

## IS PROPOSITIONAL REVELATION ESSENTIAL TO EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

GORDON R. LEWIS\*

On a pluralistic planet of numerous world religions, Christian denominations, and cults, does spiritual passion need to be directed by true information? It is often hazardous to speak, not only of religion and politics, but also of spirituality and discernment. In a *Peanuts* cartoon, after Woodstock lectured Snoopy for three frames, Snoopy exclaimed, “I don’t care if you are a friend, you have no right to criticize my lifestyle!” In spite of such possible reactions, conflicting accounts of God’s nature and spiritual formation require evaluation.

During the first fifty years of my teaching ministry, some of the most influential varieties of spiritual formation have denied the necessity of any guidance by divinely originated assertions about the object of one’s ultimate spiritual affection. Following a brief assessment of these, your consideration is invited to the thesis that, in addition to God’s supreme revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, some propositional revelation is necessary, although not sufficient, as a guide for authentic evangelical spiritual experience. First, some definitions of significant terms involved.

First, what is meant by spirituality? Spirituality is devotion, desire or longing for a loving relationship with the ultimate reality with which, or with whom, we have to do. The pre-eminent love of some is for themselves, their pride, their pleasure, or their net worth. Humanists value more highly a transcendent object beyond themselves, such as temporal causes for the good of humanity. The ultimate devotion of many in the East and the West is for harmony with the inner energy of the cosmos. As good as these ultimate concerns may be, they are not transcendent enough.

Augustine found that we were made for devotion to an even higher reality. “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in Thee.”<sup>1</sup> Do what we will, a temporal happiness that can be lost will not permanently satisfy. The ultimate longing (*Sehnsucht*) of every person, C. S. Lewis emphasized, is not satisfied by any natural happiness. Fairy tales and philosophies of inevitable progress and evolution imagine a future heaven on earth. But what satisfies this longing is a relationship with a personal, living, moral, and gracious God distinct from creation, but

\* Gordon R. Lewis is senior professor of theology and philosophy at Denver Seminary, P.O. Box 100,000, Denver, CO 80250-0100.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 1:1 NPNF 1:45.

active in it. The Oxford Professor adds, "I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important."<sup>2</sup> So the question becomes, "Do we not need an informational revelation not only to fulfill our ultimate spiritual longing but also to know how God thinks about us?"

Second, what is a proposition? A proposition is a person's assertion that may be true or false. "In philosophy, but not in business or sexual activity, a proposition is whatever can be asserted, denied, contended, maintained, supposed, implied, or presupposed. In other words, it is that which is expressed by a typical indicative sentence."<sup>3</sup> The content of any sentence that is either true or false can be transposed into a standard form indicative or declarative sentence conveying a logical proposition. Such a standard form sentence has a subject (S), some form of the verb "to be" (is, was or will be) and a predicate nominative (P), "S is P." In addition to simple propositions, there are compound (two in one), disjunctive (alternative), and hypothetical (conditional) propositions.

Propositions, the building blocks of logically meaningful human thought and communication, are distinct from the sentences conveying them.<sup>4</sup> "It is raining" expresses a proposition that is either true or false of the area to which it refers. The same proposition can be expressed in entirely different words in different languages: in Spanish, *Esta lloviendo*, in French, *Il pleut*, and in German, *Es regnet*. Translators have expressed a biblical proposition, like "God is holy," in hundreds of different languages.

Does Holy Scripture have many sentences conveying propositions? The Bible features countless indicative sentences expressing explicit or implied propositions about what was, is or will be that can be affirmed or denied. Biblical language conveys propositions like "God is spirit" (John 4:24), "he who called you is holy" (1 Pet 1:15), and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Do not these indicative sentences assert truth about God's metaphysical existence and moral character? Others inform about God's universal purposes and promises, mighty acts, and personal relationships. Biblical texts convey propositions about where humans came from, why we are here, and where we are going. Biblical history is full of propositions about individual and communal responses to the messages of prophets, Christ, and apostles. They are informative about people's thoughts, intentions, feelings, words, acts, events, and dynamic relationships. At times people assented to their truth; at other times people questioned or denied their truth.

Not all the Bible is made up of indicative sentences conveying or implying propositions. The Bible also conveys some normative commandments concerning what ought to be or ought not to be done. Some are universal like, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and love your neighbor as

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 10.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979) 271.

<sup>4</sup> On the distinction between sentences and propositions see Irving Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic* (10th ed.; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998) 5.

yourself.” Others are more specific: “Do not give false testimony”; “Do not steal.” Scripture also has normative commandments limited to specific persons or groups at a given time. God’s universal commandments, like propositions, possess normative divine authority for all communities, whether obeyed or disobeyed.

Questions are not propositions. Short figures of speech and longer parables are not propositional in form, but biblical figures of speech and parables illustrate a non-figurative, informative point. Some biblical language, especially in the Psalms, may be primarily expressive and/or evocative of feelings. Some biblical passages, such as “Be holy,” are primarily exhortative. Others, as in the Gospels, may be confessional, like “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Biblical language may be primarily performative like Jesus declaring, “Your sins are forgiven.” All the literary genres of Scripture, however, are profitable in some way for spiritual life and service (2 Tim 3:16–17). Responsible interpretations of the non-propositional uses of scriptural language fit the broader context of the Bible’s theistic world view and its explicit propositional truths.

Third, what is truth? “Truth” is used in Scripture in two major ways. First, truth is a quality of propositions that conform to God’s affirmations as tested by their coherence with relevant data in creation and Scripture. False propositions are not reliable because they do not fit the relevant data and contradict the revealed mind of God on the subject. Second, truth in Scripture may refer to a quality of persons whose conduct faithfully exhibits their teaching. Christ exhibited both senses of truth. The many propositions Jesus taught conformed to what is the case in heaven and on earth, and the life he lived exhibited his faithful commitment to his teaching about the heavenly Father and his neighbors. “Jesus’ own words always accord with his deeds and with actuality.”<sup>5</sup>

Evangelical Christians affirm that all the propositions of the Bible’s original manuscripts are inerrant and that all their literary genres are infallible. To believe in the *inerrancy* of the autographs is to affirm that their propositions are true of reality and so guide spiritual devotion to the God who is the ultimate reality with whom we have to do, the living God who has spoken and acted in history. Furthermore, assertions contradicting the truth of scriptural propositions are false and not reliable guides for the spiritual passion of one who needs forgiveness. To believe in the *infallibility* of the original manuscripts is to believe that all of the Bible’s types of sentences effectively convey their divine Author’s life-renewing aims. God said of his word, “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11).

An evangelical devotional use of Scripture, then, involves three Holy Spirit-illuminated phases: (1) a repentant-believer in Christ responsibly interprets its sentences in a given language; (2) becomes persuaded of the truth of the propositions that biblical sentences convey; and (3) relates appropriately

<sup>5</sup> A. C. Thiselton, “Truth,” *NIDNTT* 3.883. See also Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1990) 19–20.

to the propositions' spiritual or physical referents in reality. This "realism" is not to be confused with common sense realism or naïve realism. It is a critical realism based on a miraculous divine revelation requiring the testing of alternative revelation claims, and the testing of interpretations by sound hermeneutical principles and logical, factual, and existential criteria of truth.<sup>6</sup>

For evangelical spiritual formation, then, a philosophical analysis of the functions of biblical language may make its contribution, but is not enough. A Bible student's accurate exegesis of biblical sentences is necessary, but not sufficient. A theological assent to the truths of the Bible's propositions is crucial, but not adequate. God originated biblical sentences with their true contents to direct our deepest devotion beyond anything in the space-time creation, to Holy Spirit-enabled communion with the ultimate reality, the triune Creator and Lord of all. For evangelical spiritual formation, then, mentors and mentorees must realize that divinely revealed propositions are indispensable guides, but not the object of worship.

Because truth is about reality, revealed truths are existentially viable. A life faithfully guided by revealed truths will not lead to disappointing idols, but to a rich, authentic spiritual fellowship with the living God and God's redeemed people, for time and eternity. Evangelical Christian spirituality is neither a devotional life unrelated to propositional truth, nor a mere acceptance of propositions without the experience of living by them. It is a Spirit-born and illumined life of fellowship with God, based on and directed by assent to the truth of propositional teaching about God and humans as they have been, are, will be, and normatively ought to be.

Although propositions are sometimes thought to obstruct personal relationships, they unite those who authentically affirm their truth. Persons of conviction, who assent to the truth of the basic propositions of sound Christian statements of faith, discover a solid base for an enduring spiritual fellowship with God and the community of God's people. (For more on the spiritually enriching values of propositional truth about what is and ought to be, see parts II, III and IV.)

#### I. A SURVEY OF SPIRITUALITIES NOT BASED ON THE TRUTH OF ANY PROPOSITIONAL REVELATION

Many highly acclaimed recent theologians and philosophers have questioned the divine source and authority of the Bible's indicative sentences and the inerrancy of the propositions they convey. Nevertheless, these devout people have found a variety of ways to be "spiritual." After mentioning the primary philosophical influence in each view, I state its concept of God and briefly evaluate the resultant notion of what constitutes spiritual experience.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 1.36–37 footnote. Also see Gordon R. Lewis, "An Integrative Method of Justifying Religious Assertions," *Evangelical Apologetics* (ed. M. Bauman, B. Hall, and R. Newman; Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996) 69–88.

1. *Liberal theology's immanent deity and spirituality as a feeling of dependence.* Influenced by the latest products of science, psychology, and naturalistic philosophy, modernists do not believe that God transcends the world. Their God is immanent in their naturalistic world of evolution. Given those presuppositions, their critical studies reduced the Bible from a divine-human production to a collection of diverse, merely human, but useful devotional writings, at least in some passages.

According to the "father of liberalism," Friedrich Schleiermacher, "It matters not what conceptions a man adheres to, he can still be pious."<sup>7</sup> The essence of the Christian religion, he taught, was not in believing or doing, but in feeling. To be spiritual, one needs only a feeling of dependence on an undefined immanent Power beyond one's control.

By way of evaluation, one can say that a feeling of dependence may arise from God's universal revelation of his being and power in creation (Rom 1:20; Acts 17:28). But the universal moral law within (Rom 2:14–15) reveals more than a vague feeling of dependence; it discloses our moral accountability and real guilt. Until the God distinct from nature can be just and justify the guilty on the ground of Christ's atonement, spiritual reconciliation to the Holy One cannot begin. God wants our worship, not only in a feeling of dependence, but also in repentance and faith.

2. *Secular theology and spirituality as reflective action.* Influenced by the naturalistic philosophy of logical positivism, secular theologians regarded acceptance of any proposition in the Bible (or elsewhere) meaningless if unverifiable by the five senses.<sup>8</sup> Some of them pronounced the divine Lord of history dead. Nevertheless, they were "spiritual" when they reflected upon rapidly changing social issues and joined in on the cutting edge of the social and political struggles of their time.

By way of evaluation, without obedience to God's primary commands to love God and neighbor, social action lacks motivating power, and without divinely revealed normative guidelines, social activism lacks direction. Humanitarian worship and service of created things rather than the Creator is not deeper spirituality, but sinful idolatry (Rom 1:19–25). Authentic evangelical spirituality results in love for others and in principled social action motivated primarily by love for God the creator and redeemer.<sup>9</sup>

3. *God as the ground of all being and spirituality as ecstatic, existentially induced mystical union with being itself.* Influenced by monistic and existentialist philosophies, Paul Tillich, an ordained Evangelical Lutheran Seminary professor, exemplifies a form of Christian mysticism. The essence of religion, he taught, is *not* a matter of either biblical beliefs or practices, but of one's ultimate concern. Driven by existential anxiety, his ultimate concern

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion* (trans. John Oman; New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 95.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 104–5.

<sup>9</sup> See Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures: Papers from ICBI Summit III* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

was to have immediate, ecstatic experiences of union with the Ground of his being. Spirituality, he explained, "means transcending in ecstasy the subject-object scheme of ordinary experience."<sup>10</sup>

Tillich's ultimate reality, Being Itself, is the power of being in everything that has being. That one pantheistic proposition affirms the reality of an impersonal Ground of all Being, a God allegedly beyond the God of theism. In pantheism, the basic human problem is not moral rebellion against a holy God, but an existential alienation from the Ground of one's being. In Tillich's view, although the Ground of Being did not reveal any other propositions true of reality in the Bible, it was a useful human book. It supplied symbols by which to evoke and express ecstatic mystical experiences.

Tillich's ecstatic mystical experiences of oneness with the Ground of all being lasted only a few minutes each and the rest of the time he regarded his God as existentially absent.<sup>11</sup> The claim that God was absent except in ecstatic experiences made Tillich like a John the Baptist preparing the way for two major movements, the secular non-ecstatics (previously mentioned) and the invasion of the West by ecstatic religious mystics from the East.

4. *Eastern pantheistic philosophies and spirituality as a yoga-induced mystical union.* Influenced by an eastern metaphysical monism, Hindus refer to "an abstract, absolute field of pure Being underlying the subtlest layer of all that exists in the relative field (maya)."<sup>12</sup> This pure, eternal being, the unmanifested reality of all that exists, lives, or is, the Upanishads call Brahman.<sup>13</sup>

On this Hindu diagnosis of the basic human problem, we make the mistake of thinking ourselves to be finite and distinct from Brahman. To become consciously united again with Brahman, Hindus hope that the process of *karma* and reincarnation will move them up in levels of animal life or human castes, eventually to become absorbed again in their ultimate impersonal, non-moral Source. They can cut short that process by doing various types of yoga to have mystical experiences of union with Brahman. In mystical experiences, they are allegedly briefly united to the ultimate reality. In those mystical experiences, they lose their distinct identity, much like dew drops slip into the shining sea, never to be distinguished again. Buddhist enlightenment experiences are similar, but without any metaphysical propositions about Brahman or the human soul. Instead of reincarnation, they speak of rebirth. Asked for moral principles, one Buddhist speaking at the University of Northern Colorado said, "Enlightenment has nothing to do with ethics."

In world religions, then, what are the essential characteristics of mystical experience? William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, listed four characteristics. Mystical experience, the noted psychologist found, are:

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) 2.192.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962) 87-88.

<sup>12</sup> Mahraishi Mahesh Yogi, *The Science of Being and Art of Living* (New York: The New American Library, 1968) 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

(1) transient; (2) passive; (3) ineffable; and (4) noetic, that is, these brief experiences produce a psychological certitude that one becomes indistinguishable from the One or the All.<sup>14</sup>

Princeton philosopher W. T. Stace also assessed mystical experiences among such world religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity in his major work *Mysticism and Philosophy*. He found the common characteristics of extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences to be similar to those mystics reported to James. In brief, they include: a unitary vision or consciousness that all things are One in a non-spatial, non-temporal reality, with feelings of blessedness, peace, the sacred, paradoxicality, and ineffability.<sup>15</sup>

5. *Some New Age pantheism and spirituality as drug-induced mystical union.* William Braden, a reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, interviewed several hundred anti-establishment young people on how they felt when taking the illegal drug LSD. Braden listed the following characteristics: the sense of self or personal ego is utterly lost, time stops, words lose all meaning, there are no dualities, and the persons feel they know ultimate truth.<sup>16</sup> The conclusion of his major book, *The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God*, is startling. He finds that “[t]his describes the psychedelic experience produced by a chemical. But it describes something else. It describes religious mysticism.”<sup>17</sup> What do you make of the fact that various illegal drugs are a quicker way to mystical experiences than the past or contemporary disciplines of Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim mystics?

Because mystical spiritualities have been so common for centuries, they have been called expressions of “the perennial religion.” And every spring when another eastern or western mystic is publicized, his or her mystical experience is regarded as “new” or beginning a “new age” of spiritual evolution.

Should evangelical spiritual formation promote mystical experience? Consider contrasts between mystical experience whether Christian, eastern, or drug-induced, with evangelical experience. (a) Mysticism mistakenly imagines an impersonal, amoral God diffused throughout the cosmos like a vapor or a gas. To feel temporarily one with energy of the universe may be significant if the world is viewed as God’s creation. But harmony with the cosmos is not to be confused with reconciliation to the personal, holy God who transcends the cosmos. (b) Mysticism misdiagnoses the human problem as a mere mental mistake of considering one’s self different from this universal Being, Force, or Energy. The basic problem, on an evangelical diagnosis, is one’s moral corruption, guilt, and consequent alienation from the personal, holy God of Scripture. No depraved sinner can be reconciled to God’s fellowship who has not repented and been pardoned from all the guilt of his or her sin

<sup>14</sup> William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902) 371–72.

<sup>15</sup> W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1960) 131–32.

<sup>16</sup> William Braden, *The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967) 30–37.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

(justification), been born again (regeneration), and liberated from the dominance of evil (redemption). (c) Mystical experience depersonalizes one; evangelical experience regenerates and renews the whole person. (d) The mind in mystical experience is passive, that is, emptied of all concepts. In evangelical spirituality, the mind actively assents to God's existence and moral demands, hears the gospel, assents to its truth, and studies the milk and the meat of the Word with active yieldedness to the Holy Spirit's enabling grace. (e) In mystical experience, time and history become unimportant; in evangelical experience, what one knows, is, and does here and now has both temporal and eternal significance. (f) Concepts and words lose all meaning in mystical experience; in evangelical experience, propositions conveyed in sentences convey the scriptural gospel that leads a sinner to eternal life. (g) The goal of mystical experience is union; the goal of evangelical experience is communion. (h) The mystic's experience is brief; the Christian abides in fellowship with God throughout this life and the life to come. (i) In a pantheistic world view where everything real is allegedly good, it might make sense to empty one's mind in meditation to open it to any influence whatsoever. In a biblical world view, with demonic deceivers going about to devour people, men, and women need mental discernment in all individual and corporate spiritual experiences.

Given the characteristics of what is meant universally by mystical experience and the many contrasts with evangelical spiritual experience, the phrase, "evangelical Christian mysticism," is an oxymoron. The Bible advocates relational fellowship with the tri-personal God, but nowhere does the Bible exhort Christians to seek typical "mystical experiences."

6. *The neo-orthodox personal God and spirituality as divine-human encounters.* Influenced by Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy, and in opposition to the liberal and mystical tendency to consider God merely immanent, Karl Barth insisted that God is "totally other." God is removed from Kierkegaard and Barth by an "infinite qualitative distinction."<sup>18</sup> Apparently God can be infinitely different from human persons in every respect except being personal. Ineffable Person-to-person encounters are possible because God became human in the living Christ. What God reveals is not information about himself, but the speechless Christ himself. This Christomonism means the rejection of any informative general revelation, as well as an informative special revelation in the words of Jesus or of Scripture. Barth's major multi-volume *Church Dogmatics* quotes the Bible extensively but warns his readers not to confuse what God "says" with what Paul says. "In the one case, *Deus dixit* (God "speaks"), in the other, *Paulus dixit* (Paul speaks)."<sup>19</sup> For Barth, the Bible is not God's Word, but the early church's fallible human testimony to ineffable divine-human encounters. Barth's descriptions of Person-to-person encounters seem to be less ecstatic than descriptions of mystical experiences. Otherwise, Barth's crisis-type experiences

<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox, 1960) 42.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960) 127.



of God in Christ, like those of the mystics, are brief, passive, non-cognitive, and ineffable.

Since Barth's God is totally other, how are humans in God's image? The likeness is not in our having a spirit like God's with capacities of self-consciousness, self-determination, and self-transcendence. Barthians are like God only relationally and temporarily, when they reflect his likeness. Another result of the alleged infinite qualitative distinction between God and humans is that every statement about God in Christ relating to finite humans is involved in an irresolvable dialectic. The Bible, Barth thinks, leaves us with irresolvable tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions. The answer to many questions is a dialectical "yes" and "no."

A contemporary proponent of neo-orthodox theology and spirituality, Donald Bloesch, calls his stance "evangelical" as did Barth. Was Jesus God? Like Barth, because of the total difference between God's mind and the mind of God's image bearers, Bloesch gives a dialectical answer. "No, if understood propositionally, literally or univocally; yes, if interpreted alogically, figuratively and analogically."<sup>20</sup> Bloesch denies that Jesus is actually God in the realistic sense of evangelical and orthodox theology. But, as I have explained elsewhere, the classical view that Jesus was both God and human can be affirmed in subcontrary, rather than contradictory or paradoxical, propositions.<sup>21</sup>

"Too long," Bloesch writes, "we have made the mistake of identifying God's revelation with the propositional content of the Bible."<sup>22</sup> He holds to revelation alone in personal encounters with the living, but wordless Christ. "The Bible is not in and of itself the revelation of God but the divinely appointed means and channel of this revelation."<sup>23</sup> Bloesch's "final authority is not what the Bible says but what God says in the Bible."<sup>24</sup> He writes, "I hold that the words of the Bible are revelatory but not revealed . . . We do not hold to faith in propositions but to propositions of faith."<sup>25</sup> Evangelicals believe propositions revealed in creation, Christ, and the Bible. Bloesch thinks that "Scripture is one step removed from revelation."<sup>26</sup> For evangelicals, the object of *belief* is the Bible's informative teaching. It guides one to the object of *faith*, as trust or commitment, Christ himself. According to Bloesch, "the object of faith is from first to last Christ himself."<sup>27</sup> He confuses revelation with its supreme purpose, salvation. Evangelicals know that the Bible *is* divine revelation, whether its message is accepted and acted on or not.

Did Jesus' resurrection happen? Bloesch answers with the typical neo-orthodox dialectic: No, if you mean in the language of historical precision,

<sup>20</sup> Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997) 70.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2.347-51.

<sup>22</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ* 239.

<sup>23</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 66, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

objective *Historie*. Yes, if you mean theologically interpreted history, or *Geschichte* for believers only. The Bible's language, even on the fact of Christ's resurrection, he thinks, is not in plain indicative sentences, but "a vehicle for mysteries that cannot be fully contained in ordinary straightforward language."<sup>28</sup> Bloesch's Bible conveys mysteries to believers only in "dramatic parabolic language."<sup>29</sup> To the contrary, evangelicals follow Paul in holding that the publicly verified fact of Christ's resurrection gives assurance of the veracity of Christ's claims to all persons everywhere (Acts 17:31).

By way of evaluation, neo-orthodoxy's quest for experience of a personal God is an improvement over the impersonal ultimate reality of mysticism. Apart from that point, Barth and Bloesch, like mystics, deny any propositional revelation true of spiritual reality and so imagine that the divine object of spiritual experience lies altogether outside what can be conceptually revealed and affirmed. Their ineffable, brief, passive "encounters" remain a long way from an evangelical's active mental assent to the revealed truths of the gospel that result in an acceptance in God's family and kingdom for fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Never do the Christian's primary sources refer to a believer's personal experience of God as an "encounter." Only three uses of "encounter" appear in the NIV (Exod 23:27; 2 Sam 23:8; 1 Chr 11:11). None of them refer to the relation between God and his people. All three passages refer to national Israel's literal warfare with ungodly enemies!

Personal experiences with the living Christ in the Gospels, furthermore, were not with a speechless mime. Jesus said in prayer to the Father, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. . . . I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them" (John 17:1–6–8). According to Jesus, out of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). So by communicating the Father's words, Jesus revealed the person of the Father, the heavenly Father's very heart. We know a personal God and persons in general through their disclosed convictions about reality and its values. Evangelical spirituality is based on revelation supremely in the Christ who taught true propositions about reality and important values in human languages. His Great Commission requires evangelicals to teach all that he taught. His teaching involved a few paradoxes to stimulate thought, such as "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Luke 9:24). Our Lord also taught some parables to illustrate some non-figurative points. But Jesus' teaching asserted many indicative sentences conveying propositions about reality: "God is spirit"; "I who speak to you am he"; "I am the bread of life"; "I am the light of the world"; "I and the Father are one"; "I am the resurrection and the life"; "I am the way and the truth and the life." Scores of times the Lord said, "I tell you the truth." The Lord of evangelical Christians is deeply concerned that their spiritual formation be based on transcultural, life-giving truth.

<sup>28</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ* 131.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

Bloesch thinks that “[t]he imago Dei is probably best understood as an asymmetrical relationship between God and the human creature, a relationship in which the latter reflects the glory, goodness and wisdom of the former.”<sup>30</sup> Bloesch’s Barthian interpretation of the image as reflectional accounts for some passages (2 Cor 3:18), but comes short of others that include the mental capacity of the human spirit to receive divinely revealed information. Christians “have put on the new self [or nature] which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10). Because our minds are not totally other than God’s mind, we can receive an informational revelation and think God’s thoughts after him. That is why Paul could ask God to fill the believers at Colosse “with knowledge of his will . . . bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:9–10). As Paul exhorted them, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (3:16).

7. *Postmodernism’s non-world view and foundationless spirituality.* Postmodernist spirituality is anti-realist. It wisely opposes modernism’s autonomous foundational assumptions of a naturalistic world view. It also counters any claims to knowledge of God as he is in reality based on natural theology, an individual’s feelings, mystical experiences, and individual encounters independent of a community. Postmodernist theologians offer not one propositional assertion concerning the metaphysical nature of God. God is not Tillich’s Ground of Being or Barth’s “totally other” God who is nonetheless personal. Postmodernist spirituality affirms neither a pantheistic nor a theistic world view. It is post- or anti-, not only modernism’s view of God, but also the metaphysical realities asserted by classical Christianity.

Like the modernists whom they rightly accuse of joining naturalistic philosophy to communicate with naturalists, the postmodernist “evangelicals” have made the mistake of accommodating to postmodernist anti-metaphysical philosophy to communicate with postmodernists. Some spiritual people think they have to accept Ludwig Wittgenstein’s anti-realist philosophy of language. Wittgenstein proposes that each distinct human community plays a different language “game” by different “rules.” Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, in *Beyond Foundationalism*, question any base of realistic knowledge of God, whether from creation or Scripture. These “evangelical” postmodernists are anti- any form of logical knowledge of their God. “No simple one-to-one correlation exists between language and the world.”<sup>31</sup> Although claiming to have gone beyond the modernists, like the modernists postmodernists agree with Immanuel Kant that no propositional truth can be known about reality in itself. They can know only the phenomena that appear to their community as interpreted by the rules of their distinctive language game.

Postmodernist religious language is a product of social convention. It “objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 23.

the linguistic community.”<sup>32</sup> Bound by their community’s socially constructed reality, Grenz and Franke cannot transcend their present community’s presuppositions to know reality as it is in itself. “Broadly speaking the term *postmodern* implies the rejection of . . . objective and universal knowledge.”<sup>33</sup> In disallowing any universal knowledge, these postmodernists destroy the universality of God’s creational revelation of his objective divine existence and power (Rom 1:19–20). They also dismiss any universal moral demands (2:14–15). Rejecting the Creator’s basis for the inexcusable guilt of all Jews and Gentiles, they have no ground on which to defend the universal right to life and liberty with justice for all. Furthermore, they lack common categories for cross-cultural communication of a theistic world and life view. They are anti- any creational foundation for knowing objective truth about the world they are culturally commissioned to rule.

What, then, is postmodernist theology? According to Grenz and Franke, it “is a contextual discipline, it is not the intent of theology simply to set forth, amplify, refine, and defend a timelessly fixed orthodoxy.”<sup>34</sup> The doctrinal and theological formulations of postmodernist theologians are “the products of human reflection on the stories, symbols and practices of the Christian community.”<sup>35</sup> Grenz and Franke think they have advanced beyond the individual relativism of the modernists, mystics, and neo-orthodox by referring to the knowledge of a community. However, they set forth ideas that are relative, not to an individual, but to a community of persons. Grenz, in his *Theology for the Community of God*, presents Christian stories as useful for Christians. But the stories and meta-narratives of numerous other religious communities describe contradictory views with spiritualities which are true for them. Grenz’s theology shifts the focus of attention away from doctrine and propositional truth in favor of what he thinks constitutes the uniquely evangelical vision of spirituality. Propositional truths are not essential to the spirituality of his community.

By way of evaluation, unlike God’s people in biblical times, postmodernists have no universal criteria by which to distinguish true from false prophets. Among the universal criteria by which God’s people test those who allegedly speak for God are: (1) logical consistency with earlier revelation (Deut 13:1–5); (2) factual verification of truth claims (18:20–22); and (3) freedom from hypocrisy (Matt 7:16).

In his theology, Grenz asserts what his work on epistemology denies. Apparently inconsistent with his denial of realistic, metaphysical knowledge in *Beyond Foundationalism*, Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God* asserts an ontological monotheism and trinitarianism. If consistent, he is merely describing the relative beliefs of his linguistic community and not asserting those orthodox doctrines as true of a metaphysical reality in itself. If he is asserting metaphysical propositions, he is inconsistent with his

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 17.

anti-metaphysical stance and his stance against any objective use of language for the reality of God. Grenz has an unfounded hope that his community's view will receive an eschatological confirmation to justify his present use of metaphysical language. In contrast, for 2,000 years, propositional promises have provided NT believers a solid basis for this hope.

Grenz and Franke cannot affirm that even biblical propositions assert truth about reality. For them, the Bible is not in and of itself the revelation of God, but "the divinely appointed means and channel of this revelation."<sup>36</sup> Grenz and Franke, like Bloesch, do not equate the revelation of God with the Bible. Like Roman Catholics, they regard the Bible as the product of the community of faith that cradled it. They seek to avoid the individual subjectivism and relativism of neo-orthodox encounters. They claim, "the problem of subjectivism arises only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community."<sup>37</sup> Thus the postmoderns' Bible is culture-bound. Evangelicals find the teaching of Christ and Scripture to be culture-related, but not culture-bound. People created in the image of God are capable of self-transcendence and self-determination. Surely the teaching of the eternal *logos* in human flesh was not community-bound! Neither were the Spirit-originated universal teachings of Scripture.

Postmodernists warn against a "simple, one-to-one correspondence between the revelation of God and the Bible."<sup>38</sup> The biblical canon reflects, not an informative divine revelation, but the ongoing conversation within the ancient Hebrew community and the early church. The Bible is not revelation. Revelation is what the Holy Spirit sought and seeks now to accomplish in the community through the Bible. Grenz and Franke add, "[T]he biblical texts bear witness to God's acting and speaking to the communities of faith in the biblical era. But God acts and speaks today too, and the Bible is the Spirit's chosen vehicle for speaking authoritatively to us."<sup>39</sup> What is meant is that God speaks, not the propositional content of biblical sentences, but via the resultant actions. Following the "speech-act" theory of J. L. Austin, Grenz and Franke displace the original intention of an assertion with its pragmatic result in their community.

Evangelicals earlier considered liberals to be "rationalists," because they accepted and rejected the truth of biblical passages based on the assumptions of their autonomous reason. Now postmodernists call evangelicals "rationalists" because they affirm biblical propositions to be true. That makes Jesus Christ "a rationalist" in his view of the OT. Orthodox and evangelical believers have been "rationalists" in this sense for 2,000 years. Classical Christianity has affirmed its belief that the Bible's indicative sentences conveyed true information about the real world and its real Creator. Bible-believing evangelical scholars do not claim full comprehension like that of

<sup>36</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* 57. Cited with approval by Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism* 67.

<sup>37</sup> Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism* 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 70–71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

God. However, having received an informational revelation from above, they know the truth in part (1 Cor 13:12).

What is important for these postmodernists is not the propositions conveyed by the biblical text, but whatever they think the Holy Spirit seeks to do with it in their community. For example, consider a postmodernist's interpretation of the explicit biblical proposition, "God is love." According to Nancey Murphy and other linguistic philosophers of religion, the assertion "God is love" tells us "nothing about God!"<sup>40</sup> It is performative language. Its meaning lies in what the text *does for her community*. Its meaning is in its "speech-act." The meaning happens when a community chooses to live agape-istically in the same way as the early church community.<sup>41</sup> The meaning of "God is love" becomes what a church chooses to make of it.

In contrast, according to historic evangelicals, the apostle John urges Christians to love each other because "God in his essence is love."<sup>42</sup> In history, furthermore, "God demonstrated his love by sending his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:7-9). So John's argument is not that we are to love one another because the early church did, but because God in reality is love. Furthermore, he verified his *agape* by giving his Son to suffer immeasurably and die that sinners might live. Is not reducing propositions about God's eternal being to descriptions of a human community's good intentions "Scripture-twisting?"<sup>43</sup> Will such abuses of scriptural propositions produce the loving spiritual life the eternal *logos* became flesh to exhibit and give?

I rejoice that postmodernists seek to live in a loving way and try to defend their faith by their lives.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, in our hearts, we ought "to set apart Christ as Lord." This is indeed true and crucial, but the Bible's normative exhortation reads that we are asked also to prepare "to give an answer to everyone who asks . . . the reason for the hope" we have (1 Pet 3:15). To wait with Grenz for a "confirmation" of authentic spirituality in an "eschatological realism" through "the constructive power of language" (whatever that means)<sup>45</sup> provides here and now no resolution of conflicting claims concerning God's nature and spiritual formation.

Summing up, a survey of liberal, secular, mystical, neo-orthodox, and post-modernist perspectives exhibits their contradictory positions on the nature of God (personal or impersonal, merely transcendent or merely immanent, moral or amoral) and spirituality (feeling, action, a depersonalizing mystical

<sup>40</sup> R. B. Braithwaite, cited by Nancey Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the Baptist Vision," in *Theology without Foundations* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas *et al.*; Nashville: Abingdon, 1964) 247.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 270.

<sup>42</sup> Donald W. Burdick, *The Letter of John the Apostle: An In-depth Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 319.

<sup>43</sup> From the title of James Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980).

<sup>44</sup> Philip Kenneson, "There is no Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Christian Apologetics in a Postmodern World* (ed. Phillips and Okholm; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995) 163.

<sup>45</sup> Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism* 272.

experience, a personal encounter or a subservience of the individual to the community). But all agree in denying that any objective, universally normative divinely originated propositions conveyed in human languages are necessary to authentic spiritual experience. The proponents of these influential views substitute individually or communally interpreted experiences for conceptual information from the Lord of all in creation, Christ and Scripture.

The non-propositional views of spirituality are right in saying that the Bible is more than a set of propositions about which to argue in theology courses. The problem is that in the above spiritualities divinely revealed propositional truths are not just undervalued, their divine truthfulness is denied and thereby their dynamic power is extinguished. The Bible's dynamic rests on the truth of its assertions about who God is, God's relation to the world, who Jesus was, and what he actually did. That informative use of language "turned the first century world upside down." Devout non-propositional writers unquestionably have a zeal for God, but it is not based on life-giving divinely revealed information true of reality. They have constructed their own individual or communal realities and spiritualities. On what basis can they teach what is in accord with the Christian faith if they fail to respect the only documents that tell us what Christ taught and the first Christians affirmed? My heart's desire and prayer to God is that they receive Christ's imputed righteousness by assent to the truth of divinely originated, and so reliable, promises and covenants (Rom 3:21-4:25; 10:1-3).

We now turn to a consideration of the foundation, birth and growth of distinctively evangelical Christian spirituality.

## II. THE CREATOR OF ALL AND UNIVERSALLY REVEALED PROPOSITIONS FOUNDATIONAL TO EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

Evangelical spiritual experience does not start with a response to revelation in Jesus Christ alone (Christomonism). Basic to understanding the nature and power of God's Son is the truth about the nature of his heavenly Father and a theistic world view.

Paul's exemplary mission in Athens to passionate Epicurean naturalists, Stoic pantheists, and idol worshippers did not begin with the gospel of Christ. He first made clear who God is from general (universal) revelation. The apostle explained that the highly cultured Greek philosophers and artists did not construct God. The God of whom he spoke created them! The "apostle to the Gentiles [heathen]" explained the essential nature of the Lord of all cultures in a series of negative and affirmative propositions. Negatively, God is non-physical, does not live in shrines made by humans, is not served by human hands, is not far from each one of us, and is not like gold, silver, stone, or a representation by the art or imagination of man (Acts 17:24-30). Affirmatively, God made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth, gives to all humans life and breath and all things, made all nations from one to live on the face of all the earth. In God all communities live and move and have their being. Humans from radically different communities are his offspring (Acts 17:24-30).

Similarly, today, cultured pagans brought up on contemporary eastern pantheistic and western naturalistic world views and the non-world view of linguistic philosophies need to know to what or to whom an evangelical's use of "God" refers. There is a real difference between the objective reality of God and the imaginations of thinkers, linguists, and artists. In a world of conflicting philosophies and religions, God needs no defense, but an evangelical view of God does.

Where is universal knowledge of the Judeo-Christian world view to be found? In every community on earth every day and night. "The heavens declare his glory. . . . Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (Ps 19:1–3). To people in Rome concerned about non-Jewish communities, Paul explained, "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them . . . from what has been made" (Rom 1:19–20).

What propositions do people of all times and cultures know? The Athenians and others have suppressed this knowledge, but they are accountable for valuing God above all and living by God's laws. "For God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Universally, all humans know, not only that one, active personal Spirit is (1) eternal; (2) wise; and (3) powerful; but also (4) that he is righteous. Being moral, God inscribed those objective moral norms, not only in the Ten Commandments and in the nine repeated in the NT (the Sabbath command is not repeated), but also on every human heart (Rom 2:14–15). Morality is not relative to communities any more than to individuals. There is an objective difference between good and evil. Evangelicals sense their dependence on the one eternal, moral Creator of everything who is personal, distinct from the world, and active in it.<sup>46</sup>

How do all people know the four numbered propositions plus the negative and affirmative assertions of Paul to the Athenians? These assertions about reality are not the creations of humans trying to find God by some form of a natural theology or self-flagellation. General revelation is God's activity of bringing truth to his image bearers. God's activity involves more than creation; it involves his common illumination of creation and common grace to achieve all that is good. Paul explains, "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Rom 1:19). To the Athenians he added, "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). Unfortunately, sinfully inclined humans worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25).

As a result of creation, general revelation, and illumination, a theistic world view is foundational to evangelical spiritual formation. Because the Creator is active in all of human history and all communities know the

<sup>46</sup> See H. P. Owen, "Theism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Paul Edwards; New York: Macmillan, 1967) 97–98.



basics of moral law, all Jews and Gentiles are accountable to him and for their idolatry and immorality are guilty before him (Rom 1:18–3:20).

Monotheism is inherent in theism and is also foundational to evangelical Christian spiritual formation. A monotheist assents to the truth of the proposition that in reality, there is but the one, eternal, living, moral divine Being. The God of creation is not just the tribal deity of a postmodern nation (henotheism). Scholars may create their own linguistic alleged realities, but universally, God's general revelation and illumination make clear that all in every community are: (1) dependent on one God; (2) morally obligated to the one God; and (3) guilty before the one God. All people everywhere who worship the creature more than the one real Creator (Rom 1:25) revealed in creation and their consciences are lost and need to hear about the spirituality the Savior came to give.

Unfortunately, Barthians and postmodernists, in their worthy desire to oppose the autonomous assumptions of modernism and natural theology, have destroyed these foundations of universal truth and justice. All salvation is in Christ alone, but not all revelation. Christomonism destroys the knowledge of the eternal Logos "without whom nothing was made" (John 1:1–2). Having contradicted the foundations of general revelation, Barthians and postmodernists cannot appeal consistently to universal human rights, universal justice, or the sacredness of all life beyond their community. They leave non-Christians with the excuse that they did not know God's moral demands.

Foundational to an evangelical spiritual formation, then, is a theistic world view that involves some absolute distinctions. General revelation makes clear a universal and necessary distinction between (1) reality and unreality (metaphysically, theologically and so spiritually); (2) truth and falsehood (epistemologically); (3) good and evil (ethically) and justice and injustice (politically). Evangelicals assert that all pious people are not worshipping the one Lord of all, however politically incorrect that may be. All communities are not living up to divinely revealed moral principles. People are without excuse for devoting themselves to the creature rather than the Creator and disobeying his moral requirements. God's righteous and impartial judgment is inescapable for all Jews and Gentiles. Every person from every community will have to account for suppressing those propositions or holding them down in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18; 21–25). A day when God will judge the secrets of all human hearts by Jesus Christ is part of Paul's gospel (Rom 2:16).

To affirm propositional revelation is not to claim omniscience. But some knowledge of reality is possible, since the eternal Word of God made the world and men and women in his image to rule it. Believers in propositional revelation need not assume with Immanuel Kant and his countless followers that the categories of God's thought and of creation are totally different from those of the human mind. Neither are his principles of reasoning totally different than those of his image bearers' logic. The Creator made and renews human minds to think his revealed thoughts after him (Col 3:10). The Creator made humans to rule the world and the lower forms of life to

be ruled by them as his accountable stewards. As a result of revealed truth, there is not only analogical knowledge of God, but also some univocal (non-figurative) knowledge of God. Hence a critical realism is possible. God's image bearers can know some things as God knows them by common and special grace via the content of general and special revelation.

The general revelation of God's universal laws of logic and morality provide the basis of the universal Christian mission. They make possible cross-cultural communication and appeals to justice. It is not that evangelicals impose their alien standards on others. Rather, we help people to realize that God's law is good for all people of all times. The possibility of attaining greater justice in every tribe and nation rests on a common inner sense of justice. Evangelicals simply remind agnostics, pantheists, henotheists, and polytheists, however spiritual they seem to be, of God's moral nature and the moral principles they already know and may be suppressing.

Evangelicals, like Paul, deliver the divine summons. The Lord of all commands all everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). When people know they are sick, they are more likely to call on the great Physician. Like Moses' moral law, the universal moral law inscribed on the heart helps sinners realize that they are already under condemnation and stand in need of divine mercy and grace (Rom 1:18–3:23).

### III. THE INCARNATION, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS, AND THE BIRTH OF EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

Necessary to the conception and birth of evangelical Christian spiritual vitality is assent also to the central propositions of the Creator's special revelation. The disclosure of God's redemptive plan and provision is found supremely in Jesus the Messiah and inspired Scripture. Christianity originated in history and has a founder. Everyone in every language and culture needs to hear and receive the great news of "its founding events."<sup>47</sup> New life for depraved, guilty, and alienated sinners begins with assent to the truth of historical facts and their revealed significance. Belief in the gospel directs devotion to trust in its referent, the living Christ, who can save. We often hear that knowledge is not enough without faith. True. It is equally true that sincere spiritual zeal without knowledge of the gospel is insufficient. The most pious Jewish monotheists, like Paul, needed to hear and assent to the gospel's truths (Rom 10:1–4).

In this fallen world of conflicting claims about God's nature and spirituality, how do evangelicals determine what is the case and therefore is morally and spiritually *bona fide*? To distinguish spiritual reality from unreality and authentic from inauthentic spiritual experience, evangelicals turn to the divinely originated propositional truths in both general and special revelation. Those revealed truths are indispensable criteria by which to test

<sup>47</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946) 47–48; Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946) 19.

the spirits in a fallen world inhabited by evil as well as good spirits. By way of illustration, one biblically explicit criterion of authentic spirituality is a proposition about the literal incarnation of God's eternal Word. "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:2–3). Faithfulness to revealed assertions like the Messiah's literal humanity help evangelicals direct their devotion away from impotent idols and avoid counterfeit spiritual experiences.

The "simple" gospel of God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ is made up of several such profound propositional criteria. (1) The proposition, "The Word was God," asserts truth about his essential deity (John 1:1). (2) The proposition, "The Word is the one who became flesh," affirms truth both metaphysically and historically (1:14). (3) The proposition, "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God," is true both historically and ontologically (Matt 16:16; John 20:31). (4) The proposition, "Jesus is the one who died for our sins," is a straightforward assertion of a historical fact and its revealed meaning (1 Cor 15:3). (5) The proposition, Jesus rose from the dead, is true in both its historical and its theological significance (vv. 4–8). To become an evangelical is not only to hold a theistic world view, but also to believe the gospel, that is, to give mental assent to the truth of these five profound propositions. These revealed propositions are "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:14). The gospel's assertions about the real Christ are unparalleled in the founding of any other religion. Hence God's supreme revelation is in the incarnation of God's eternal Word. Although revelation is not Christomonistic because it occurs also in creation and Scripture, salvation is Christomonistic.

If all this is involved in the gospel, how can children receive Christ? Children old enough to realize that they are sinners can assent to their level of understanding of the gospel's assertions. In a Christian home they have heard repeatedly that Jesus came from God, died for their sins, and rose again. However simple their understanding and beliefs, if born again their faith has been directed to the Jesus celebrated in their home and church every Sunday of the year as well as on Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. The commitment of a child is directed by a child's understanding of sound information beyond relatives, friends, and church to the one who can save them. Some older people need a child-like trust in Christ.

The supreme revelation of God in history is the person of Christ, but he was not speechless. He told several parables illustrating explicit propositions. He also affirmed many explicit propositions: "God is spirit" (John 4:24); "I who speak to you am he" (v. 26); "I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the light of the world" (8:12); "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will die in your sins" (8:24); "I and the father are one" (10:30); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6). Jesus believed and taught propositional truth and faithfully lived by it existentially.

The apostle John, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the claims of Christ, was not playing language games for one community. He recorded Jesus' claims that people of every culture "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that believing [that proposition] you may have *life* through his name" (John 20:31). It is assent to the truth of the gospel's propositions expressed in the language of any culture that begins an eternal life of personal fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

What did Jesus teach about the source and power of his own teachings? His words in human languages originated, not with his human community, but with his heavenly Father. In prayer, Jesus said, "I gave them the words you gave me . . . Your word is truth" (John 17:8, 17). His propositions were far from static. His affirmations of cognitive truth were dynamic. He could say, "The words I have spoken unto you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Revealed truths are the key to vital spiritual life. He also said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). Revealed truths are the key to freedom from mere human oppressors, individual or communal.

Jesus' teachings were culture-related but are far from culture-bound.<sup>48</sup> His great commission is to be followed by all of his disciples around the world. His message transcended his community of disciples. The risen Lord could say, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:18–20). However ecstatic or awesome the alternative spiritual experiences reviewed above, any sinner's hope of justification, redemption, and reconciliation depends on the logical validity of the propositions affirming the facts and meanings of the Messiah's atonement and resurrection. Hearing the gospel's affirmations, the Holy Spirit calls sinners to assent to their truth, repent of their sins, and trust the real ascended Savior. God, being righteous, just, and holy, cannot be approached by the devoutly self-righteous any more than the blatantly immoral. Both need to hear the powerful message of the gospel, assent to its truth, and be forgiven. Both need to be justified by faith and born again from above. By the way of the cross both can enjoy reconciliation to the Holy One.

Whoever dismisses propositional revelation denies the truth of other explicit teaching of the Lord. When Peter finally acknowledged, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this [true proposition] was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt 16:16–17). Does not the rejection of any propositional revelation contradict the Lord's teaching on the origin of Peter's confession?

Was Paul's gospel the product of a frail and fallible human language game constructed to point to ineffable personal encounters or to the fallible insights of his new community? The former enemy of Christ wrote, "I want

<sup>48</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 1.113.

you to know . . . that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11–12). Does not the rejection of any propositional revelation contradict the divine origin of Paul's gospel (1 Cor 15:1–4)?

What is the object of *belief*? The object of belief is the gospel's propositions. The seed of the Word must be sown before evangelical spiritual life is conceived. Augustine asked, "Who cannot see that thinking is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought what it is to be believed. . . . everybody who believes, thinks,—both thinks in believing, and believes in thinking. . . . If faith is not a matter of thought, it is of no account."<sup>49</sup> One must hear and actively think about the gospel and then become persuaded of its objective truth for all and so its truth for him or her. The Holy Spirit's witness assists one to the conviction of the gospel's truth. Turning in repentance from all lesser masters is then prior to a life of fellowship with the Lord of all. Belief that the gospel's propositions are true is not sufficient without faith.

What is the object of *faith*? The object of faith is the Person to whom the gospel refers: the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Christ himself. Evangelical spirituality is born with faith and a holistic commitment to the exalted Christ as our Savior and Lord. Evangelicals are not ashamed to witness, because, like Paul, they (1) know whom they have believed; (2) are persuaded that he can save; and (3) have committed themselves to the glorified Christ himself for time and eternity (2 Tim 1:12). One who has believed the gospel's propositions to be true has good reason to trust its referent. "Everyone who trusts in Christ will never be put to shame. . . . Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:11, 13). All who "receive him" are given "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Reconciled to God by belief and faith, strangers from the covenant become officially children in God's moral and spiritual family.

What is the relationship of belief and faith to the birth of evangelical spirituality? An evangelical has: (1) heard the gospel; (2) believed it to be true in reality; and (3) trusted the living Christ. Only people who believe the good news that Christ died for their sins and rose again will desire lovingly to relate to the Christ who rose and ascended. Believing that Christ really is glorified in heaven, one can put one's holistic trust in the ultimate living Lord with all authority in heaven and earth. The *telos* of belief and faith is Holy Spirit-enabled personal fellowship with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. It also provides the enduring basis of informed and caring relationships with all other members of Christ's body from every community on earth.

Evangelicals, of course, do not claim to know anything as completely as God does. They see things from their particular, limited perspectives and have different interpretations. Some interpretations, however, are in fact better informed than others. Some ideas are consistent with divinely revealed information; some are not. We know the truths of general and special

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, "On the Predestination of the Saints, I,5 NPNF 5:499.

revelations about spiritual realities only *in part*. But God's image bearers can *know* the central gospel message in part. The elements of gospel truth they receive are sufficient to direct one's spiritual passion from the creation to the Creator and from their sinful selves to their sinless Savior.

#### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE REST OF BIBLICAL PROPOSITIONS GUIDE BELIEVERS' MORAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Since Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit descended to dwell with believers, no spiritual child of God need ascend a ladder of spiritual disciplines to try like the mystics to reach God. "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is to bring Christ down). . . . The Word is near you" (Rom 10:6, 8). Now "in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13). Converts continue to be brought near to the Holy One by the Spirit-inspired prophetic and apostolic teaching of Scripture. The Holy Spirit "breathed out" all Scripture to be "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). No Scripture "came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:20–21).

The Holy Spirit not only reminds pre-Christians of God's existence, power, and moral demands, and persuades converts of the gospel's truth, but he also abides permanently with committed disciples of Christ to attest the enriching truths in all the Scripture he inspired. The Spirit's ministries are multiple. He baptizes believers into Christ's church, dwells with them at their gatherings, gives them spiritual gifts to build one another up, teaches, counsels, fills, and energizes them for their Christlike lives and ministries. In all these services, the Spirit's primary instrument is the truth he breathed out.

Some devotional speakers may quote, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9). In that context, God called *the wicked* to forsake their ways and evil persons their thoughts (vv. 6–7). Indeed, God's thoughts and ways are as far above those of unrepentant evil people as the heavens are from the earth. However, God brought his thoughts from heaven to earth in the informative teaching of his inspired prophetic and apostolic writers, and supremely in his Son. Hence God's thoughts and ways in Scripture are not far from the believing, repenting, and trusting. The primary instrument of the Holy Spirit is revealed truth. "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edge sword, . . . it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

Devotional writers sometimes say, "It is better to experience God than to define God." Why would one who understands the gospel pit clarity of revealed truth against personal experience? To illustrate, if one is seriously ill, what is more important than a propositionally true diagnosis and a precisely defined prescription? *Based on that truth*, what is more important than the patient's faithfulness in taking the prescribed medicine as directed?

Similarly, when addressing humanity's moral and spiritual need, what is more important than a true diagnosis of our basic moral and spiritual malady and an accurate prescription for its alleviation? *Based on revealed assertions*, what is more important than personal trust in the Jesus of history and faithfulness in following all that he commanded?

Specifically, in what ways does the Holy Spirit use belief in objective propositions and obedience to universal normative commandments in a growing moral discernment and authentic spiritual experience?

1. Revealed propositional truth sharpens the goal of spiritual experience. It is not union, but communion. The aim is not a depersonalizing metaphysical oneness, but a renewing intimate fellowship with Jesus and his heavenly Father. Knowing from revealed truth that we are finite and fallen, we never claim to become one in essence with the eternal God, even temporarily. To confuse one's self with deity is not deeper spirituality, but blasphemy. In our most intense spiritual experiences, and throughout eternity, we remain personally distinct from, but in a personal fellowship with, the one living, tri-personal God.

What brief, mindless, totally passive "mystical experience" or "personal encounter" can compare with a continuous life of personal "fellowship" of one assured of eternal life in "communion" with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (1 John 1: 3; 2 Cor 13:14)? Consider the rich fellowship believers share in common and the communion in which they participate. According to Paul,

*koinonia* refers strictly to the relation of faith to Christ: "the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9), "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14), fellowship in the gospel (Phil. 1:5), "fellowship of faith" (Phlm. 6) . . . The "right hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9) given to Paul and Barnabus by James, Peter and John was not just a handshake over a deal but mutual recognition of being in Christ. Similarly, *koinonia* in 1 Cor. 10:16 means "participation" in the body and blood of Christ and thus union with the exalted Christ. . . . This new existence is not a divinization in the sense of mysticism and the mystery religions, but incorporation in Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and glory. It is not the elimination or fusion of personality but a new relationship based on the forgiveness of sins. . . .

According to John,

*koinonia* in 1 Jn. 1:3, 6, 7 does not refer to a mystical fusion with Christ and God, but to a fellowship in faith. It is basic in the apostolic preaching of the historical Jesus, walking in the light, and the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin. It thus excludes the sectarian pride which denies the incarnation and misrepresents the character of sin.<sup>50</sup>

Several biblical terms for spiritual experience remind one of ideal family relationships. A person of faith is a "child," a "son" or "daughter" of Jesus' heavenly Father! Persons of faith view each other as "brothers" and "sisters" of fathers and mothers. They represent the enduring fellowship of a prodigal

<sup>50</sup> J. Schattenmann, "Fellowship," *NIDNTT* 1.643-44.

reconciled to his father and joyfully participate again in his forgiving family. Is there a higher enduring value in human life than personal fellowship with relatives and friends? Eternal life is a personal, spiritual fellowship with their Lord and with their believing family and friends eternally.

There may be high points or peak participatory experiences in family relationships, but continuous fellowship better expresses the enduring evangelical experience of the justified, redeemed, and reconciled who are reborn and adopted children. "Fellowship with God" seems more helpful than the brief "encounters" or "mystical experiences." Fellowship is preferable, moreover, because it encompasses both personal and communal experiences, not merely the one or the other.

As indispensable as is revealed truth to evangelical spiritual formation, mature evangelicals do not worship the Bible's indicative sentences or the propositions they convey. To the extent that their devotion is directed by those biblical guidelines, people of faith enjoy fellowship with their real referent, the Triune Lord of all, and with their real brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. From the greatest normative commandment Jesus taught, evangelicals in every culture and community know that their primary motivation for a spiritual life ought to be holistic love. The regenerate, knowing that God first loved them, ought to love God with all their being: heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matt 22:37-38). Evangelical moral and spiritual growth is motivated primarily by self-giving love for the triune God who has disclosed himself in the incarnate Christ and the teachings of Scripture. *Agape* love for God is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:19). God does not desire headless enthusiasts, but those who love him with all their minds, as well as hearts, souls, and strength. As we check our motives, mixed though they may be, the primary incentive of members of God's moral and spiritual family should be love for the triune God above all others in our family, church, neighborhood, business, and nation.

3. From the second greatest universal commandment of our Lord, evangelicals know that they ought to love their neighbors as themselves (Matt 22:39). As Paul taught, "over all" other virtues, believers manifest love because it integrates the others (Col 3:14). "Above all," Peter wrote, believers ought to love one another because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). Love for all those to whom we relate does not violate God's moral laws; it fulfills them. Christ exemplified a life that keeps God's moral law flawlessly, but was not bound by the Pharisee's misinterpretations and additions. Since Jesus died, rose, and ascended, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell with people of faith "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Rom 8:4). Compassionate evangelicals address the needs of the victims of injustice, the weak, the sick, the poor, and the imprisoned in the name of Jesus Christ. Theirs has been and ought to be a principled social activism motivated primarily by love for God and others.

4. Spirit-inspired exhortations direct evangelicals to a source of strength to live a moral and spiritual life. How can anyone find the stamina always to love God and neighbor? The good we would do is countered by the desires of the sinful nature. As Paul advised, "do not live according to the sinful na-



ture, but according to Spirit” (Rom 8:4). First, put to death daily the sinful nature with all of its ugly acts (Gal 5:19–21). Second, live in the energy supplied by the inward assurance and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Actively yield soul and body to him daily to bring forth his beautiful fruit (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:22). Progress in principled and loving evangelical spirituality, insofar as it is achieved, is energized not by the flesh, nor by the Christian community, but by the Holy Spirit’s multiple ministries.

One of those ministries is his witness to the truth of scriptural promises. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirits that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:16). For reliable guidelines in spiritual formation, evangelicals ought to interpret the Spirit-inspired sentences and propositions by the Holy Spirit’s illumination. “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Cor 2:12). The Spirit’s illumination does not replace the Word, either as living or written. He does not subtract from or add to the biblical canon he inspired. The truth of the inspired Word, as we saw, tests the spirits. It is also important that the Holy Spirit *attests* the Word, assuring each person that he or she is a child in God’s family of the redeemed.

The witness of the Spirit overcomes one’s fleshly resistance to receiving the propositions conveyed by biblical sentences as true. The Spirit’s witness does not add to the faith once-for-all entrusted to the saints, but brings evangelicals to convictions of its truth and to personal fellowship with the Triune God. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). Apart from yieldedness to the Spirit we may see and hear biblical sentences, but not see and hear them with assent to the truth of the propositions they convey. People in fellowship with the Holy Spirit find the truth he breathed out in Scripture to be “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” They find biblical instruction necessary to become “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16).

Differing interpretations of biblical propositions will occur, for illumination does not result in inerrancy. But evangelical interpreters of the Bible need to be clear on its ultimate Source and authoritative nature. Then the ordinary, straightforward language of a text is to be interpreted consistently with its writer’s purpose, grammar, and immediate and broader contexts. The biblical writers’ broader context extends to their world view and belief system. Evangelicals must relate biblical propositions to contemporary cultures, philosophies, religions, and theologies, but will not contradict or distort the writer’s intention understood in a manner consistent with the entirety of biblical teaching.

5. Evangelical spirituality is holistic. Faith in God and fellowship with God involves (1) mental assent to revealed truth; (2) affectionate desire for its referent; and (3) volitional action in humble obedience. Like Paul, evangelicals do not lose heart, because they know whom they have believed and are convinced that he is able to guard what they have entrusted or committed to him (2 Tim 1:12). The Holy Spirit does not want worshippers whose minds are blown on drugs or forms of meditation that delete the distinction in a proposition between subject and predicate. Evangelicals do not worship

an unknown God. The Lord of all wants our worship and our meditation in both spirit and truth (John 4:24). So, with Paul, evangelicals say, "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (1 Cor 14:15). Evangelicals know the God they love and serve. They love the God they know and serve. They serve the God they know and love. An evangelical is one holistic person while consciously enjoying creation, meditating on Scripture, studying biblical doctrine, communing with the triune God, worshipping in a gathered community of believers and helping the poor.

6. The righteous live by faith (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17). Faith is commitment directed to a moral path by revealed commands and to spiritual realities by propositional truth. "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:8). What is faith? It is not wishful thinking, gullibility, or a leap in the dark. For Abraham, faith began with belief in what God had revealed. Faith was "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom 4:21). Can a person who does not believe another person's word be said to trust that person? The faith commitment of evangelicals is directed by Spirit-revealed and Spirit-inspired information and admonition more than by uninspired interpretations of spiritual experiences, whether individual or communal. The Scripture founded the Church; the Church did not invent the Scriptures. The Church did not create the Book of Romans, Romans came from the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul to the church at Rome. Faith rests in words that originated with God. Those words encourage Christians to pray. Barth had much helpful material on prayer, but no divinely originated promises to encourage intercessory prayer. Believing divinely inspired promises, evangelicals engage both in prayer for themselves and in intercession for others. Believers in universal promises can count on God hearing and answering according to his wisdom.

7. Evangelicals place scriptural authority above their own and their community's interpretations of their moral and spiritual experiences. We do not engage in false advertising by claiming an experience that will be ours only in heaven. Peter, knowing he would soon die, wrote to establish Christians in the truth (2 Pet 1:12–15). He spoke of being an eyewitness of Christ's majesty when he received honor and glory from the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration (vv. 16–18). Peter had a foretaste of the heavenly experience of the glorified Christ. But he did *not* then say, "Tell everyone about my immediate experience of the transfigured Christ and try to have a mountain top experience like mine!" Instead, Peter wrote, "we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it" (v. 19). It is well to look forward to seeing the risen and glorified Lord in heaven. We are not, however, to become so preoccupied with our experiences that we neglect the teaching of the Word. If some of us had an experience like Peter's, we would likely spend the rest of our lives talking about our experience, rather than about the wonderful provisions of Christ's atonement, resurrection, and present ministry at the Father's right hand in glory.

What can be more moving here and now than to acknowledge our sins at the Lord's table and rejoice in his forgiveness? What can bring greater joy

than to know we have passed from death to life and can never come into condemnation? Do you expect a passing emotional experience or that of your community to make you “more than a conqueror”? Paul asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” At the burial services of believing relatives and friends Paul’s conviction has been of great comfort. He wrote, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38).

8. For believers convinced of such changeless revealed propositions and promises, God is always present. Never is there a time when God is absent or “dead” (as in mystical and secular spiritualities). Repentant people who believe unshakable promises and trust their great Giver know that God is always with them. They believe in the sun even when it is not shining. Enabled by the many ministries of the Holy Spirit, they do not give in, like the mystics between rare momentary experiences, to “shadows of unknowing” and “dark nights of the soul.” When believers are tempted to sinful denials of revealed truth, they overcome them by quoting Spirit-inspired and Spirit-illuminated Scripture as did their Lord. They meditate day and night on God’s omnipresence and the risen Christ’s promise, “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

Biblically informed believers grow in their consciousness of God’s presence in three ways. (1) They grow in awareness of his sustaining providential presence in their daily lives and in history at large. (2) They become cognizant also of his redemptive presence in their spirits convicting of sin and strengthening them, their families, and their church to bring news of Christ’s atonement to the whole world. Repeatedly, the Lord’s redemptive presence at his table helps believers focus more fully on the provisions of Christ’s atonement and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence. (3) Believers anticipate the future when the repentant, after death or the rapture, will enjoy God’s immediate, glorious presence in heaven itself.

Which is more beneficial? The apostle Peter’s testimony to his immediate religious experience of seeing the Lord transfigured in his glory or inspired propositions of universal relevance? Shortly before his death, Peter wrote, “we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it. . . . Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:19–21). Evangelical Christians are encouraged by hearing and reading the testimonies of others’ experiences of fellowship with the triune God, but they do not finally base their faith on the word of individuals or communities of believers. Evangelicals base their spirituality on “more certain” Holy Spirit-inspired propositions, promises, and commands.

9. Evangelicals develop a sanctified habit of being conscious of God’s redemptive presence. Pastor J. C. Ryle was concerned that his people were not “living the life of habitual communion with Christ.” He asked, “Are we

living the life of faith in him and drawing out of him every hour the supply that every hour requires?" Jesus asked his disciples to abide in him. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). Forensic justification is one great blessing; communion with Christ is another inestimable blessing.

Ryle adds, "Ignorance of this life of communion is one among many reasons why so many in this age are hankering after the Confessional, and strange views of the 'real presence' in the Lord's Supper. Such errors [and I include the lust for brief, immediate mystical experiences or encounters] often spring from imperfect knowledge of Christ, and obscure views of the life of faith in a risen, living and interceding Savior."<sup>51</sup> Many evangelicals return to fellowship with Christ by memorizing his words and frequently returning to them in meditation.

10. People of the same convictions love, not only their Lord, but his church. They devote themselves to the apostle's teaching and then to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Believers in the Christ, the head of the church, join a church that believes the Bible, and become active in its many-faceted ministries. They do not stand outside and criticize. They get inside and help to make the community what Scripture teaches it ought to be morally and spiritually. A church or academic community is a great provisional help if it serves people according to the Word and is motivated by love and enabled by the Holy Spirit. But if given an authority to deny revealed propositional truth, a church or school becomes an idol. One should do everything morally and legally possible to recover it for biblical truth. However, as a last resort, if its people and leaders will not submit to the fact that the Bible is God's revealed truth to live by, then one will need to separate from it and find a church that believes the Bible (Rom 14:19–21; 16:17–18).

Convinced that every doctrine in the Bible is of enriching spiritual significance, I developed at the conclusion of each major doctrine in *Integrative Theology* a section on that belief's relevance for life and service.<sup>52</sup>

We ask again our original question. "Is propositional revelation essential to evangelical spirituality?" (1) Unless people affirm that they owe their existence to a personal moral Creator, are dependent on him, accountable to him, and guilty before him, they cannot understand their need for the evangel. The call of the gospel can make sense only on the foundation of the Judeo-Christian world view and moral norms. (2) Without belief in the propositions of the gospel, moral lawbreakers cannot enter God's kingdom. The conception and birth of evangelical spiritual life in God's kingdom occurs through Holy Spirit-illuminated belief in the revealed truth of the gospel's propositions and a holistic commitment of faith to the risen One of whom those propositions speak. (3) Without the direction of, and desire for, the Holy Spirit's many divinely revealed and authoritative normative guidelines in Scripture, newly

<sup>51</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1959) 13.

<sup>52</sup> See my section on "Relevance for Life and Ministry" at the conclusion of each chapter of Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* and "God's Word: Key to Authentic Spirituality," in *A Call to Christian Character* (ed. Bruce Shelley; Zondervan, 1970) 105–20.

regenerated spiritual babies in whom the old sinful nature seeks to dominate, will not mature as healthfully as God intended. Only as motivated, not by legalistic fear or necessity, but by love for God and neighbor and as energized by the many ministries of the Holy Spirit, can people achieve distinctively evangelical spirituality.

Having found that propositional revelation is that without which each step in the process of evangelical spiritual formation cannot develop, I have not argued that mental assent to the truth of propositions is sufficient. There is much more to life-long loving of the triune God and our actual neighbors than this—but not less!

#### V. A CONCLUDING GLIMPSE OF EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY PAST AND FUTURE

A resurgence of evangelical convictions began around the middle of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s non-evangelicals had dominated most of the large denominations, publications, schools and missions. Several evangelicals with earned doctorates, like Gordon Clark, Carl Henry, Edward John Carnell, and others answered the assumptions of the liberal critics and gave sound reasons for holding to the truth of all that the Bible asserts. By December 28, 1949, sixty scholars from varied schools and affiliations formed the Evangelical Theological Society. It included those who held that “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety [including its explicit and implied propositions] is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.”<sup>53</sup>

Then came the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Christianity Today*, and many other publications. In 1974, at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, Christian leaders from 150 countries accepted “The Lausanne Covenant.” It affirmed “the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”<sup>54</sup> From 1977–1987, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy produced some six scholarly books, numerous pamphlets, and the influential Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.<sup>55</sup>

During the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of educated confidence in the divine origin and authority of biblical assertions (and other factors), another evangelical distinctive—evangelism—became more vibrant.

<sup>53</sup> This was the original “Doctrinal Basis” of the Evangelical Theological Society.

<sup>54</sup> “The Lausanne Covenant” can be obtained from LCWE, P.O. Box 1100, Wheaton, IL 60189.

<sup>55</sup> See the Chicago Statement in the Appendix of Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Zondervan, 1979). Other ICBI publications included: Norman Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy: Its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, eds., *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); John Harrah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Kenneth Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987).

With new fervor, evangelicals reminded people of God and his moral principles and called people to accept the gospel's affirmations concerning the person and work of Christ, repent of their sins, and trust the living Savior. Globally, Billy Graham and others declared with conviction, "The Bible says." Countless people received Christ, youth and campus ministries flourished. Evangelical colleges and seminaries grew. Missions agencies sent numerous alumni to fields around the world. A plethora of evangelical magazines, journals, and books flooded the market. To live and teach during the resurgence of evangelicalism during the last half of the twentieth century has been exciting indeed!

My eyes have seen, not only evangelicalism's phenomenal recent rise, but now the beginnings of its apparent demise. Some "evangelical" leaders appear to be departing from a spirituality based on the universal veracity of revealed ontological, moral, and historical propositions. In place of that firm foundation, some leaders, authors, and publishers seem to prefer spiritualities based on feelings, social activism, mystical experiences, personal encounters, and interpreters of communal experiences.

I pray that the Holy Spirit here and now will summon you, enduring reader, to rededicate yourself to defending two primary evangelical distinctives: (1) Believe divinely revealed propositional truths and trust and obey the Lord of all; (2) be ready to pray, preach, or die to evangelize the world with objective truth. Whatever people's felt need, their most profound need is for divine mercy and grace. Deliver the divine indictment. Call them to repent of their sin and trust the Jesus of history as both Messiah and Lord. When facing the threats of terrorists, remember that though "Heaven and earth will pass away," Jesus promised [the propositional meaning of] "my words will never pass away" (Mark 13:31).