, loving, or compassionate. This is, ultimately, a libel on God and His character.

Tozer rebuked the church for holding such manifestly decadent views of God that were “utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God”. I believe it is time again for another such rebuke, since, as Tozer pointed out, such ignoble views of God are, in fact, idolatrous because they present God as someone or something other than He is:

“Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges. Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilised peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.”⁵

It is time each of us reassessed how we conceive of God and see if our ideas about God square with His own self-revelation in Scripture.

The abuse and neglect of Scripture

That our conception of God often does not reflect His own self-revelation in Scripture should be no surprise when we understand that Scripture is all too often ignored, neglected, or abused by the church. Indeed, Scripture has all but been excised from much of our theological deliberations. For example, a 6,500-word essay by Brian Edgar located on the

Australian Evangelical Alliance website entitled ‘Eight Core Christian Values’ cites only one Scripture—and even then it was a mere passing reference or ‘proof text’.⁶ We have gone from *Sola Scriptura* to *Nulla Scriptura!*

In some cases, evangelicals are advocating ideas that are clearly prohibited in Scripture! In that same essay, Edgar states that justice is “[a] concept biased in favour of the disadvantaged” despite the fact that Leviticus 19:15 states: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” Exodus 23:3 states that favouritism should not be shown to a poor man even in a lawsuit. There was also no partiality when Moses took a census and God required an offering of half a shekel from everyone over the age of twenty years (Exodus 30:14–15). The rich were explicitly forbidden from giving more, and the poor were explicitly prohibited from giving less.

Another example is the exhortation in Micah 6:8 which has been adopted by *Micah Challenge*. Followers of that organization believe that acting justly implies advocating for ‘redistributive justice’ imposed by government: rich countries taxing their citizens in order to give aid to poorer countries. But Micah 6 takes the form of a law suit. The prophet, on behalf of the Lord, brings a case against Israel. The prophet proclaims that God ultimately requires all His people to act justly. The Hebrew word used (מִשְׁפָּט, *mīšpāt*) clearly refers to the administration and maintenance of justice in relation to resolving legal disputes.⁷ It never refers to anything close to ‘social’ or ‘distributive’ justice. That is eisegesis, not exegesis! Those who hold such views are reading neo-Marxist socialism back into the text, not extracting biblical principles.

Biblical truth as revealed in Scripture defines Christianity and guides Christian practice. Once our theological confession loses its Scriptural foundation, “it finds its subject matter anywhere along a line that runs from Eastern spirituality to radical politics to feminist ideology to environmental concerns.”⁸ Indeed, many evangelical churches, in one way or another and despite the warning in Romans 1:25, have exchanged evangelism and the proclamation of biblical truth for these very things or whatever else is the current cause *du jour*.

In the case of those in the Emergent movement—the likes of Brian McLaren and Rob Bell—the Scriptures are made virtually irrelevant! For them, we cannot really know anything except that we should love Jesus. The Emergents are effectively soft postmodernists: they believe in the existence of objective truth, but deny it is possible to know anything with absolute certainty. Truth is always provisional because it is impossible to be sure that what is claimed as truth is in fact truth.

Of more concern is the way most evangelicals now reinterpret the Genesis creation account and no longer consider it to be a historical description of what actually

happened. Moreover, those evangelicals who do still uphold the traditional view of a six-day creation around 6,000 years ago are marginalized, derided, and often ridiculed—even by fellow Christians. For example, during a recent televised discussion with theoretical physicist and self-described antitheist Lawrence Krauss,⁹ John Dickson gave the following advice on how to deal with young-earth biblical creationists:

“But what you should be doing, Lawrence—what you should be doing—here’s a tactic—hand them over to us. People like the Centre for Public Christianity, where I work, who are trying to educate not only the general public but also the Christian public on Biblical scholarship and scientific scholarship. ... I just mean we could be the friend—we could be the friend to the new atheism and have the effect you want. I think all you are doing is firming up the opposition.”³

Thus, according to Dickson, those who hold to the traditional, historical-grammatical interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis are ignorant and uninformed of biblical and scientific scholarship and need to be ‘educated’. This is rich coming from Dickson, who thinks “Genesis 1 is written in a style that is most unlike the historical prose we know from other parts of the Bible. The style is not quite poetry but it’s more in the direction of poetry.”³ On the contrary, it is nothing like poetry because it does not contain the semantic parallelism that is a fundamental characteristic of Hebrew poetry. It does, however, have all the classical characteristics of Hebrew historical narrative and has the same grammatical, structural, and semantic markers as the narrative found in the later chapters of Genesis,¹⁰ and other passages that are clearly narrative.

Regarding the history of interpretation, Dickson stated that his view “was the view of ancient Jews, like Philo of Alexandria [figure 2] in the first century, the greatest theologian of the ancient world, Saint Augustine, Origen, Clement and so on.”³ But Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who could not read Hebrew.¹¹ Not surprisingly, his writings are almost totally free of rabbinic concerns. Instead, he resorted to “an extensive allegorical interpretation of Scripture that made Jewish law consonant with the ideals of Stoic, Pythagorean, and especially Platonic thought.”¹² Philo was clearly more concerned with harmonizing the Old Testament with Greek philosophy than with careful exegesis, and his interpretive methodology heavily influenced Origen. Clement’s comments in *The Stromata* make it clear that he believed the days were literal. Augustine held to an instantaneous creation and therefore interpreted the days of creation allegorically, although he was not entirely happy with this approach. Nevertheless, he believed in a young earth that was only thousands of years old, not billions.¹³

Dickson also believes that 13.72 billion years ago “there was a bang and evolution by natural selection”.³ Even if one accepts the standard big bang model, there was no ‘bang’.



Figure 2. Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who could not read Hebrew. He employed allegorical interpretation and sought to make Jewish law consonant with the ideals of Stoic, Pythagorean, and especially Platonic thought.

The expression ‘big bang’ was a derogatory term coined by Sir Fred Hoyle that apparently stuck, but it is not an accurate expression of what the model describes. Also, evolution by natural selection did not start until the earth was formed, which was, according to conventional evolutionary models of earth history, about 4.5 billion years ago—and even then it could not start until self-reproducing life appeared on earth, which evolutionists believe took at least hundreds of millions of years. So who is really ignorant of biblical, historical, and scientific scholarship?

In any case, why does Dickson want to “be the friend to the new atheism and have the effect [Krauss] want[s]”? Shouldn’t Dickson’s goal be the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20)? To demonstrate the emptiness of atheism and secular humanism? To persuade atheists like Krauss of the truth of Christianity? Does he not realize that the ‘effect’ Krauss wants is the silencing and marginalization of all Christian voices—including that of Dickson himself?¹⁴

It appears that the reason for the kind of hermeneutical and attitudinal changes that Dickson embodies is a defensive tactic. Many educated Christians—and especially those with

theological training—appear deeply intimidated by scientific data and the truth claims of leading scientists. It is almost a case of ‘scientists say ...’ equals ‘God says ...’ and theologians, lacking the knowledge, training, and confidence to question these truth-claims, just accept them at face value. This has created a dilemma for evangelicals who hold to a high view of Scripture (including inerrancy). For these evangelicals, the notion of a six-day recent creation stands against the irrefutable scientific ‘truth’ regarding the age of the earth and the nature of the universe, and therefore the Genesis account cannot mean what it appears to mean on a ‘superficial reading’. So there must be either a deeper meaning, or the details have been wrongly understood as a straightforward description of actual historical events occurring in real time, when in actual fact the time referents are mere literary devices. Thus, the Genesis accounts of creation and the global Flood must be understood as communicating only theological rather than historical or scientific truth. This approach removes their dilemma. As Meredith Kline put it, “as far as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesizing about cosmic origins”.¹⁵ In other words, their desire to save the Bible from being contradicted by scientific ‘fact’ has ultimately led these evangelicals to reinterpret the early chapters of Genesis and give it a meaning and significance quite different from what the original author intended.

But those evangelicals who feel the need to do this are rarely ever consistent. The same hermeneutic is never applied to the Gospels, for example. Like the creation account, the Virgin Birth, Christ’s miracles, and His bodily Resurrection are also scientifically impossible, yet evangelicals invariably have no problem accepting the record of these events as straightforward historical accounts. And the very atheists they are trying to appease note the gross inconsistency here.¹⁶

In any case, one of the primary contributing factors to this theological and hermeneutical reorientation appears to be a general ignorance of either theology or science—or both! Evangelicals need to realize that all science is provisional. Both the history of science and recent experience reveal that scientists are often wrong—indeed, spectacularly so! Furthermore, science is, by definition, confined to revealing truth about the *natural* world. Science cannot tell us anything about the *supernatural* world. Science is not the enemy of Scripture—it simply complements it. Yet many Christians with a scientific background seem to have very little grasp of the philosophy and history of science, and very little appreciation of the epistemic basis for both scientific knowledge and biblical revelation. In other words, they have a philosophical blind-spot: they cannot see that scientific knowledge is not the absolute truth they think it is or wish it to be. This is illustrated by another comment from Dickson: “I agree that [the church] shouldn’t stick its head in now and

tell the scientists what to do. My view is let the scientists do the science and let religious believers do what they do.”³

In addition, even when Scripture is cited, it often lacks authority. For example, regarding the campaign for gay marriage in Australia, Dickson thinks there is no point in trying to persuade gay people to leave their chosen lifestyle, because they hold their beliefs so strongly that any suggestion of change would immediately turn gay people away and prevent them from hearing more about Christianity.¹⁷ In fact, he believes that the church should apologize to gay people for its comments on homosexuality, and until it does, Christians have no right to speak about it! Why the church and Christian leaders should apologize for proclaiming what the Bible clearly teaches (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10) Dickson does not say. He rightly notes that we should still show compassion and care for gay people even though we profoundly disagree with their ideas. But how does this work in practice? Note that respect is rarely, if ever, shown to Christians who present rational and dispassionate arguments against homosexuality and gay marriage.¹⁸ Gay activists routinely harass, ridicule and abuse those who disagree with their beliefs, and especially those who voice their disagreements in public! The only Christian action that seems to please homosexuals is silence—which is effectively what Dickson advocates!

In any case, if someone is making bad choices and living a risky and extremely unhealthy and destructive lifestyle, isn't warning and counselling them the most loving and compassionate thing we can do? To allow someone to continue on the road to early, and ultimately eternal, death seems indifferent and uncaring at best, and calloused, unloving, and downright heartless at worst!

The Scriptures also lose their authority when classical logic and the historical-grammatical method of interpretation are exchanged for postmodern relativism and personal intuition and experience. This means that—as David Wells pointed out—when it comes to interpreting Scripture, “[e]very person’s intuitions are granted equal value Common access to truth is understood to mean common *possession* of truth. If everyone’s intuitions stand on the same plane, it is assumed that they are equally valid, equally true, and equally useful.”¹⁹ Rather than a search for what God is saying to all of us, Bible studies descend into pools of ignorance where participants exchange thoughts about what some verse means to them personally. Derrida²⁰ has infiltrated the church!

This is not to say that experience should not play a part in our handling of Scripture. The Bible is, after all, a Christian’s guidebook to life since it reveals to us who God is, what He is like, and what He has done for us. Thus, our experience of God and His love and compassion, His grace and mercy, and His discipline should all be rooted in what the Bible teaches about God and His dealings with His people. Yet it appears that this experiential knowledge of God is often missing. Some Christians may have strong biblical knowledge, but their experience of God may still be lacking. One particular

comment by Dickson appears to reveal this phenomenon: “And, for me, Christianity explains the world I live in, in such a spooky and deep way that I find I feel I have met the God I had a hunch was there based only on the beautiful elegant”³ Dickson believes Christianity explains the world in a “spooky and deep way” and because of this he *feels* he has met the God he had an inkling was there. But if a person has really met God, wouldn’t that person surely know it?

When Christian leaders demonstrate such poor handling of Scripture and appear to have such shallow relationships with their God, is it any surprise that evangelical Christianity is, for the most part, making little head-way in the modern world? As Jesus said of the religious leaders in His own time, “[they] are in error because [they] do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matthew 22:29).

Distortion of the Gospel and the Christian mission

The Gospel is not about love but about justice; not ‘social justice’ but true moral justice. All humanity has rebelled against God and His justice demands death. The good news is that Christ’s death and Resurrection has satisfied God’s demand for justice (figure 3). A Christian is someone who has accepted God’s gift of salvation through Christ, and who embarks on a spiritual journey with the help of the indwelling Spirit, in order to seek personal righteousness and to bring others to Christ. Thus, the Christian mission is not about making friends with atheists or gaining academic respectability with non-Christian intellectuals. It is not about being liked by, or gaining favour with, the media. It is to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and to teach them to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19–20).

Yet, for many evangelicals, the quest for personal righteousness and the call to proclaim the Christian message to others has been replaced by a desire to feel morally superior: to feel as if you stand on the right side of a deeply moral argument. Moreover, interest in doctrine and truth and concern for the lost has gradually been replaced by a therapeutic faith that looks inward and is more focused on surviving the world instead of changing it.

Unlike Christ, many evangelicals have become entirely focused on ‘social justice’. Their concern for the poor appears limited to meeting their material needs, and many are completely uninterested in reaching out to the poor with the Gospel.²¹ For example, ostensibly Christian organizations like World Vision no longer preach the Gospel to the poor, but are content with meeting their material needs only:

“We are . . . a Christian organisation It is important to note, however, that we do not aim to convert people of other religions, nor do we restrict the help we provide to Christian areas only. We are not an evangelical organisation. We exist solely to help people who are hungry, sick or oppressed.”²²



Figure 3. Christ's death and subsequent resurrection is the centrepiece of Christian doctrine and the pillar upon which the gospel of salvation rests, yet many Christian spokesmen seem more concerned about 'social justice' which is often just codespeak for neo-Marxism.

But don't the poor also need to know that they are creatures of God, that they have rebelled against their Creator, that all people are sinful and inclined to do evil, and therefore stand condemned, but that there is salvation and deliverance through Jesus Christ?

In many evangelical churches and organizations, the central Christian message has been expunged and replaced with Christianized socialism. As Nobel Prize-winning economist Friedrich Hayek noted, clergymen have been active promoters of social justice, "while increasingly losing their faith in a supernatural revelation" and "appear to have sought a refuge and consolation in a new 'social' religion which substitutes a temporal for a celestial promise of justice, and who hope that they can thus continue their striving to do good."²³ Similarly, Mark Steyn noted that "[m]ost mainline Protestant churches are, to one degree or another, post-Christian. If they no longer seem disposed to converting the unbelieving to Christ, they can at least convert them to the boggiest of soft-left political clichés."²⁴

This is not to say that addressing social issues is unimportant, but this should not be the church's prime focus or priority. Themes of social justice (as properly defined by caring for the poor, refugees, abolishing slavery, etc.) are not the primary focus of, or are conspicuously absent from, Christ's teachings

and the other New Testament writings. This is because social transformation comes about as a result of spiritual transformation. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for vocal self-appointed Christian spokespersons—especially those that incline to the political left—to disparage and even condemn other Christians who have different ministry priorities, who reject their social justice theology and who view their social reform agenda as unbiblical and ineffective. Those who refuse to sign up to the socialist agenda of the 'Christian left' are derided as being uncaring and self-absorbed and part of a dumbed-down consumerist culture. Some have even suggested that Christians getting into politics are "really just right-wingers hijacking Christian language and imagery to cynically exploit Christian concerns for their own political benefit."²⁵ Such derision is not only unfair, it is presumptuous arrogance, yet all too typical of the hubris coming from some Christians on the political left. Moreover, it is ironic that vocal Christian spokespersons routinely condemn materialism or consumerism yet constantly talk only about 'material justice'. They appear concerned only with material needs (i.e. material assistance for the poor, the oppressed, the 'alien', the vulnerable, asylum seekers, low paid workers, etc.) and completely unconcerned with their spiritual needs even though it is a person's spiritual standing that has eternal consequences.

The Australian Evangelical Alliance and other evangelical organizations have pushed for a 'Public Theology Network' linking theological and ethical institutions and 'think-tanks'. The problem is that much of what passes for 'public theology' and Christian policy positions are completely divorced from both Scriptural teaching and political reality. In many instances, they seem to have been lifted straight from the green-left policy handbook! The Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society, for example, publishes a quarterly journal (*Zadok Perspectives*), recent editions of which include articles entitled "Being Carbon Accountable", "How Green is your Church?" and "A National Day of Prayer on Climate Change". Regular contributor Peter Crabb wrote, in an article entitled "An eye on the earth: when will we ever learn?", that "[w]e cannot fight and conquer this land, we must live in companionship and harmony with it."²⁶ In another article entitled "Be fruitful and multiply—not anymore", he stated: "The fundamental cause of the world's environmental problems, and especially climate change, is that the human population is exceeding the earth's carrying capacity."²⁷

Concerning the church's response to the push for gay marriage in Australia, John Dickson makes the following revealing comments:

"Should the Christian church be able to legislate [its view of marriage]? I feel very awkward about that. A part of it is my reading of Scripture. I don't see any basis in the Bible. And I don't think anyone who takes the Bible seriously can point to Biblical passages that indicate the church has a right to legislate for general society, and for the first three hundred years

of Christianity there was never any expectation they would be able to call the shots in Rome ... I oppose gay marriage at the level of the intellectual debate, the ethical debate ... But am I saying the church should be able to block Australian legislation? No, I'm not. I'm not saying that at all."²³

Thus, according to Dickson, because not all Australians are Christians, we have no right to advocate for legislation that accords with Christian morals and ethics, nor do we have any right to block legislation that goes against Christian morality. Christians have no right to legislate for general society. But Dickson's position is absurd. Firstly, no society has a uniform set of morals and ethics. No law would ever be passed if it had to be endorsed by the whole of society. Secondly, aren't those advocating for gay marriage wanting to legislate for general society, including forcing churches to 'marry' gay couples? Why is it acceptable for gay marriage advocates to legislate their morality for general society, yet inappropriate for Christians to oppose such legislation? This kind of inane and fatuous reasoning is all too common among evangelical spokesmen today.

In any case, much of the public commentary emanating from evangelicals today displays a great deal of political, legal, and economic naivety. Too many evangelicals appear to think that a doctorate in theology or ministry automatically qualifies them to speak out on matters of science, law, economics, industrial relations, etc. Not surprisingly, their utterings—if they receive any attention at all—are often greeted by true experts with the derision and contempt they deserve.

It appears that many evangelical leaders are more interested in gaining respect and a media profile than expanding the kingdom of God. Indeed, many sound just like other left-wing political lobbyists, albeit with a Christian face. One has to wonder if there is an element of vanity and egoism at play. Indeed, it appears that too many Christians are more interested in 'feeling good' than actually doing good. T.S. Eliot once said, "Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm—but the harm does not interest them. Or they do not see it, or they justify it because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves."²⁸

Serving God involves more than making self-righteous pronouncements and moral posturing. Jesus told a parable about a father who asked his two sons to work in his vineyard (Matthew 21:28–31). The first son initially refused but later changed his mind and went. The second son promised to work but never did so. Jesus' point was that, when it comes to doing God's will, it is not what we say that counts but what we actually do. Many Christians may say all the right things and have the best of intentions but if they are not actively ministering to God's people or working to expand the kingdom of God, then they can hardly claim to be doing God's will.

A call for reformation and revival

Jesus said:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:13–16).

While there are many great evangelical people and churches, it is my contention that the evangelical movement in Australia and around the world has hidden its light and lost its saltiness. It is ultimately a crisis of leadership. Too many of our current evangelical leaders are more interested in 'mainstreaming'—seeking the respect of secular power-brokers and seeking favours from government. As J.P. Moreland has noted, we ought to be suspicious of evangelical leaders "whose primary agenda seems to be to remove embarrassment about being an evangelical and to assure their colleagues that they are really acceptable, rational people in spite of their evangelicalism." He adds, "While we need to be sensitive to our unbelieving friends and colleagues, we should care far less about what the world thinks than about what God thinks of our intellectual life. Fidelity to God and His cause is the core commitment of a growing Christian mind."²⁹ As Christians, we should embrace the world's ridicule, scorn and condemnation. Indeed, this is often proof that we are doing the *right* thing. As Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11–12).

It should also be noted that those who strive for respect from academia and the mainstream media rarely, if ever, get it. Despite their silence on moral issues, their support for dubious causes or their compromises on controversial matters, they are still mocked and ridiculed. John Dickson, for example, in his appearance on the 'Q&A' program, was still mocked and ridiculed by Lawrence Krauss, despite his constant agreement with, and acquiescence to, Krauss's views.³

Francis Schaeffer pointed out many years ago that "our culture, society, government, and law are in the condition they are in, *not because of a conspiracy, but because the church has forsaken its duty to be the salt of the culture*. It is the church's duty (as well as its privilege) to do now what it should have been doing all the time—to use the freedom we do have to *be* that salt of the culture [emphasis in original]."³⁰ Too many evangelical churches are moving away from Scriptural fidelity and sound doctrine in order to appear more 'hip' and appealing to the younger, idealistic, and post-modernist generation. For many Christians, a 'good' church is one that is

culturally relevant and has a social conscience (which usually means a *socialist* conscience). As Wells has pointed out, love of God has been subsumed by love of neighbour, “And then this love of neighbor itself underwent further transformation so that faith came to mean little more than seeking justice in the world, and while that is a characteristically Christian concern, it is not distinctively Christian.”³¹

Evangelical leaders need to reassess what they are doing, where they are heading, and what is driving them. All leaders must ask, “Am I doing this because I love God and His people, or because I desire worldly recognition? Am I fulfilling the Great Commission? Am I preparing and strengthening my sheep for spiritual warfare?” Indeed, all Christians need to assess their spiritual standing. As Paul warned: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (1 Timothy 4:3–4).

The evangelical movement needs to return to its scriptural roots and refocus on teaching sound theology derived from Scripture—especially the Genesis account of a supernatural creation some six thousand years ago, and the subsequent catastrophic global Flood, since these truths are fundamental to the meaning and coherency of the Christian worldview and Gospel. In addition, sound, biblically based theology is necessary for both Christian ethics and practice. Therefore, we do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them a true, undistorted picture of who God is and His acts in history, along with a clearly articulated view of the mission with which we have been entrusted. Our ultimate goal should be to stand in front of our God at the coming of His kingdom and hear Him declare, “Well done good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21).

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- (1) point of view, (2) characterization, (3) dialogue, (4) narration framework or glue, (5) plot, and (6) repetition. All of these elements are clearly exhibited in the early chapters of Genesis. The point of view is clearly that of an observer on earth. The Serpent is characterized as shrewd and cunning. Dialogue occurs between God and Adam, Adam and Eve, and the Serpent and Eve. The grammatical constructions outlined above form the narration framework, and the plot involves the creation of mankind in the image of God in a pristine universe, mankind’s rebellion against his Creator, and the cursing of creation as a consequence. The account also contains a great deal of repetition. E.g. “And then God said ...”, “Then there was evening and then there was morning—the Xth day”, and “God saw that it was good.”
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