

THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN ETS: WHERE SHOULD WE GO? A LOOK AT JESUS STUDIES AND OTHER EXAMPLE CASES

DARRELL L. BOCK*

Certainly, mankind without Christianity conjures up a dismal prospect. The record of mankind *with* Christianity is daunting enough. . . . In the last generation, with public Christianity in headlong retreat, we have caught our first, distant view of a de-christianized world, and it is not encouraging.¹

I. INTRODUCTION: ON BOUNDARIES—A DIVINE VOW AND THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN ETS

Our theme this year is boundary-setting. So I want to consider how we should discuss questions about drawing boundaries. Is our obligation only to the truth? Does the way we argue for the truth matter, not just in terms of method and the “biblical facts” but also in terms of how we address each other? Should our goal in the ETS be to draw more boundaries or something else? If more boundaries are to be drawn, then how should it be done—*ad hoc* one issue at a time or in a wholesale revision of our statement? More fundamentally, what was the purpose of the ETS in forming an organization in 1949 that accepted people from a wide variety of ecclesiastical traditions? Why did ETS hold to one value primarily at its founding, namely, a commitment to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, a value worth reaffirming? Should the ETS function in a way that provides a niche for evangelicalism that is more difficult to place in another evangelical locale?

I will contend that our role in the ETS is unique, and so our response to contentious issues must be earnest about the truth and open to its possible configurations. That response also must be measured in how we come to judgments on hard boundaries. More importantly, I would plead that in our pursuit of internal reflection we do not lose sight of another crucial aspect of our call, that of being a servant to the church at large and that of being a witness in the world. We balance two major concerns in this Society: (1) a pursuit and affirmation of truth; and (2) a scholarly study that prepares the church to live christianly and to address a needy world. We need to be careful that both stay on our radar screen.

* Darrell Bock, research professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, 3909 Swiss Ave., Dallas, TX 75204, delivered this presidential address at the 53d annual meeting of the ETS on November 14, 2001, in Colorado Springs, CO.

¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976) 517.

There are lessons we can learn from the history of evangelicalism, from the history of the ETS, and from the possibilities that exist for evangelicals today. These lessons will help us steer clear of a penchant to be too self-absorbed. A potential preoccupation with our own internal debates may come at the expense of our fundamental mission as academics or church members. In my view, this is not a good trade for the ETS.

In turning to history, let me start with a biblical metaphor. I view it as a lodestone of our God's commitment to us. I illustrate it by making a comparison of vows. Beyond coming to Christ for many of us, wedding vows represent the most sacred moment of our lives. It is the moment when we said to our spouses, "Till death do us part." Two people commit themselves to each other for life. My comparison is an important reminder as we begin. For God in Christ also has given his bride a vow. He will bring his church to himself as a cleansed, spotless bride (Eph 5:26–27). Sometimes when I hear all the negativity about what is happening in the church or in evangelicalism or when I read of the decline of institutions originally committed to God, I ask myself, where is our faith in God that his vow to us is his unalterable promise? God has vowed "till glory makes us complete." If we fail, he will not fail to raise up within the world and his church those who are faithful to him and his Word. His vow does not relieve us of spiritual stewardship in our service to him. However, it should motivate us to remember that he is committed to supporting us as we look to him for guidance and discernment (James 1:5–8).

With this vow as our backdrop, consider a 1993 editorial from our former secretary/treasurer, Sam Kistemaker, who penned an encouraging farewell note in *JETS* as he stepped down from the role he had from 1974–1992. He spoke as a second-generation ETS member to the third generation. He traced the growth of the society from seminary campuses to meeting in hotels. He noted ETS's growth from 600 members to 2100 (we are now over 3000). He closed his editorial saying,

I am pleased to meet numerous young and able scholars at our regional and national meetings. This bodes well for ETS. We encourage younger scholars to take leadership roles and boldly present evangelical scholarship at the cutting edge of academic pursuits. As the older guard passes the torch to the younger generation we trust that, with the Lord's blessings, ETS may continue to be true to its stated purpose: "To foster conservative Biblical scholarship by providing a medium for oral exchange and written expression of thought and research in the general field of the theological disciplines as centered in the Scriptures."

Sam surely was speaking directly to those, like me, who registered with him at meeting after meeting, in my case beginning in 1976. Sam closed his tenure passing on the purpose statement of the Constitution of the Society written in 1949. It serves as a founding vow of direction that leads a purpose-driven ETS—we are to foster conservative scholarship through oral and written dialogue and research for the theological disciplines while being centered in Scripture. How does such an organization do this and main-

tain both its scholarly, societal, and theological integrity? Can we be cutting-edge without cutting ourselves up to death?

II. A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF OUR EVANGELICAL ROOTS

I know my introduction has been elaborate, but my membership in this uniquely positioned society has been one of the treasures of my professional life. So I, as part of the third generation in ETS, want to speak primarily to the fourth—to a group of up-and-coming younger scholars who will lead the Society into the middle of this century and face the mega-challenges of a world in significant cultural and philosophical flux.

My first point in terms of the Society is: We are not evangelicalism, we are only a section of it. Appropriate humility will help us clearly define our role, as we pursue our commitment to truth and to the church.

History shows us this. The roots of the term “evangelicalism” are those of the Reformation. The Reformers used this term of themselves even before the term “Protestant” became popular.² Erasmus fought with Luther over the use of the term. A result of these roots can be seen in the fact the Protestant church in Germany is still known as *evangelisch*, not Lutheran. At the center of its confession stood justification by faith. In Calvin, an emphasis developed in terms of the broader issues of sanctification (a sanctified life) and regeneration (Spirit-rooted). The regenerate is transformed and moves to fruitfulness. Justification is once for all, and sanctification follows it, in contrast to Lutherans who see justification as a process. For Calvin, works are a result of justification, not justification being the result of works as in much medieval Catholic theology. According to Grenz, word, sacrament, and later discipline, including church discipline (under the Puritans) became the marks of the pure church, also known as the invisible church and the church elect.² Assuring the individual of salvation became a key concern. Such assurance became grounded in evidence of sanctification.

Alongside this grew a German pietism, tied to names like Philipp Jakob Spener, where the emphasis turned to the universal priesthood and the value of a trained laity, who should enhance the work of the church. Worship, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship were keynotes here. The new birth is the principal article of this approach. The focus was a transformed heart leading to proper living. Personal conversion, not the sacrament of baptism, became more important as evidence of one’s belonging. Testimonies became the key way to define one’s entry into the church pointing to experiential conscious experience as a key component of the evangelical ethos. Assurance of salvation emerged through the nature of these experiences. Sound familiar? They did not seek a pure church, but a “church within the church.” Those who sought a pure church struggled to find it as the famous story of Roger Williams makes clear. Distinct approaches to evangelical commitment were emerging, though Jonathan Edwards with his emphasis

² Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 26.

on religious affections seems to represent a blend of the emphases, by wedding content and the heart closely together. This also meant, however, a focus on the individual over corporate concerns and/or corporate endeavors. Some ask if modernity with its emphasis on the “provable” experience (as eventually powerfully expressed in Schleiermacher) made this shift sociologically possible.³

The second historical stage came within America and the two revivals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Here the key figures are Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, the Wesleys, and Charles Finney and those in their wake. While the first Great Awakening was largely Calvinistic, in the Second Awakening evangelism and pragmatics were wed together, along with a pietistic Methodism less driven by a focus on divine decree than the Reformers were.⁴ Here concerns led not only to a preaching of the gospel but a move that led to social concern (called “moral reform” then) in terms of the poor, the slaves, women, and finally temperance. All the impetus for these concerns came from evangelicals as there was no social gospel out there yet. These concerns emerged from a view of a life of holiness that was different than the way the world lived and that marked out the powerful, life-changing presence of the Spirit.

Interestingly, these moves had eschatological roots as well. Most people today do not know that Jonathan Blanchard, founder of Wheaton College, was very sympathetic to postmillennial views. In fact, he affirmed both premillennialism and postmillennialism simultaneously!⁵ Blanchard once argued that, “Society is perfect where what is right in theory exists in fact; where practice coincides with principle, and the Law of God is the Law of the Land.” Imagine someone arguing this today as an obtainable standard for our nation. And, in fact, some still do, while others have flirted with the idea.⁶ Recently David Chilton said, “Our goal is world dominion under Christ’s Lordship, a ‘world takeover’ if you will . . . we are the shapers of world history.”⁷ I note the point, not to say I agree with this triumphalistic mission statement, for I do not. I note it to show how broad evangelicalism

³ Ibid. 49–50.

⁴ Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994 [1976]). I am purposefully combining a discussion of the first two Great Awakenings in North America. The First Awakening emerged in the mid-eighteenth century with Whitefield and Edwards as catalysts in a largely Reformed and Calvinistic revival. The Second broke out in the early nineteenth century and was more diverse, reflecting the growing influence of Methodism. In part I combine the discussion, because the First Awakening, being so Calvinist in orientation, was in one sense but an expansion of the emphases of the Reformation, while the Second was a reaction in part to emphases of the First Awakening and its Reformation roots. My basic point is how diverse the roots of American evangelicalism have been for centuries.

⁵ Paul M. Bechtel, *Wheaton College: A Heritage Remembered 1860–1984* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1984) 40. For the simultaneous affirmation of pre- and postmillennialism, see *Christian Cynosure* (April 5, 1877).

⁶ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard, 1992) 303–4, notes the Dominion Theology of Rushdoony, Grimstead, North, and Chilton to fit here and argues Pat Robertson flirted with the idea.

⁷ For this citation, see Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988) 205.

was centuries ago. Interestingly, during this key period of the nineteenth century, British and European evangelicals formed the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. It is the ancestor to today's World Evangelical Fellowship.

Underlying all of this was a commitment to Scripture (*sola scriptura*) initially against the appeal of Roman Catholics to their tradition and later in reaction to the rise of a secularized rationality and the scientific claims about the world and then to subsequent exclusively experientially-based moves to theological liberalism.⁸ The pressure understandably became immense to defend everything in the midst of this growing chaos and attack on the faith. This defense became tightly allied to a literal or correspondence model of truth, so that the hermeneutics of a Milton Terry could be "amillennial" and "literal" at the same time. Some have marked out that evangelicalism as rooted in the Reformation has five "*solas*": *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, and *solus Deo gloria*. Here is a nice central evangelical core to add to the Trinitarian-Christological core of the early church noted above.⁹

Our battle with modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked evangelicalism with a worthy passion for truth in every detail. Christianity as truth needed a fully developed defense. Scripture was and needs to remain a central feature of that apologetic. The truth was defended as part of a "war" of worldviews, for the battle was not only intellectual, but more importantly spiritual. A sense of life or death pervaded these debates as biblically-based belief fought for its survival. But in adopting this "battle" approach to the culture, the world, and to differences within the visible church, conservatives also took on a similar approach to more internal disputes among those who clearly were believers. The rationale was that the slightest departure from truth would lead us down the slippery slope to abandon Scripture, revelation, and truth. The position was understandable at the time throughout the first half of the twentieth century, because the survival of theological conservatism was at stake with liberalism seemingly having emerged numerically and administratively victorious (at least for a time) in most denominations. But God made his vow to the church long before all of this happened. His promise was and is "till glory makes us complete." And in his mysterious, yet sovereign way, he acted to preserve the believing church and kept it alive thanks in great part to the faithful work of those who formed the earlier generations of the ETS and others like them. Defeat at one point looked quite possible, but, as the song goes, "the times they were a' changin'." God was still at work.

At the start of the twenty-first century, we see that conservative evangelical theology has survived, because many were diligent to remain faithful to Scripture, committed to Christ, and concerned about the world, even as they pursued doctrinal reflection. Institutions in many cases were rebuilt from scratch and now thrive. A few other institutions were recovered. Our recovery is so strong that it has reached a level where what we may have

⁸ Grenz, *Renewing the Center* 53–80.

⁹ *Modern Reformation* 10/2 (March/April 2001) 33.

most to fear is our desire to court a cultural and social popularity at the possible expense of our message. This survival might have been hard to contemplate at the turn of the last century. God changed the times and worked again to keep his vow—"till glory makes us complete." We are still on that journey; and risks still remain, but so does God's vow. Evangelicalism became vibrant, as the believing generations of the twentieth century also tried to stay focused on addressing the larger world in which they found themselves.¹⁰ ETS was born in this context fifty-two years ago. Paradoxically, at a time when the theological fighting was the hottest, foundations also were laid for a missional outreach that is now reaping much fruit around the world. The combination—being theological and missional—is no accident. It is a lesson for us as we face this new era of challenge. It is why theology must remain focused on its center in Christ and the transformation he brings by the Spirit and also be missional to survive, even as it keeps an eye on being faithful to the truth.

III. WHERE WE STAND TODAY IN THE ETS: WHO WE ARE

Today evangelicalism is vibrant with a whole set of freshly constructed institutions and structures of which the ETS is a prime example. As a force for renewal in the church, evangelicalism, which I would define as people committed to Christ, his gospel, and the primacy of Scripture, is growing worldwide, but hardly a dominating presence. There is no question that we also have the potential to grow in impact. However, the road has not always been smooth, nor will it be. Voices of despair for the state of evangelicalism continue to ring out warnings. These warnings cannot and should not be ignored, but neither should they be overstated. Maintaining balance on a tightrope always means keeping one's arms, both left and right, outstretched and waving to adjust.

My assessment of our current state leads to my proposal. It is grounded in what led the ETS to be founded as the type of organization it has been for over half a century. My thesis is that not all evangelical institutions are created for equal ends. It is essential to know what type of organization one has and in which one is operating.

One can examine recent issues of *Modern Reformation* magazine and see in the Reformed-dominated *Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals* a sense of the need for open dialogue and pursuit of defense of the truth while arguing

¹⁰ For a fascinating study of the impact of evangelicalism throughout America's history and from the perspective of four Great Awakenings, see the work by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Fogel argues that evangelicalism has understood the debilitating effects of technology on culture better than any other group because it has continued to value spiritual concerns that technology tends to ignore and that the technologizing of society often eviscerates. By egalitarianism, Fogel does not mean issues of gender as in our theological discussions, but a whole array of social issues that pertain to equality in American society including those of race, class, and opportunity. For more substantive comments on Fogel's important study, see n. 32 below.

that certain locales within evangelicalism need to be places where discussions can occur with some time given patiently to sort things out. Such institutions are locations where discussion and interaction takes place, while other institutions are contexts where decisions are made. There are also times when each institution must decide hard questions and make tough calls. However, the process needs to be deliberative and patient before deciding whether or not to draw lines. For example, Thomas Oden, no fan of openness theology, complains about the use made of his critical remarks on openness by some in the Reformed tradition and says in *Modern Reformation*, in an issue dedicated to the topic *Our Debt to Heresy: Mapping Boundaries*,

I remain committed to irenic theology and the peace of the church. I regret that I have been brought into a conflict that requires patient dialogue and caring conversation. It is with charity that such conversations should proceed, as I tried to argue in that article [in *Christian Century*]: "If 'reformists' insist on keeping the boundaries of heresy open, however, they must be resisted with charity." That does not mean "anything goes," but that the debate on divine foreknowledge as with other controverted questions ought to take place with civility, charity, and empathy.¹¹

The same concern appears in an earlier issue of the same magazine given to the topic *Evangelicalism™ Who Owns It?* Michael Horton compares evangelicalism to a "village green" to be distinguished from the local churches. He says,

Our churches are spheres of discipline, but Evangelicalism is a village green where common causes are made and discussions occur. That frees us up to interact with and, where possible, seek agreement and cooperation in common tasks. There is no power of excommunication in the village green, but that should ensure protection for irascible Calvinists and Lutherans as well as tenderhearted Arminians, as the caricature has it.¹²

In the same issue there is a warning from an article originally written in 1980 by Lewis Smedes about the danger of confusing evangelicalism with the church. Here is Smedes's key claim,

Evangelicalism as a power structure, with hierarchy and all, is probably a fantasy. . . . This is a dangerous fantasy because it leads evangelicals to act it out, and this means they ignore the real church and invest their energy only in the quasi-church called *evangelicalism*. . . . Evangelical people need to be protected from *evangelicalism* and its hierarchy. Evangelical theology needs to be free from power plays called by party leaders. Evangelical theology needs to be the theology of and for the church.¹³

Though I believe Smedes overstates his case rhetorically (given the 1980s setting of his remarks in the very worthy debate that took place over

¹¹ *Modern Reformation* 10/3 (May/June 2001) 42.

¹² *Modern Reformation* 10/2 (March/April 2001) 20.

¹³ "Evangelicalism—A Fantasy," *Reformed Journal* 30/2 (1980) 2–3; also, *Modern Reformation* 10/2 (March/April, 2001) 27.

inerrancy and in a context where he is defending a move away from such a commitment to Scripture), there is a ring of truth in what he affirms. There is no clear structure of accountability within evangelicalism that allows it to speak with either one voice or as a monolithically clearly defined sociological-religious entity. As we all know in our souls, evangelicalism, as large and significant as it has become, is a rather amorphous entity, no matter how tied we are to the label. Even we as the Evangelical Theological Society are but one voice in this rather large and growing village. In fact, the village is becoming a cosmopolis as it spreads around the world. The ETS's voice is an institution committed to dialogue about exegesis, theology, and theological history grounded in a commitment to Scripture. However, within the ETS and in our corner of the city we must be careful not to affirm that possessing a distinct reading of Scripture but still embracing Scripture wholly, even if "they" possess a minority reading, requires removal from the Society simply because others in the Society regard it as inconsistent with our doctrinal base. I will return to this contentious issue later because there is a time when removal may be called for, but my main concern is that if this is done, it should be done very deliberately and only with the most obvious and central of issues where a substantial portion of the Society as a whole makes as informed a decision as is possible. As an academic society we must not merely react to jet streams and downdrafts of opinion circulating through the village green. We should be careful to be as reflective as we can about such decisions.

In yet another article in the same edition of *Modern Reformation*, Shane Rosenthal distinguishes between the circles of one's own confessional and church tradition and the larger public square, where we function outside such circles. Keeping those areas distinct, even though this distinction raises important ecclesiological questions about the visible and invisible church, will help us determine that boundaries may work differently in a tradition-specific confessional context (the circles) versus a tradition-inclusive context (the public square). My argument would be that ETS is an entity that was designed primarily to be in the square. Local churches operate in the circle, while denominations and seminaries as self-defining entities can end up in either slot, depending on the doctrinal base they affirm. The important thing for each institution is to be aware of what space they occupy and why. Over half a century ago, ETS indicated what type of institution it was when it purposefully made its doctrinal statement so short. (Actually, the doctrinal element of the Society has never been called a doctrinal statement, but a doctrinal basis. Founders were well aware that this basis of membership and fellowship was never designed to be a comprehensive statement.)

I am arguing that the ETS is a public square institution, intentionally designed to be such. I think there are obvious reasons this is so both in terms of our makeup and our mission. So I turn to mission, which I think should give us the context to help us define what we should be as a purpose-driven Society and how we should go about making tough calls in areas of doctrinal contention.

IV. OUR CALL AS PART OF THE CHURCH:
THE MISSIONAL MANDATE

Let's put evangelicalism in a global context. Think with me globally about mission. Here are statistics related to Christian presence and evangelicals worldwide. In the past 25 years, the total number of Christians grew by 60% from 1.25 billion to 1.95 billion. Most of this growth was not in North America, but in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. However, the Christian percentage of the world population remained stagnant at approximately 34%, while the percentage of Muslims increased from 15.9% to 19.6%. The number of Muslims has doubled since 1970 from 564 million to 1.3 billion. The main reason is their high birth rate. Today 58% of 600 million Protestants worldwide live in Africa and Asia. This leaves 1.3 billion who belong to another major tradition. Evangelicals had an annual growth rate of 5%, from 125 million in 1970 to over 300 million. Even with such growth evangelicals make up about 15.3% of those who claim the title Christian.¹⁴ Surely these are estimated figures, but they are revealing. We, as evangelicals, are part of a global "Christian" minority, and North American evangelicals are part of an even smaller minority of world-wide evangelicals, since North American evangelicals make up about 5% of the world's population.

Thinking in terms of mission, by 2025 there will be over 8.3 billion people in our world. Billions will need cross-cultural witness to understand the gospel. Most will live in the 10/40 window. Here is the geographical location in which the concentration of the main spiritual, ideological, social, urban, people group challenges to mission are the most prominent. This, however, is not the only key window. Discussion also involves the 4/14 children's window, where one third of the world's population is under the age of fifteen. There is also the fact of the growing urbanization of our world and the fact that more people now live in cities, including mega-cities, than outside of them. There is the 40/70 European window extending through what was the Old Soviet Union that needs to be re-evangelized. Finally there is the 35/45 Turkic window, which is largely Muslim. There are an estimated 1.2 to 1.4 billion people who have never had the chance to hear the gospel and over 95% of these individuals reside in the 10/40 window. It also is where 85% of the world's poorest and most deprived live. It is the residence of over 95% of the Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in the world.¹⁵

Major work in world religions will be needed in the future for all of us. My own daughter attending Wake Forest this year is in a religion class where efforts are being made to emphasize the similar religious roots of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity and to de-emphasize the differences. Here is where our culture will want to take the next generation. The recent tragedy of the World Trade Center attack also underscores the importance of an

¹⁴ Statistics are from the www.worldevangelical.org site, news and notes from Patrick Johnstone, director of research WEC International.

¹⁵ Statistics come from the AD2000 People CD distributed by WEF.

understanding of the various strands present in the religions of the world. Few Christians know near enough about Islam, not to mention its various permutations and mutations. Even more challenging is the fact that these world religions are often syncretized into local, folk-religious expressions, reminding us that the problem of local cultural influence (“glocalization”) on the great religious traditions is never very far from us.¹⁶ The relationship of culture and religious expression is a major part of the theological exercise, yet rare is the seminary or theological agenda that spends much time on issues of culture and sociology that so form who we are in our individual sub-communities—both religious and socio-political.¹⁷ These issues need not

¹⁶ Lyon, *Postmodernity* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 64, mentions the coined term “glocalization” to note the seemingly tension-filled fusion between globalization and its peculiar local expression, which fragments that globalization into some type of hybrid subform. Both happen simultaneously. Theological students thus need to appreciate both the global aspects of religion and their localized expressions into which they walk professionally, whether it be found in the peculiar expression of their local congregation or in the neighboring faiths they will encounter. Such realities make an awareness of contextualization that *has* taken place imperative for our students. They must be students of theology, theologies, and of culture and of cultures.

¹⁷ Perhaps nothing illustrates the problem of reading our culture well and carefully more than how Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, defines what is spiritual in an effort to raise it up as a positive value to be pursued by our culture. Like the other books analyzing our culture cited above in note four, Fogel focuses on values as they relate to quality of life issues. The study is valuable for its insights about the cultural impact of a series of phenomena in the last century that have changed and prolonged life and labor, as well as shaping new economic realities including unprecedented opportunities for the use of ever-expanding leisure time and voluntary work that contributes to the individual and society. Fogel begins the Fourth Great Awakening in the decade of the 1960s. Four sentences may suffice to show the direction of his study, “The initiative in the shaping of this new agenda has to a large extent, passed to the disciples of the Fourth Great Awakening, who have focused on issues of spiritual (immaterial) equity. The proposition may surprise those who oppose the ideology of the religious Right. However, it is the substance of the proposals, not the rhetoric, that is germane. The issue is whether these reforms are likely to contribute to greater equity in the distribution of spiritual assets that have such large effects on both the quest for self-realization and economic success in the marketplace” (pp. 12–13). What is so interesting about the thesis is that although Fogel makes spiritual issues subject to the average person’s greater concerns of self-realization and the marketplace, there is a recognition that spiritual values do impact the world quite profoundly. Interestingly, as I studied his analysis initially, I asked myself whether evangelicalism has made the same compromise when it comes to subsuming spiritual goals as a means to what in reality are viewed as greater ends in this life, namely, self-realization and success in the marketplace. These are priorities I believe Jesus would challenge, as Jesus’ instruction on money and possessions indicates. In fact, as I read on, Fogel’s analysis is more complex than the previous question suggests, for he contrasts the pursuit of self-realization and marketplace success with the “endless accumulation of consumer durables and the pursuit of pleasure” (p. 176), which is what many others who refer to self-realization mean by the term. He also distinguishes between the sacred realm (what we mean by religious faith) and the “whole range of immaterial commodities that are needed to cope with emotional trauma” that Fogel recognizes have little to do with the marketplace (p. 178). Thus what “spiritual” means for Fogel is broader than the normal evangelical or religious use of the term, showing how post-modern culture is co-opting the area of the spiritual and defining it much more broadly than it has been defined in the past. Thus for Fogel, self-realization is the pursuit of virtue (not a selfish, self-fulfillment). He defines self-realization as possessing fifteen elements (pp. 205–7): a sense of purpose, a vision of opportunity, a sense of mainstream work and life, a strong family ethic, a sense of community, a capacity to engage with diverse groups, an ethic of benevolence, a

be relegated to the periphery of the Society, especially as the United States becomes more internationalized. Many in the next generation need to tackle such questions, picking up where a few brave pioneers in this generation have left off. Or think in terms of the different elements within the North American church that are not so well represented in the Society. So, I conclude these initial historical sections reminding us that we are not evangelicalism, but a part of it, especially when evangelicalism is viewed historically and globally. And there is an immense job to be a part of the rest of the church. The mission and very makeup of the church says we have much to do—and we have barely scratched the surface of how to engage biblically the global yet local issues that dominate our current reality.

V. THE ETS IN LIGHT OF THE MISSIONAL MANDATE AND ITS HISTORY AND ROLE IN EVANGELICALISM

We as a Society are not evangelicalism. However, as ETS members, we *are* an important component of the movement, part of the reflective community in the church that is especially committed to Scripture. But our service is not merely or even primarily academic. It is to set an example for the church about engaging the Bible seriously, even in disputes, not just in what we say but how we say it. I would also argue that our purpose goes even beyond issues of content and tone. Our purpose should coincide more closely with that of the church at large, namely, giving serious energy to how we should reach a needy world—an even more diverse world than existed in 1949. That world has come to our doorstep, not only through increased travel and exchange, but through the media and the world's visible, complex meshing of cultures.

I am arguing that the primary value of the ETS is the mixture that is here (and we need to do better with regard to that mixture, ethnically, in terms of gender, and internationally). ETS is one of the few places we can get this mix dialoguing and fellowshiping face to face. Here we see the church, not just our provincial sub-groups, at work together in both dialogue

work ethic, a sense of discipline, a capacity to focus and concentrate on one's effort, a capacity to resist the love of hedonism, a capacity for self-education, a thirst for knowledge, an appreciation of quality and self-esteem. What Fogel defines as spiritual is amazingly devoid of any transcendent element, although it might have room for it. The spiritual content here is decidedly anthropocentric and humanistic. The place of the Spirit (capital S on purpose) in spiritual endeavor is missing. Here is what evangelicalism is up against in addressing a culture that wants spiritual values but desires to pursue virtue on anthropological terms devoid of discussion of that which is sacred or divine in any sense of the term, not to mention in terms of the God of Scripture. Here is a major reason why evangelicals cannot let go of the meta-narrative of Scripture and must be very clear about its content. The danger is that God will get lost in the cultural pursuit of a spirituality that could make little or no effort to consider or engage the living God, something evangelicals would not recognize as spirituality at all. The potential for confusion in engaging our society about this topic, then, is immense. A real risk is that some evangelicals in our churches may have definitions of the spiritual that are as much defined by Fogel's categories as they are by issues raised by the presence of the living God and his Spirit in one's life.

and debate around the Bible. I think the founders were wise to have the Bible be the rallying point and leave it as the central part of the confessional statement. Still, we face important questions. Do we fill out our identity with a longer, more complete confession? Or do we, as a Society, keep the commitment to the Bible central and then proceed to engage the world and each other with that as the common thread? (I dare say, to switch an old theological analogy—a scarlet binding that serves as our bookmark and boundary, a binding that is not itself the center but points the way to it but pointing us to him in his trinitarian glory.)

Let us also consider the history of major debated issues within the Society. A check of the *Bulletin* and *Journal* of the ETS (established in 1958) shows that in our five decades five major issues have surfaced, about one a decade. They were: science and the Bible, especially origins (1959); inerrancy, its definition, and hermeneutics (1979); the role of historical criticism (1983); women and the Bible (1986); and now openness (2001). In all but one of these cases, the Society proceeded with its dialogue and did not even begin to move for a vote against its members. In the case where a member did leave, he did so after being asked to consider leaving. It never came to a final vote. Also, in 1990, we made one addition to our doctrinal basis to underscore our trinitarian view of the Godhead. This was something a significant percentage of the Society (80%) saw as needed. It also was a good move. But working to add such statements should be entered into with much deliberation and with special care to preserve the mix we possess and have historically had. The idea that such additions require 80% approval is wise.

Allow me to list for you two remarks that come from Presidential addresses or historical summaries about the ETS in the period running from 1959 to 1982. Listen for their theme. In 1959, pointing out the tension between creative theological work, the issue of origins, and the danger of error, Warren Young wrote in “Whither Evangelicalism?”:

This does not mean we should not evaluate the work of each other. In fact quite the contrary should be the case. It does mean, that ETS will best be fulfilling its function when sincere efforts of others are evaluated in an atmosphere unclouded by theological witch hunting. At the same time we know that we shall all make mistakes—many of them. No doubt I have made a big one this evening! But let us strive as brethren in Christ to judge the efforts of others in the spirit of love which should motivate all the work of Jesus Christ. If, as we search for the truth, we do err, let others be ready to point out the nature of the error and so lead one another back to the center of our evangelical faith. If we shall aid one another in this way, we shall make real advances for the cause of Christ and shall not deviate far, nor long, from that normative center that should always be our goal. On the other hand, if honest and sincere efforts in scholarly advancement are to be viewed in a negative atmosphere of suspicion, we shall destroy our own usefulness and with it the very purpose of our existence as a society.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 2 (1959) 14.

Or consider the remarks of Stan Gundry in 1979 on the topic “Evangelical Theology: Where *Should* We Be Going?”:

The Evangelical Society should be a forum where those with a commitment to inerrancy can come to grips with the problems of definition and hermeneutics. We (and our critics) should remember that our statement was never intended as a creed adequately summarizing what it means to be Christian or evangelical.¹⁹

John Wiseman, reviewing the history of ETS in 1982 and the shortness of the ETS doctrinal basis, wrote:

By choosing this view, that because the Bible claims to be the Word of God it is by necessity inerrant, as its sole doctrinal basis the framers of the ETS constitution did not mean to imply that other evangelical doctrines were unimportant. Rather, it was felt that such a brief theological statement would allow proper theological latitude in the membership for evangelicals holding to different denominational distinctives.²⁰

Finally, I cite Alan Johnson discussing the debate over the historical-critical method in 1982:

In our society are those who rightly warn us against the danger of unbelief expressed in our methods and against the altogether too easy capitulation to the undesirable aspects of modernity [and, if I may add, to the citation of post-modernity]. Yet we are also a Society where those involved in the refinement of critical methodologies under the magisterium of an inerrant scriptural authority can move us gently into a deeper appreciation of sacred Scripture and its full appropriation to our lives and the mission of the church in our age.²¹

Of course, that is part of what we are here to discuss this year. Does an affirmation of a commitment to inerrancy alone keep us within appropriate boundaries? I would contend it can *within our community at large*, provided we also keep a focus on what emerges from Scripture, a vibrant trinitarian doctrine as that has been defined in the earliest church.²² This can be the

¹⁹ *JETS* 22 (1979) 7.

²⁰ “Introduction,” *Index to the Bulletin/Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society vols. 1–25, 1958–1982*, p. 9.

²¹ “The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice?” *JETS* 26 (1983) 15.

²² If the ETS were to wish to adopt a fuller creed, I would argue that we should not rewrite a new one, but look to the historic creeds of the early church. One might reply that bibliology is not treated explicitly there, which is true. However, my reply would be that a commitment to Scripture was implicit in this period and was not explicit because the earliest debates in the church were not about Scripture but about carefully defining the content of its message, especially as it related to the Godhead. For works that show the ancient view of Scripture and how implicit such understanding was, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Church Doctrine of Inspiration,” in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (ed. Carl Henry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958) 205–17; Robert D. Preus, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther” and John H. Gerstner, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 357–410; and the entire volume, *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John Hannah; Chicago: Moody, 1984). For this early period of church history, the articles by Bromiley, Preus, and Hannah’s opening article in his edited volume are key. Bromiley (p. 207) speaks of the patristic authors seeing the inspiration and authority of Scripture as “self-evident.”

case, even if some of our members hover around the edges in an exploration of how that inspired Bible actually functions. Such exploration needs both to be allowed and examined.

Armed with such wisdom from our past, the critical question now for ETS is, what to do “to 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”? More importantly, how should we proceed in a society that averages a major issue once a decade?

For this type of public square institution, our forefathers made the right choice to have a short statement. ETS is neither a seminary nor a denomination. Where else could Oswald Allis, Roger Nicole, Carl Henry, John Walvoord, and others of the first generation come and interact together? Where else could they ponder the question of how to encourage the church to accomplish her mission in an intentionally reflective way, even in the midst of their differences? They gathered around an originally broad common commitment to engage the larger culture: developing a new social ethic, an intellectually credible apologetic, a bold thrust in evangelism, new institutions of education and scholarship, and transdenominational cooperation. They acknowledged an underlying spiritual unity, a unity affirmed in their commitment to the Word and to its core story, remembering where the real enemy lurked and what the real mission was.²³ They purposely kept the doctrinal basis short. Perhaps the statement remained short because in part, like the poor, such debates will always be with us. Legislating such beliefs and debates might turn the ETS into one big legislature, and we know how effective legislatures are. And so this is the appropriate place to have debate and to agree to disagree, as long as we all agree that the arguments should be grounded in a sincere attempt to work with and from a faithful Scripture.

So I am arguing that the Society is a place of dialogue within evangelicalism that evangelicalism desperately needs to preserve for that purpose. The alternative, to draw more boundaries here, is fraught with its own dangers. If we start serving as yet another doctrinal clearing house within evangelicalism, where do we stop? I fear that road is an unending one that will keep us too occupied with where we differ. What we shall lose is more precious. It is the opportunity to produce truly collaborative biblical work as evangelicals. Such work should challenge and engage our diverse culture that is rapidly trying to reshape the image of the true and Almighty God into impotent idols of various shapes and sizes. We need to be sure a sufficient quantity of our work challenges those outside our community and invites them to be open to hear his voice. Surely this concern for mission needs rekindling in our Society.

But some will say we must guard the gates of truth diligently. I agree. This is part of our purpose to discuss and deliberate about Scripture’s mes-

²³ Millard Erickson, *The New Evangelical Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1968) 31–44. Ironically again, maybe a center which leads to renewal has been around for a long time, provided we hold firm to him and the tools he has given us for understanding.

sage and keep it as a point of central focus, both as the boundary for this society and to ensure the expression of Scripture and theology's importance for evangelicalism. But I ask, if a major issue pops up on average once every decade, how can we afford to be so repeatedly self-consumed and debate each time whether to draw more lines? Will we in the process fail to challenge a religiously diverse culture clearly outside the faith?

When we do engage internally, what is needed is a mature discussion—one that allows sufficient time to reflect on what the biblical truth is.²⁴ Everyone on each side of these disputes believes, often passionately, that their side has truth, justice, and the divine way on their side, but a little humility from us all would make for better dialogue and could contribute to a healthy tone.

VI. WHERE WE CAN GO IN TAPPING A RICH POTENTIAL
AND OUR PART OF A LARGE CALL: JESUS STUDIES AND
OTHER EXAMPLES IN MOVING TOWARD CULTURAL IMPACT

So where should we be going? I want to use several different examples to suggest where we are doing well and where we are doing poorly. My goal is simple—to issue a call to the next generation of ETS members for a direction that engages issues biblically in a humble, respectful pursuit of truth and with a goal that both instructs and moves us toward mission as well as to theological edification.

I remind us of one of my key points. The call of the church to mission is immense and is a theme fundamental to the Scripture. It is a “center.” That call should contribute to the ETS's own purpose as a participant in the call, but as one church sub-group among many who share the larger call. Another key point is that the founding of ETS gave us a good, solid reason for existence. However, because the “times are a' changin' and changin' fast,” the issues we tackle may need a fresh look for new topics and categories as well as how we engage them in our new, more globalized world. So how do we proceed in light of such a staggering need and the simultaneous growing and shrinking of our globe?

I begin with my own specialty: Jesus studies. Alas, hermeneutics and method rear their ever-present heads. In ETS, there are two paradigms for Jesus studies. These paradigms date back to ETS's earliest days and precipitated the one very public departure of a member. View one argues that different presuppositions exist between evangelicals and the historical-critical method. This difference is so severe at its base that adoption of the method inevitably leads to defection from biblical fidelity, or at least severely erodes it. This approach sees the issue of method as a strict ideological

²⁴ I quite realize that the debate often is whether, when a contentious issue arises, we are in an internal discussion or are dealing with an intrusion from outside. This is why the “paramour” image opened my essay. My point is that this uncertainty as to which category we are treating requires that we function as a mature community in coming to a resolution of where our debates stand. All of us need to be sensitive to God the Spirit and engage in a careful, deliberative discussion.

clash. The argument is that we should draw boundaries and close ranks around options that honor the very words of Jesus and an openness to constant and consistent harmonization, while rejecting calls that also see historical authenticity in those places where Jesus' voice is affirmed as present without him being quoted exactly. A particular hermeneutical method is affirmed as consistently biblical, largely if not entirely closing off other options.²⁵

A second view argues that evangelicals can and should engage the opposition *and* their method. It should look for that method's inconsistencies *beyond* the presuppositional ones and expose the fact that even on those often suspect standards, the synthesis coming into our culture from that view can be exposed as seriously flawed. It argues that a healthy respect for Scripture and a modified use of such standards that reflects such respect is possible and valuable in appreciating how Scripture actually works and should be read. It keeps us from making the Bible do more than it intends. Intellectual honesty also may force us to acknowledge that critics have sometimes gotten things right. Even so, why should evangelicals be the only ones put on the defensive? If, in engaging in a careful use of Scripture, we can make a case for Jesus and the core of his teaching to the larger culture, then should we not pursue such a course and raise questions about the so-called "assured results of criticism" using that criticism to expose the problems of the alleged results? Our task in this second model is to present and defend the Scripture using all the means necessary to make the case.

The result, in my view, requires a two-pronged strategy in engaging the inside and outside debates, with the phenomena of Scripture themselves always at the forefront. I see precedent for this dual level of interaction in Scripture itself when I look at Romans 1 alongside Acts 17. Romans 1 is a scathing critique of the pagan culture, yet interestingly, when Paul addresses that culture provoked by the presence of idols in Acts 17, he could not work harder to address them in a tone of invitation *starting from their*

²⁵ This debate is as old as the reference to the topic by Alan Johnson in his ETS address in 1983. For less engagement with historical criticism are Robert L. Thomas, "Impact of Historical Criticism on Theology and Apologetics," in *The Jesus Crisis* (ed. Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 356–77; "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical: Another View," *JETS* 43 (2000) 97–111; Donald Green, "Evangelicals and *Ipsissima Vox*," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (2001) 49–68. For the careful use of such methods, see Grant Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *JETS* 42 (1999) 193–210; *idem*, "Historical Criticism: A Brief Response to Robert Thomas's 'Other View,'" *JETS* (2000) 113–17 and my "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 73–99; see as well my reviews of *The Jesus Crisis*, *BibSac* 157 (2000) 232–36; and of Green's article forthcoming in *BibSac*. The dispute I allude to here involves both the use or non-use of critical method and the issue of *ipsissima verba* (the very words of Jesus) as being present in the Gospels versus the possibility that in places we have the *ipsissima vox* (the voice of Jesus). This also is an old debate. Those favoring the use of *ipsissima verba* were affirmed in the volume on *Inerrancy* edited by Norman Geisler in an article by Paul Feinberg entitled "The Meaning of Inerrancy" 301.

context, while exposing what it lacks also *using their own culture's words*.²⁶ We need more of such engagement with our wayward culture.

Note what this kind of open engagement allows. It allows us to put on the defensive those who are getting the bulk of public attention today, like the members of the Jesus Seminar. Note what leaving ourselves to the first view alone does. It often keeps us on the defensive, constantly focused on the minute details of the Jesus story, often at its most tangential points. There are times for such a defense, but there are times as well when the bulk of our attention should be elsewhere. Do we want to spend most of our time defending every little detail the non-conservatives bring up and spend tons of energy fighting each other about how to resolve such differences because we as conservatives approach the solutions differently? Or do we want to spend time working together on the big picture of Jesus and his ministry and how the Bible, even when it is read as basically trustworthy, still leads to him as the answer for a perishing world? Must we insist that our culture accept our view of Scripture before coming to Jesus? Or can we argue that seeing the Jesus of Scripture in his most basic terms will help people in our culture reconsider their larger worldview which leads them to demean Scripture? I want to keep both lines of argument open.

Millard Erickson argues for this approach in *Postmodernizing the Faith* using a metaphor of bringing a horse to drink water where the horse is the one witnessed to in the current postmodern context. He says, "This means that we will need to cross the bridge to where the horse is, rather than standing on our side of the bridge and trying to coax the horse to come to us. Eventually, of course, we must bring the horse across the bridge, but that may not be possible initially. We will need to enter into the other person's perspective, to think from his or her presuppositions."²⁷ Erickson suggests that in that process we need to expose the inconsistencies in their approach. This we can certainly do with skeptical critics and their portrait of the historical Jesus that argues that so much of what we have (up to 50%) has nothing at all to do with him. To be sure, we have some problem texts and significant internal issues, but the portrait of Jesus most non-conservatives offer has mega-problems. Liberals may be able to raise questions about details like the Quirinius census or how many blind men Jesus healed at a particular point or the number of witnesses at the empty tomb. However, I do not want them to lose sight of the fact that Jesus did heal (and non-Christian materials acknowledge this when they call Jesus a magician or sorcerer). The one option the actual Christian and non-Christian historical evidence we have about Jesus does not allow is the one option many modern critics want to take, namely, that nothing really happened. Jesus' exorcisms

²⁶ This difference of tone is so great that skeptical critics cannot believe the same person could say both things! But what the difference exposes is a strategy of engagement that is audience-sensitive. What we know in house about the culture need not be the tone in which the culture is directly addressed.

²⁷ Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith* 155.

and healings, the claim of resurrection, as well as how Jesus' opponents struggled to explain his power require a decision about the source of Jesus' work and point to God's presence working through him. These signs look to the kingdom of God that shows Jesus is more than the prophet or example that those in the Seminar wish to defend.

Both approaches, one defending Scripture in detail and the other examining the alternative paradigm from within its method while keeping an eye on the big picture, have their value. But we need more of the second, not less, to engage our more diverse culture and to make sure that mission always remains a key element of our work.

The ETS needs time for internal reflection to allow the give-and-take of different views. We need to be very careful about when someone should be excluded (without ruling out the possibility that exclusion may be called for on occasion). There also needs to be a place where missteps can be initially made and the community can work to show them without using an instant guillotine.

The danger on one end of the spectrum will always be that of going too inward and talking only to ourselves about details we think are important while missing God's larger call. Another danger on the other end of the spectrum is ignoring debate on what Scripture teaches and refusing to engage each other about truth. Yet a third danger in relation to our mission and doing mission in our culture is engaging in an apologetic where the other person never feels his own world view is really under any significant duress. Those outside will always lead us to these points of internal dispute to keep us off the major message we do have about him and can affirm together as one voice. I know this strategy. I used to do this when I was an unbeliever, developing terrific compassion for those in Africa or Asia who have never heard of Jesus, so the discussion about him would not stay focused on me and my need. The effort was consistently successful until someone sharing with me said in effect, "Let's not go there now. Let's keep the main thing how God is addressing you and how you see him."

My contention is that we risk making all our energy turn inward. We will risk ignoring those we are called to pursue beyond our need to embrace the truth. We will lose our ultimate purpose and way. So what does that goal toward mission look like in our academic climate and society when it comes to Jesus studies? I wish to note three examples of mixed results in Jesus studies. (1) First, we need individual monographs of the highest standard. Here numerous recent examples exist. We also are gaining the right kind of international recognition for the quality of our work. A recent article by Prof. Martin Hengel of Tübingen in *Christianity Today* names a series of evangelical scholars whose work is recognized as the equal of anything anyone else is producing.²⁸ In the list are people who belong to ETS and IBR. This shows that we are making headway in the larger debates with a growing presence. (2) There are genuine group efforts. The IBR Jesus group is made up of Jesus specialists in that evangelical community. They are pro-

²⁸ *Christianity Today* 45 (October 22, 2001) 79.

ducing an article a year for the *BBR* until twelve key events in Jesus' life are presented. Eventually several books, both academic and popular, will emerge discussing the core of Jesus' emphases. I can predict that this work will be of a very different flavor than the Jesus Seminar with its media hype. The IBR Jesus group will challenge at a historical-critical level any attempt to reduce Jesus to a non-messianic level and reject the idea that he did not make unique claims about his relationship to God. The study groups in the ETS possess similar potential with good planning and careful attention to the contemporary theological climate. (3) There are intentional efforts to reach our culture through visual media. The going here is a little tougher. We are behind in the networking and financial underwriting such efforts take. But the potential exists, if the evangelical community can seize the opportunity to engage.

The goal in such efforts is not always "converting" the current scholarly community. Neither is it gaining academic acceptance, as some of our internal critics so wrongly claim. If we wanted that kind of acceptance, then the easiest thing to do would be to deny inerrancy. Our primary target is the next generation of students who are deciding how to approach Scripture, do theology, and understand Jesus—those who are reading both views and watching both sets of media specials and making up their minds. In other words, our goal is to shape the future of the theological debate.

Let me highlight our current problems by pointing to the issue of Jesus in the media. There have been at least three major video efforts on the historical Jesus in the last few years: (1) the PBS special entitled *From Jesus to Christ*; (2) the Peter Jennings Special, *The Search for Jesus*, which won its prime time slot with a viewership of 15 million and drew heavily on participants from the Jesus Seminar; and (3) a special produced by James Charlesworth of Princeton for the Discovery Channel, which actually, unlike the other two named specials, did spend some of its time defending aspects of the biblical accounts of Jesus.²⁹ In evangelical circles there have been two responses. One by D. James Kennedy was an hour long and aired on prime time on some 85 stations nationwide. This special was seen by 13 million viewers and involved very few NT evangelicals working in Jesus studies. It was mostly informational using Dr. Kennedy and the actor Dean Jones to make the case. It was an admirable effort of a traditional sort and did make prime time at a probable cost of a few million dollars. Another, more substantial, effort was the John Ankerberg production that utilized 12 scholars from three continents, all of whom work in Jesus or Second Temple Jewish studies. It could be seen several times on the Inspiration Christian network in a two-hour prime time slot and airs periodically on the John Ankerberg show in five segments, also in a Christian network context. Efforts are being made to raise the 4.5 million dollars it will take to buy time

²⁹ For a solid assessment of Jesus and the media in our culture extending up to the time of the Jennings special, see Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) esp. pp. 178–204. This is written by a professor at Penn State and is a very competent analysis of the roots of what is going on culturally.

on about 200 markets nationwide to air the special on prime time on major networks. The production directly interacts with the Jennings special using several ETS and IBR members. Yet the issue of whether it makes prime time and reaches our culture is one of Christian organization and fundraising. How ironic it is that we have a three billion dollar Christian entertainment industry, but raising money to present and defend Jesus in our most visible cultural context can be hard to come by?³⁰ What does that say about where we are in terms of mission in the culture and the priorities of how we spend our resources within the church? In fact, when the Peter Jennings ABC special first came out, the evangelical community, with the exception of the Southern Baptists, was totally unprepared to respond, nor was there any evangelical network in place to react in TV media time, which means in days not months.³¹ So we have been left to respond belatedly in increments that surely will take months, if not years. Now these issues extend beyond the ETS, but it shows how unconnected the dots of the evangelical community are when it comes to cultural engagement.

Here we are badly losing the cultural battle. Publishers should help us be sure our distribution networks are not limited to exclusively Christian stores or Christian TV networks. We need to be aggressive about getting into Borders or Barnes & Noble in areas outside of their “inspiration” sections. We need to work on getting access to the media as other religious and anti-religious publishers and institutions do. Why are evangelicals failing here? I know that I am moving outside the scope of the Society’s work here, but the fact is that the “experts” such media depend upon should come in part from our ranks. Might it be in part because we are too fragmented in arguing with each other and in setting up organizations with limited distribution or audience goals? Might it be that we talk in a language so filled with technical internal lingo that no one gets what we are saying? Might it be that we have given up, claiming bias will never let us in (and there is some point to this)? However, have we really tried or paid the price as much as we could to be at the table and in the cultural discussion?

In part we fail also because many evangelicals do not sufficiently appreciate how our culture has gone from a culture of words to a culture of images, even multiple layers of imagery, coming at us at several a second. More work needs to be done here by a coming generation that is far more image and technologically savvy than past generations.³² Nor do we often

³⁰ We can get media attention with the headline “Jesus Rocks” in the *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001 issue, but what is highlighted? Merely how much Christian publishing, music, and media is mirroring methods in the world—and that there are no drugs and sex at our rock concerts, which fortunately is a striking contrast to much of secular contemporary rock music’s culture.

³¹ Would it not have been nice, when the Jennings special came out, if within days the presidents of the major evangelical seminaries had made a public statement that affirmed that Jesus is studied in a careful, scholarly way at their institutions but that the results are far different than the Jennings special affirmed? Is it possible for evangelicalism to have enough of a single voice in the area of understanding about Jesus that our position would be made clear and then substantiated by solid *collaborative* work? Where better to affirm this than in the ETS, IBR, and other evangelical scholarly and academic contexts? We are past the days of the “single expert,” as the expertise required for study and the current bibliography are too complex to leave to one person.

write in a way that aims at this larger audience with the substance that the other side is claiming to use or with a style that engages the issues clearly.³³ I say to those that are trying, and in innovative ways, “Go for it.” Moving in this more visualizing direction are works of Christian fiction like the “Left Behind” series or the spiritually oriented short book “The Prayer of Jabez.” They have managed to crack the “secular ceiling” that often halts widespread distribution, as have many other “popular” works. However you rate those works, and there are important, critical issues to be raised here about the potential for escapism or of an oversimplification of spirituality, they do get people discussing God in ways more weighty works have not. Might it be our fault as authors that we attempt to write for only one audience, leaving the popular work to others? Do we write and then limit our distribution to “in house” settings? Do we sometimes write at a length and with a vocabulary and style that precludes engaging the average person in our culture?³⁴

Other examples could also be raised. Let us look at the Dispensationalism-Covenant discussions at ETS. Here we have an example of discussion across traditions within the evangelical camp in both dialogue and debate. The original ETS study group, the Dispensational study group, led to a direct dialogue between the two traditions that has not removed differences, but has led to a better appreciation and tone to our dialogue-debate. The proliferation of these groups bodes well for the society, if we can continue to see them produce works that move beyond the meetings and touch the theological and ecclesiastical community at large.

We can consider the newly emerging area of Spiritual Formation. Here within the evangelical camp are people working together on a centered set of commitments integrating the importance of formation in the midst of academic pursuit. This effort has been led by academics at various seminars now concerned to see that seminary students do not lose their heart and soul while engaging their minds at seminary. There have been two interna-

³² An interesting study engaging our image-conscious culture in terms of its films and the issue of God is Robert K. Johnson, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). Here is a creative take on how to engage our culture.

³³ An exception here in the Jesus debate was the work edited by Michael Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*. The popular work has been left to non-professionals like Lee Strobel, *The Case for Jesus: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) and Jeffrey L. Sheler, *Is the Bible True? How Modern Debates and Discoveries Affirm the Essence of the Scriptures* (New York: Harper San Francisco/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), who used to work with *US News and World Report*. I commend their effort, but there needs to be more cooperation between technical scholars and popularists in addressing such issues. We would do well to consider how we can make our work and ourselves more available to such people. Perhaps publishers can help us network better at these levels that require a variety of people with a mix of expertise. Another good example of crossover comes from Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996). This work started life with a less well-known publishing house. Sometimes good evangelical work surfaces in obscure locales, which limits its distribution.

³⁴ I am as guilty of this as anyone with a long, two-volume Luke commentary. However, the commitment to a more popular audience was reflected in taking the extra effort and time to also write for pastors and lay people in the NIV Application Commentary for Luke and in the IVP New Testament Commentary Series.

tional conferences in the last three years. This dialogue also is taking place across traditions on a central focal point of Scriptural and pastoral concern. Schools playing a significant role here comprise a surprising array of the evangelical spectrum. My list of schools is alphabetical, but pride of place must go to Regent College for fostering this concern intentionally at the base of its academic program from its early days. Schools now pursuing this and engaged together in the discussion include: Bethel, Dallas, Fuller, Talbot, Trinity, and Westminster, an interesting mix. This movement is taking place outside our society, but many in the society are taking leading roles. The next step hopefully will be to more fully engage other portions of the evangelical community, including the churches, parachurches, and internationals, all of whom share this concern. The desire is to ground discussion of spiritual formation not just in various forms of helpful practice but in substantive biblical theological work. The issue of formation and the underlying call to the worship of God it promotes is an important dimension of both our call and unity. Here is the formation that God engages in within us through his Spirit in Christ in light of all we learn about him. There is work to do here, however. How do we address spirituality in a context where "spirituality" and its practices take on some many distinct forms emerging from such varied histories? How do we look at spirituality biblically in order to determine what is healthy or not about these varied expressions? Are these questions matters of taste or culture like much music is in worship? Why has music style become so divisive at the very point where we are supposed to be drawn together? Certainly there are more basic issues that need fleshing out to help us negotiate what has become a controversial and sometimes generational issue in the church. How do we make clear what spirituality is biblically in a world that has become more "spiritually charged" and open to spiritual discussion?

Turning to the Society and spiritual tone, the earliest ETS meetings, as the earliest editions of the Bulletin notes, involved worship together. We no longer do this intentionally beyond the largely poorly attended five-minute "devotions" before the general meetings. Two efforts in the last few years to do this in different ways have met with only modest results. Our academic orientation may argue that this belongs elsewhere, but I would argue that reminding ourselves of our unity in Christ is a central community act that can reinforce our purpose. We have not honored God well in our response to these opportunities to worship together. Once again, I believe our forebears had it right to include worship in the ethos of the Society. The IBR will do so and will invite worship leaders in the local church to help them. I recognize the ETS does not meet on Sunday, but why not underscore our shared commitment to the Lord together in a few true communal moments of praise one evening at each annual meeting? We are not merely or even primarily academics. Worshipping together, even briefly, affirms something fundamental about who we are. Worship belongs in a purpose-driven ETS.

How does the ETS do internationally? The short answer is again, rather poorly. Last year was possibly the most international meeting in terms of attendees that we have ever had. Plenary speakers came to us from Israel, both Jewish-Christian and Palestinian. We need more of this. Should we

consider some annual travel scholarships to major international Christian leaders from other countries, especially in the Two-Thirds world, to keep them in touch with what is happening here and keep us in touch with them? Should one plenary address each year or at least a major session be given over to an international figure not from North America, who can give us a solid sense of what is happening elsewhere in the body of Christ? I think we struggle here. I am pleased to announce that the executive committee of ETS has approved going in this direction over the next few years.

Last year one evening session produced frank discussion on Israel and our fellow Palestinian believers. I heard some comments that the one evening's discussion was too political and sociological. But the point of juxtaposing the Palestinian Christians and the Jewish believers was to show just how much culture and setting impact one's reading of God's call. How can one discuss Israel today and not cover politics? How can one not think of the question of our oneness to our Palestinian brothers and sisters in Christ who are related to us spiritually versus how the mostly unbelieving nation of Israel treats them in mixing them together with a largely Muslim Arab society? Even for those among us who believe national Israel has a future in God's promise, these questions are quite legitimate. They apply regardless of how we view Israel's future as a nation. If we theologize only with an eye to the future ignoring God's ethical call to believers, we fail to do theology well. In every age we are to be sensitive to others who are persecuted for their association with the Lord. If we skip over the Bible's constant call that his saints pursue love and justice, then our theology is naive and has nothing to say to those trapped in a human hell that has been millennia in the making. If reconciliation is a central theme of the Bible, then how do we show that core divine virtue in a racially and religiously divided Middle East? The questions are hard. The answers are not easy. But they have to be faced realistically in terms of what God asks of us today until he comes. In addition, last year's reminder to us in discussing Israel past, present, and future was important for another reason. It reminded us that we should not ignore God's call to help our fellow messianic Jewish believers be appreciated as a part of the church. Such discussion is certainly in line with the fundamental mission to which our Society should contribute and would speak volumes to our culture that also has no clue how to reconcile such groups of diverse people.

VII. ON EXERCISING CARE IN DRAWING BOUNDARIES
AND THE CURRENT ISSUE OF OPENNESS
IN SUCH A PURPOSE-DRIVEN CONTEXT

So I come finally to openness, having placed it in a larger context for our reflection.³⁵ Here is an issue that is currently "up in the air." Nothing stirs our passions like the doctrine of God. It is an important topic. Such passion

³⁵ The key recent works here are John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) and Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

is understandable because we are discussing the character of the triune God we love and who loves us. How does he act in his creation amongst his creatures? What does divine sovereignty really mean? This is our once-in-a-decade mega-issue. How do we proceed in the face of legitimate concerns about how our beloved God is understood?

One test within the Society must be how biblically has the movement attempted to ground its case. This standard is not whether I agree with the conclusions or the model (if this becomes the standard, then membership could become a political issue of a raw majority of votes). Another guide (note I did not use the word standard, for the judgments of history are not necessarily inerrant) should be the history of doctrinal reflection. Similar debates of the past may well have much to teach us. Most of us do not know this history well. History can serve as a protection against being arbitrary in what we accept or reject. If the standard becomes a sense of whether we as a mere majority determine whether a position is correct or not, then where do we stop saying that inerrancy really entails this or that specific conclusion as a basis of membership? The form of expulsion in ETS was purposefully and wisely made difficult to prevent the Society from turning too easily in this direction. Article IV, Section 4 requires the Executive Committee to be the initial point of referral for one whose writings or teachings are thought to differ from the doctrinal basis of the Society. They are called upon to discuss and meet with the person or persons in question.³⁶ If the Executive refers the case to the Society, then a vote is taken the following year and it takes a 2/3 majority of those present and voting to dismiss. An even higher standard applies to amending the doctrinal basis, a 4/5 vote. When that standard is reached, with something close to significant communal consensus, then it is proper to act. Like a jury of our peers in legal cases where more than a majority is required, hard boundaries should be drawn when the community as a large and significantly unified whole speaks, not when a mere majority expresses itself. Reducing such a serious move of censure to a majority vote or a procedural majority vote is not wise for the long-term health of the Society. A process that consciously takes several years is wise.

What about tackling the examination of a position before getting to such a point of judgment? Our initial question should be, has a plausible attempt been made to ground the view biblically? At this level, the openness movement has been serious about engaging the text. And on one point they seem to have us reflecting on some important questions: Is not the hub of the biblical narrative about covenant and God's action to redeem his creation back into relationship with him? Could there be a relationship between general and special providence that is not unidimensional or monochronological? Can we be certain we have this all tidily sorted out? On the other hand, I wonder if the question of openness has been posed properly by speaking of God's openness to risk our responding to him. Does God really leave the fu-

³⁶ To clear the record, our statement last year that led to this year's sub-theme does not reflect an initiating of this procedure.

ture as open as some suggest when we find God speaking so directly about what the future ultimately will hold and when the Bible affirms so much about what he does know so completely? On what basis then can he so speak? It seems to me that numerous texts in the latter part of Isaiah, parts of the book of Daniel, the concluding sections of Job, portions of the Psalter, John 13–17, Romans 8, and Revelation all suggest that God has a design that is rooted in his comprehensive foreknowledge. At this basic content level, I do not find the openness explanation at all convincing, but that should not stop me from listening to the issues they are raising. I realize that in the openness view the position is taken that God has determined certain key elements as reflected in the texts noted above, but that other details are left open. My point would be that many of these texts treat God's comprehensive involvement in the creation, not the specific details of his plan, so I struggle to see the support for the distinction they make.

Still these are questions I would love to discuss, not just seek to engage in critique and judgment. More importantly, we as a Society, if we are to make informed decisions, need time to sort out the debate's details in order to come to a wise community determination. If there ever were to be a vote on this or any other major matter of contention, then each of us should make that vote responsibly having been adequately prepared for that vote by the way ETS has handled the issue *at its meetings*.

Given such questions and counter-questions and this need to engage and interact, the openness movement in my view should be given the time to engage, reflect, and react both in terms of developing its view and responding to critique. My basic reason is that this approach to theological dialogue is fundamental to a purpose-driven Society structured around the centrality of Scripture and dialogue. Whatever we do, my argument is that we should be deliberative, take our time, make sure we are fair, and even see if there is something we all can learn in and through the debate. Moving too quickly may short-circuit the learning process for all of us.

Let me give an example of how this can work by sharing what we have done at Dallas. It also allows me to deal with another phenomenon that often rears its ugly head during such conflict, that is the circulation of rumors that may be as fast as the omniscience of God, but not as accurate. Dallas's model is not perfect, and in places I will note how it could have been improved. However, my point is not the model in all its detail, but the process's deliberativeness. After a general discussion at our faculty workshop in 2000 involving all our faculty, our Biblical studies division (OT, NT, and Bible Exposition) chose to deliberate all last academic year on this issue. We have more planned for this year as well when the theological division will join us.³⁷ It would have been better to have included the theological division from the start. But, traditionally, our divisional structure had us

³⁷ Systematicians at DTS and Wheaton have been at work as well, as the critique by Robert A. Pyne and Stephen R. Spencer shows, "A Critique of Free Will Theism, Part One," *BibSac* 158 (2001) 259–86. "Part Two" appears in *BibSac* 158 (2001) 387–405. This first article focuses on the christological issues raised by openness. Now some openness theologians wish to block off some

meeting separately. We have adjusted that in this case, because the issue demands it. Our attention involved both texts and method. We began discussing how the analogy of faith works when each side claims that numerous, clear controlling passages are on their side. We did not meet because we had anyone who was an openness theologian, though I and others at DTS have heard that rumor. We met, because we believed the issues raised had importance and required careful study. In 2000–2001, we met six times in ninety-minute blocks.

We began by discussing the sovereignty-pancausality texts to see if they expressed a universal idea or expressed a particular contextualized situation. For example, we could not agree on whether Amos 3:1–8 was event-related only (that is, contextualized to this particular event only) or gave a characteristic, universally true statement about how God always reacts. Yet while discussing Amos 3:1–8 as a particularly helpful example, we soon realized that how each side of the debate read that text was largely correlated to how each side viewed and related the larger emphases within Scripture. Among questions raised here were, is the Hellenistic model of the divine person the only backdrop to consider in the understanding of the doctrine of God? Would a Second Temple Jewish background (like the Dead Sea Community) give us help on how God, time, and foreknowledge were seen to work by the time we get to the NT? We know of no one who has gone down this road in his or her study of this topic. Appeals to the OT fall on both sides of the debate and in some senses are the question. How were such texts and doctrines being understood in the first century? Are there openness precedents in this parallel material to show that the OT was being read in this proposed manner? We noted the lacunae in the current discussion and pressed on, because our goal was not to solve every problem but get our hands around the debate's various levels.

Next came the "God repents," "changes his mind," or "grieves" texts. We were asking how the anthropopathism worked. What exactly does it affirm, for it must intend to affirm something. Here there was consensus that God has revealed himself as One who interacts relationally and covenantally, engaging his creatures in the context of their living within time.³⁸ But

of these christological texts and make them exceptions as part of the divine plan tied to Christ. However, the very existence of this kind of knowledge by God raises questions about their model. If exceptions exist here, then why is their presence elsewhere such a major violation of the divine-human relationship? One could well argue, if it happens with God's relationship to his key human representative, then surely it applies to other relationships as well without surfacing a violation of the covenantal character of God's relationship to those he created. Important in the Pyne-Spencer critique is the idea that human willing and responsible choices are not incompatible with divine foreknowledge. The Judas example, discussed on pp. 279–81, is telling here. Also important is their hermeneutical question of how to handle the "straightforward" reading of OT texts in light of canonical issues (pp. 281–82). This is where our own biblical studies divisional discussions have taken us at DTS. Distinctions between moral will and sovereignty also must be taken seriously (pp. 284–85). It is the characterization of the traditional position as monolithic and one-dimensional that is really a straw man in the openness argument against the more traditional views. The nature of our debate must improve here by being sure we are fair to each side. Making sure we have the other side's argument right is important and yet another reason to continue discussion and moving toward understanding and resolution.

questions remained. Are there two kinds of God-time texts in Scripture—those describing his actions in the language of time-bound human experience and those describing his transcendence of that experience and his timeless impassibility?³⁹ We believe there are. How do we then correlate these two classes of texts? And can we speak with certainty (or even clarity) about the transcendent texts from our finite perspective? Might it help to posit a distinction in God’s knowing—what he knows in foreknowledge before the creation and what he may experience in relation to his creation? Is this latter category where the key openness texts fit, so they can be read as affirming something beyond mere anthropathism? Neither side of the current debate the best we could tell dealt clearly with these additional alternatives comprehensively or with other combinations these distinctions might raise. Might God, rather than being open about options in the future, be using the language of relationship to highlight his engagement with us while still foreknowing precisely how these relationships will proceed given the way creation is created and given who he is? Might these texts express feelings on analogy with human relationships where a spouse is deeply disappointed with the unfaithfulness of a partner or a parent knowing a child’s tendency to rebel still feels the pain of that rebellion and what it means for the breakdown of the relationship between them? Should we not see God’s reactions—and even his “changes”—as grounded in a divine character that has knowledge of what our responses will be but still has to communicate a reaction in time and space that touches not only our mind but our heart? For God to say he is “moved” by us and our actions may be to affirm the

³⁸ I am not even here getting into whole areas of theological and philosophical debate centering around the issue of God, space and time that impact even how these questions could and should be articulated. Exegetes have expressed themselves in these kinds of terms in trying to come to grips with the texts. Theologians have a whole set of additional issues they raise about the conceptualizations related to this topic. I thank Robert Pyne for interacting with me about the wording of this paragraph. I am, of course, solely responsible for its content. Such differences in even how we examine the issues shows the importance of working in a cross-disciplinary way. There also is a rich history of patristic and medieval interpretation of this area that has not yet been addressed. I owe this observation to Jeff Bingham, who works in historical theology and especially in patristics. A well-known Reformed scholar, critical of openness, is quite aware of this problem but does not develop it as much as might be possible in his work critiquing them: see Bruce Ware, “An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God,” *JETS* 29 (1986) 431–46. Ware does little but mention the article in his *God’s Lesser Glory*. I am alluding to the doctrine of the absolute immutability or impassivity of God in this note and in this paragraph. The sheer bulk of biblical texts describing God engaged with his creation, the incarnation, and the localized work of God’s Spirit all point to the need to carefully think through such questions and review the history of discussion on it. Our discussion will not have reached a point of maturity until this is done. This final observation reflects interaction I had with Craig Blaising over these issues. Again, the advantage of cross-disciplinary discussion shows itself as I have benefited greatly from my interaction with the systematicians even as I seek out a satisfactory exegesis of such texts.

³⁹ In expressing myself in terms of two types of text, I am not suggesting that these two classes of text are so distinct as to be ultimately irreconcilable. Neither am I wed to saying this taxonomy should be retained. Rather, the observation is simply being made as an exegete that these seemingly present categories of text approach the discussion of God from two distinct angles. The relationship between these angles is the question I am posing in this paragraph, saying this question and the philosophical, theological issues they raise need further attention before we have had a full mature discussion around which one can make a judgment.

time-space dimensions of aspects of the bounded relationship we have with him as humans as well as to underscore the genuineness of his reaction to us apart from making any statements about God's lack of knowledge or of his Being. These additional paths have led us as a biblical studies division into fruitful interaction, giving us much to contemplate. In sum, such alternatives need to be fully explored exegetically and historically before we have had a mature discussion. Does the mystery reside in this juxtaposition of God's character of knowing and his moving in relationship with us using the language of time and covenant? Might we simply have to be content in our own limitations as humans to let things reside in the mystery at this point without answers that Scripture may not explicitly give us or that we may not be able to comprehend as we "see through a glass dimly"?

So next we again stepped back hermeneutically and asked, How do we generally handle two sets of seemingly competing texts? Does one set get elevated over the other? If so, on what basis is this done—by logic, by sheer number, by the history of theological discussion or by some other means? When do we start to look for distinct classes of texts within each set of texts to help solve the tensions? How can historical and systematic theology help us here with their variety of answers and discussions in the past (the very reason theologians and exegetes must work together on these issues, thus recognizing our need not merely to talk amongst ourselves as exegetes or as theologians)? When do we simply say the tension brings us to the edge of where divine mystery resides or to the edge of what Scripture directly addresses? That is where our first year's discussion ended. Our first meetings this year are taking up another juxtaposition of two sets of texts—salvation by faith, judgment by works—to see if we can learn anything from how that juxtaposition is handled in terms of method as an aid for us in this newer discussion. We still have also to go over some key "proof texts" whose translation and meaning are disputed (e.g. Ps 139:16). My point here is that we are proceeding textually and theologically very methodically—doing so as a community, a *mixed* community in terms of specialties.

Interestingly, ETS has the advantage of being made up of an even broader community, so that the potential for meaningful engagement is enhanced. Last year such concerns are what motivated the ETS executive, rightly I believe, to make openness a key sub-theme of this annual meeting. The goal was to have a healthy discussion of the issue before as much of the Society as possible. I view this as only the start of a good but necessary process of dialogue that may or may not go beyond that. That is the reason for the discussion this year—to give the ETS guidance as a community about what is or is not needed—nothing more and nothing less.

VIII. CONCLUSION: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN ETS AND A CALL TO MISSION BEYOND OUR INTERNAL DEBATES

So my basic advice is: go slow. The church has been around for two thousand years. God has cared for it well up to this point. We do not need to come to an instant judgment—the discussion has just begun. We need to allow time for the Society as a whole to digest the issue before we do anything

else. One publisher recently told me (and no, it is not IVP) that they have five titles on this topic coming out in the next few years. Walking the book displays of publishers' recent wares, we can see several new books just out on God and time. We need to digest these. Give time for the internal debate, pursue it in a quest for both truth and mutual understanding and, especially, watch the tone.

A short example concerning tone for the openness debate emerges from an essay published in the June 12, 2001 edition of *Christianity Today* as I was preparing my own address. In "Where Do We Go From Here?" Christopher Hall and John Sanders conclude an e-mail debate dialogue on openness that covered two issues of the magazine.⁴⁰ Despite their substantial differences on the issue, they make six points together at the end: (1) observe the importance of solid biblical exegesis; (2) the model should recognize and preserve the insights given to us by the Christian community over the centuries; (3) we need not fear a hearty and forthright argument; (4) the evangelical community must work hard to resolve theological debates communally (this is a major concern of my essay as well); (5) we need to practice intellectual empathy toward those with whom we disagree (i.e. avoid caricature, being able to state the opponent's position in a way they can affirm); and (6) after pursuing these five steps vigorously, faithfully, and truthfully, as well as charitably, there is surely a time to accept or reject a theological model. Where they say we stand at this time is where I think we stand as well, "The debate needs to continue so that issues can be further clarified." It is too early to act in a decisive, comprehensive way now. After a few years of genuine, internal community dialogue, it may be appropriate as the Society has time to give the topic serious, concentrated reflection.

But enough on openness—I conclude by closing with a reminder about priorities. The danger in such debates to me is just as subtle and significant as warnings about deviation from the truth implied in drawing boundaries. These debates, as important as they are and even though they are necessary, risk knocking us off our more basic track and our greatest potential as a Society. We may become so self-absorbed about our own theological state of health that we forget the mission to the larger world.

My ultimate hope is that more of our energy would be directed to issues affirming, impacting, and improving our relationships to each other as we together face a massively large, lost world. In a purpose-driven ETS, our study groups should be productive in addressing questions that our distorted, diverse culture needs to have addressed christianly, even if there is some diversity in those replies. Our culture seems to be more open to treating such issues on a spiritual plane, so let us wade into the discussions. We can walk to the table and be a participant. But we must challenge this post-modern "oprahized" culture that looks to all forms of the "spirit" equally for answers to questions science and technology cannot answer. I suspect in this pursuit we may be more closely drawn together, appreciating anew how

⁴⁰ *Christianity Today* 45/8 (June 11, 2001) 56. The May 21, 2001 issue contained part 1 of this dialogue.

much more we have in common than we tend to consider when we take on each other.

To the next generation I say, let your research pursuits keep the lost world in mind. Within the Society, let us do our humble best to listen and interact with each other about Scripture's message and seek the community he calls us to and even prayed for us to possess (John 17). Ephesians 4:1–5 may be a good reminder of where our oneness, our center lies as scripturally defined: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over us all. Openness to God means people being open to his Spirit. That Spirit resides in us as we are formed by him and the divine web of teaching that is found in Scripture. Though members amongst us construct the details of this differently, that spiritual and scriptural point of unity forms the basis for our Society and puts us in a place where we should be able to profitably debate and dialogue. I am saying that I do not believe that boundary drawing and creedal writing is our Society's fundamental purpose, except in cases where a substantial proportion of the community affirms a line has been crossed *only after* careful internal, societal reflection has taken place on the question at hand.⁴¹

A purpose-driven ETS, I would argue, will concentrate its substantial energies and great potential mostly elsewhere. Here are the practical implications expressed in terms you will recognize. Like an altar call, I make several invitations.

My invitation to others of my generation and those that came before us is—mentor the next generation to work on projects that may also reach the church at large and give them help with the biblical mandate for mission in our diverse culture. Give them the room and permission to address the culture they are familiar with in ways that may be different from how we might do it. At the same time, urge them to be accountable to God, his Spirit, and his Word in doing so. If they package things differently, assess it on its substance, not on its style or because it is different. Try not to confuse content and form. Such differences may be matters of generational culture or personal taste.

My invitation to the next generation of ETS members is to be faithful and look for projects of study that challenge the fallen world more, sharpen each other more, and challenge each other exclusively less. However, do not forget that no period has a monopoly on truth or method. History shows this. Sometimes listening to words from a generation past, if not millennia ago, yields rich insight into our modern problems.

⁴¹ It makes sense that those who have studied the question, led it in publication and debate, and even taken sides should be given opportunity to address such matters pro and con when we go into such an assessing mode. Their headstart helps us all. That was part of the rationale behind the sub-theme of this particular meeting and setting up the opportunity for both sides to be heard. These plenary speakers and those who have volunteered papers on this topic have served the ETS well by having taken the initiative in entering into debate. They deserve our appreciation for what they have and will do for us in this discussion and others like it. However, their individual work cannot replace the ethical responsibility of the ETS to handle such areas in ways that allow members to get a first-hand exposure to the issues in the debate when there is a perception that a serious difference of opinion exists.

In the last ten years or so, the ETS has moved more and more in this direction to the betterment of the Society. However, we still have a long way to go. We are a spiritual and academic fellowship of debate, dialogue, growth, and study. We seek to work collaboratively to give an answer and/or answers to questions we are not just debating among ourselves but that challenge the debates going on in the world. We wish to raise to a visible level those things the world fails to see as significant to God.

Here is the value of the study groups, one of the great recent successes of the ETS. These groups should aim intentionally for substantive publication with the need to reach the lost in mind or to help those engaged in mission to do it. Publishers need to help us here. For such careful work is not as profitable from an economic standpoint, but may be far more edifying to the church than much of what we invest in publishing or sell as trinkets in our bookstores. Also, we should consider, both as a Society and in terms of media possibilities, what can be done visually to reach our culture with our results, especially on those topics where we do have substantial agreement. When our voice is one, let it be heard loud and clear, even when each of us may take slightly different routes to get there.

To close, I return to the vow. He will watch over us. Our call is faithfulness to the groom until he comes. In one of the great gender ironies of Scripture, we find that the lady of wisdom is found in the pursuit of the One who is Logos. By not letting go of Logos, we will never lose our way. If we go astray, others will surely be faithful. Be diligent in keeping watch over our commitment to Scripture as a community that points to God's central story. Above all pursue our loyalty to him in how we do what we believe and in who we are. Do so in a way that does not dishonor what God has done for all of us. We need to ask him humbly to protect us from those paramours who would masquerade as wisdom that have resided in every age. We need to embrace by faith and cling to with our heart, mind, and spirit the meta-narrative that is Jesus the Word as revealed in his Word. God's activity in Jesus is the story that stands at the center of the Word. This Logos makes possible relationship with God through his sacrificial work and the provision of the Spirit. We need as a community to draw on all that he has provided. We work until our time comes or the Lord returns. Surely our disputes will always be with us, and so will a multiplicity of approaches to each problem. But small victories in clarification and better movement toward mutual understanding are also realistic goals. Let us be sure to remember the world and pursue our larger mission with a careful eye to how times both change and remain the same. Let us debate fairly, fully, and with a dignity that reflects respect for our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, until glory comes, and God completes his vows and makes us fully his by dissolving all our questions into eternal answers.