

THE *JOURNAL OF THE*
EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY:
RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT AT THE OCCASION
OF THE FIFTIETH YEAR OF ITS PUBLICATION

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Thank you, Ron, and thank you, Alan, for summarizing for us the first 40 years or so of the history of the publication of the *Journal*. It is a privilege and a sacred stewardship to serve the Society as *JETS* editor, and I want to thank the executive committee and all of you for your trust, encouragement, and support. Since I assumed the editorship in 1999, I have attempted to continue in the fine tradition of the *Journal*, both in terms of quantity and quality. In terms of quantity, page numbers have increased several times in the last few years and presently stand at over 200 pages per issue, for a total of almost a thousand pages a year. Just this year we published close to 700 pages of articles and over 250 pages of book reviews.

In terms of quality, as many of you know, the *Journal* is a fully refereed journal. What this means is that every serious contribution is reviewed anonymously by one or several experts in the field, and that normally as the Editor I act on the recommendation of these reviewers. I think one thing that makes *JETS* particularly unique is the broad range of articles we publish, from Old and New Testament studies to Systematic Theology and Church History to Preaching and Missions and other disciplines. Producing the *Journal* is a team effort, and I would be amiss not to thank my book review editors, the editorial committee, the many referees, and our typesetter, Eisenbrauns, for their valuable and indispensable contribution.

If you believe in the viability of our *Journal*, there are several things you can do to enhance its stature. You can use *JETS* in your research and cite relevant articles in your writing. You can submit your work to the *Journal* and entrust us with publishing your best research. You can also speak well about the *Journal* to your colleagues, including those who may regard it lightly, frowning on our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture. I am certainly excited about our *Journal* and about publishing and promoting first-rate evangelical scholarship as I continue to serve in this role.

As you know, this year it has been my joy to edit, not only the *Journal*, but also the anniversary volume, *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* published by

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Crossway. For our remaining time together I would like to summarize for you some of the main contributions of the book and conclude with a brief assessment of the future of the Evangelical Theological Society and the *Journal* and of evangelicalism as a whole. Hopefully, this will whet your appetite to read the whole volume, maybe over Christmas break, if not before.

I. INTRODUCTION

Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism? Where are we going as evangelicals? With the passing of a generation of leaders in our movement in recent years, evangelicalism is somewhat in ferment and transition, and I believe we are at a critical juncture which presents us with both challenges and opportunities. The purpose of *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* is to gather seminal presidential addresses over the course of the *Journal's* 50-year history so that insights from the past can serve as guides for the future. I am convinced that *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* is a timely compilation that can help us chart our course for the years to come. But don't take my word for it. Here is what some of evangelicalism's leaders have to say about the volume:

Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School and a senior editor of *Christianity Today*, says, "This anthology of ETS presidential addresses shows how . . . an unswerving commitment to the totally truthful Word of God written and the transforming message through the living Word of God, Jesus Christ—has guided the evangelical academy for the past half-century. This book has both historic importance and contemporary relevance for the issues evangelicals face today."

David Wells, Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell, and one of our plenary speakers this year, writes, "This book gives us a snapshot of evangelical scholars engaging their world over the last fifty years. It is a valuable history. But more than that, it also shows just how difficult it is to preserve Christian orthodoxy, constantly beset as it is by questions, challenges, and perplexities. This calls for both fidelity and wisdom and these presidents showed that they had what was needed."

And John Woodbridge, Research Professor of Church History at Trinity, comments, "For those who think evangelical Christians are intellectually blinkered when they uphold the infallibility or inerrancy of Holy Scripture, this book should give genuine pause. It constitutes a veritable treasure trove of sparkling insights and reflections upon the meaning, importance, and biblical warrant of the doctrine. In fact, a belief in the Bible's infallibility represented the central tradition of the Christian churches . . . until at least the mid-nineteenth century. Today's evangelicals reside squarely in that great Christian tradition."

These words are a tribute to our Society and to many of you who have shaped the life of the ETS in significant ways in the past decades. I think we can be grateful to God for all that he has done, and for his faithful servants who have defended the integrity of his Holy Word. This is truly a moment of celebration. Sometimes we are too focused on problems and controversies and forget to give thanks to God. I believe that tonight providence has

presented us with a golden opportunity to reflect on the 50 years of publication of the *Journal* and to celebrate the gift of leaders God has given to the Society. Many of these are present today, and I would like to ask all past ETS presidents in attendance (and our President-Elect and future president) to please stand up for a moment so that we can recognize them for their contribution to the life of our Society.

I would also like to express my personal appreciation to the past editors of the *Journal*. Thank you, Ron, for your many years of faithful service as editor and for your fine summary a few moments ago of the “Youngblood years.” And thank you, Alan, for covering the early years of the *Journal*, including Sam Schultz’s tenure as editor, so capably. In the remainder of our time together, as mentioned, I would like to review with you the contributions of our past presidents that are featured in *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* I have served with several of them on the executive committee and have come to know and appreciate them and their visionary leadership deeply on a personal level.

II. QUO VADIS, EVANGELICALISM?

But before I do this let me share with you for just a moment some of the interesting tidbits I discovered while working on *Quo Vadis?* Did you know, for example, that several presidential addresses were never published in the *Journal* and as far as I know are no longer available to us today? (And I should add that if any of you happen to have any of these addresses I am about to mention in your personal possession, I would love for you to come forward after this meeting and to let me have these so we can publish them in some appropriate way in the future.) These lost presidential addresses include: Allan MacRae’s “Challenges of Evangelical Scholarship” (delivered in 1960); R. Laird Harris’s “The Cosmology of the Hebrews” (1961); Burton Goddard’s “Evangelical Theological Stewardship” (1964); Kenneth Kantzer’s “Blueprint for Evangelical Strategy” (1968); and Gleason Archer’s “The Glorious Liberty of the Children of God” (1986).

I tried to locate these addresses, particularly those relevant to the topic of the ETS *Festschrift*, but unfortunately in each case was unsuccessful. With regard to Allan MacRae, I contacted Wayne Sparkman, director of the PCA Historical Center in St. Louis, MO, where many of MacRae’s papers are kept, yet he did not succeed in locating MacRae’s ETS presidential address, even though the Center had just received over a dozen boxes containing MacRae’s materials and had started going through these.

I also got in touch with Burton Goddard, who responded in a note dated February 28 of this year, writing, “Sorry. I do not have what you request.” (I am told that Burton has since gone to be with the Lord.)

Dick Kantzer, son of Kenneth Kantzer, informed me in a message on February 22 that he was unable to locate his father’s ETS address, adding, “It is also possible that my father recycled portions of that speech and literally cut and stapled it into any number of other presentations, since those were the days he was constantly working to build and shape evangelical institutions.”

I was also disappointed that I could not include an address by one of the towering figures of the American evangelical movement of the last century, Carl F. H. Henry. Henry delivered his ETS presidential address on the topic of justification (in 1969), a very important topic, though not the subject of the ETS anniversary volume. Upon checking, I did discover that Henry delivered the banquet address at the founding meeting of the Society, December 27–28, 1949, in Cincinnati, OH, on “Fifty Years of American Theology and the Contemporary Need,” which led to the publication of Henry’s *Fifty Years of Protestant Theology* the following year, a volume still very much worth reading. However, I was not able to locate Henry’s banquet address itself.

Finally, Roger Nicole told me in two pieces of written correspondence of his presidential address, given in 1956, the year prior to the first publication of the *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Roger writes that he delivered his address before some 80 people at the most at Westminster Theological Seminary. His address was entitled something like “Progress and Prospects in the ETS.” He writes that, “Having moved my library twice since 1956, I don’t have the text of this address.”

After acknowledging these few instances where I have come up empty, let me now share some brief words of appreciation for each of those ETS presidents whose addresses *are* included in the *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* volume. I did not have the privilege to know personally Ned Stonehouse, Warren Young, and Gordon Clark, who delivered the first three addresses included in the book, but I have the greatest appreciation for the contribution of these men in laying a foundation for our Society during its early years (1957–1970).

The first address by Ned Stonehouse bore the title, “The Infallibility of Scripture and Evangelical Progress” (1957). In this address, Stonehouse combines a very keen intellect with a firm commitment to biblical inerrancy. In essence, Stonehouse argued that, contrary to what some allege, rather than being a hindrance to true evangelical progress, a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is actually an indispensable prerequisite to it. In this he turned the tables on his opponents who argued that inerrancy presents a hindrance to the open-minded investigation of Scripture. To the contrary, Stonehouse believed that the evangelical commitment to the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture would prove to be a liberating and energizing force by which we “lay hold with all our powers upon the Word of God in order that all our thoughts and ways may come under his control.” I believe Stonehouse was exactly right and he and others like him left us an important foundation on which to build the house of responsible, faithful evangelical scholarship.

In the second address included in *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* Warren Young spoke on “Whither Evangelicalism?” (1958). Young believed that the ETS and the evangelical movement at large would progress if their theology, while grounded in “the unchanging Truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and recorded in our unchanging Bible,” was to explore creatively ways of addressing the ever-changing world around us. This is a very apt way of putting the challenge that continues to be before us. Young, somewhat prophetically, urged that there should be room for this kind of creative exploration in the ETS, or progress would likely be stifled. As a postscript, I should

add that Roger Nicole informs me that “Warren Young resigned from ETS very shortly after his presidency, developing doubts regarding the viability of believing in the inerrancy of the autographs that we do not have,” an illegitimate response to a legitimate concern.

Moving on to the third address, Gordon Clark’s “The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow,” what I appreciate about this address is, similar to Stonehouse, Clark’s unflinching commitment to a high view of Scripture and biblical inerrancy in conjunction with a very sharp intellect. In his address, for example, he includes a lengthy rebuttal of one ETS member who resigned his membership saying it was “spiritually unnecessary and intellectually impossible to accept the last clause of the Society’s doctrinal basis” regarding inerrancy. Still, Clark commended this person for his integrity, saying it was better for him to resign honestly than to remain dishonestly, and this, I believe, also continues to be true today.

This leads me, briefly, to the next, second, period showcased in the volume, which you may call “The Maturing Movement” and which encompasses the decades between 1971 and 1999. The next ETS president whose address is included in the volume—and one whom many of us know very well—is Stan Gundry (his address bore the title “Evangelical Theology: Where *Should* We Be Going?”). One of the many things I appreciate about Stan is that he is not afraid to face what may be uncomfortable complexities in our dealing with Scripture and the Christian faith. As I say in the foreword to the book, Stan exemplifies “the type of honest self-examination and openness to the evidence” that he calls for “in dealing with thorny issues defying simplistic resolution.” Stan also is convinced of the importance of hermeneutics and global missions, something many of us likewise firmly believe are vital issues for us as evangelicals to pursue and practice.

The next address in the volume is by Alan Johnson, whom you’ve already heard speak a few minutes ago. As many of you will remember, Alan delivered his address on the topic “The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice?” The question Alan sought to tackle was, and still is, are the tools used by the practitioners of the historical-critical method themselves hopelessly tainted by anti-supernaturalist presuppositions so as to render them useless for inerrantists or can they be transformed in the hands of Bible-believing scholars to serve as useful means of studying various aspects of Scripture? Johnson answered cautiously in the affirmative, and again I tend to agree. I appreciate Alan’s sound and balanced judgment, especially in the areas of ethics, hermeneutics, and New Testament studies. I am particularly grateful for his advocacy of a hermeneutical wisdom that seeks to avoid both undiscerning accommodation to critical methods and a reactionary retreat into fideism and deductive thinking.

Moisés Silva, in the next address entitled “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?” spent much of his time urging evangelicals to heed James Barr’s critique of what he called “fundamentalists” in his book *Fundamentalism*, even though he strongly objected to Barr’s tendentious description of “fundamentalism.” In this, I believe, Moisés exemplifies the virtue of being willing to listen to the legitimate points of criticism even by those who in many ways are themselves biased if not ignorant of who

evangelicals are. This is truly a mark of wisdom, because it would be very easy to dismiss someone like Barr as an outsider and as ill-informed (or worse), but Silva did not do that. And I think this is a very important quality for us as evangelicals: to hear criticisms where they may be legitimate by those outside our movement.

The first address chosen under the third and final rubric, “Recent Reflections,” drawn from the years 2000 through 2007), is that of Darrell Bock. Darrell delivered one of the most far-ranging presidential addresses in recent memory (as well as one of the longest, I might add) on the topic of the present and future of evangelicalism in 2001. He said that, as the ETS, we should be a “purpose-driven Society” (with a nod to Rick Warren; as many of us know, Darrell has been trying to land a bestseller like *The Purpose-Driven Life* for a long time, but I guess “The Purpose-Driven ETS” didn’t sell quite as well as *The Purpose-Driven Life*). Bock says that this large, all-encompassing purpose, properly conceived, is the church’s missional mandate, and in this, as we shall see, Darrell is far from being alone. What I appreciate most about Darrell, and what I believe he contributes to the evangelical movement at large and to our Society in particular, is the virtue of majoring on the majors. It is commendable how he seeks to view current crises or issues within the larger context of the history of evangelicalism and within the framework of the church’s missionary mandate. This has served us especially well in dealing with the most recent controversy in our Society surrounding Open Theism.

Another shining light in our Society is Millard Erickson. Millard delivered an extremely helpful ETS presidential address, entitled “Evangelical Theological Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century” (2002). In characteristic humility, he referred to this as his “I Have a Hope” speech. In a quiet but nonetheless penetrating way, this is a stirring speech indeed, and I would urge you to reread it (or to read it for the first time) in the anniversary volume in which it is included. In my view Millard’s address is one of those rare instant classics, invaluable for all of us who aspire to craft better arguments and who endeavor to teach our students to do the same.

The final address included in the volume is by Craig Blaising, and it is truly a fitting conclusion to the volume, as it is entitled “Faithfulness: A Prescription for Theology” (delivered two years ago in November 2005). Like Bock, Blaising roots ETS’s mission and evangelical scholarship, rightly understood, in the church’s missionary mandate. This seems to reflect a growing consensus in many circles. Here Craig’s maturity of judgment, and especially his level-headedness, is evident when he critically dissects books such as Bart Ehrman’s *Lost Christianities*. Thank you, Craig, and thank you, all, for your vital contributions to the ETS.

III. CONCLUSION

I conclude. As I reflect on the ETS *Festschrift*, dedicated to this Society and to its *Journal*, I believe *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* bears telling testimony to the maturing of the evangelical movement over the past half-century. In the early years of the Society, the common affirmation of inerrancy provided the basis for scholarly exploration, and while in subsequent years a variety

of issues came to the fore that were debated vigorously, inerrancy has never been set aside from its place as the critical cornerstone on which the Society was established.

Recently one writer sought to argue that affirming inerrancy on the basis of God's truthfulness is fallacious and unduly deductive in its reasoning and logic. Instead, we should look at the way in which the canon was determined by the church of the first centuries. As a biblical scholar, I think I can see where this writer is coming from, but at the same time I wonder if the proposal is unduly disjunctive. If Scripture is the Word of God, and if God is truthful (which he certainly is), why would it be illegitimate to hold that, as the Word of God, and on the basis of God's truthfulness, Scripture is "therefore" wholly and infallibly true? To be sure, inerrancy must not be construed so tightly that the doctrine is domesticated and narrowed to serve the partisan interests of those who strenuously argue for particular methodologies or denominational distinctives. But I believe that after over 50 years of the existence of our Society, the wisdom of our founders has been amply demonstrated and vindicated, and it will be hard to improve on it in the years to come.

In this maturation of the Society over the past half-century, the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* has had a vital role as the publishing organ of the Society, helping to fulfill its purpose "[t]o foster conservative biblical scholarship by providing a medium for the oral exchange and written expression of thought and research in the general field of the theological disciplines as centered in the Scriptures." Delivery systems have changed, and will continue to change, but the contribution made by our *Journal* will continue, thanks to the excellent contributions of so many of you. Thank you again for a wonderful evening celebrating our Society and the *Journal*. Let me close in prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for all that you have done for us, both in revealing yourself to us and in redeeming us from our sin and calling us into your service. We are mindful, Lord Jesus, of your final prayer before your crucifixion, and I would like to pray a portion of this prayer specifically for this special group of people, my brothers and sisters in Christ here in the ETS, asking that what you prayed for your disciples would also become an increasing reality in our midst. And this is what you prayed, and this I pray for all of us today:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

I pray, Lord Jesus, that we would become perfectly one, even as you and the Father are one, so that the world may know and believe that the Father sent you and that you loved them even as the Father loved you. And this I pray in Jesus' precious and holy name, and for his glory. Amen.