

**THE EMERGING EVANGELICALISM: THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE TWENTIETH AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURIES**

By

Aaron Earl Klinefelter

116 Tahoma Dr.

Paris, KY 40361

Fuller Theological Seminary

School of Intercultural Studies

MH 500 Global Evangelical Movement

Dr. Jehu Hanciles

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## **Introduction**

Evangelicalism is changing. From the beginning, regardless as to when you date it, evangelicalism has been amorphous and diverse. These changes are particularly pronounced in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in America. There are, perhaps, many reasons why this is so. Some may contend that evangelicalism is less evangelical than before and is showing signs of decline. Others might assume that additional forms of Christianity are supplanting the evangelical variety. However, these would be only partial explanations. Underneath these lies a seismic shift in the tectonic plates of our society. America has increasingly moved from a modern to a postmodern world. This fundamental shift in American culture has had enormous impact on the status of evangelical life, witness, and ethos.

Evangelical Christianity was a product of the Enlightenment and, as such, developed with modernity as its primary worldview. However, in the western world in the early twenty-first century, the landscape has changed. The dominant culture facing evangelicalism is no longer modernity, but a post-modern, post-Christian, milieu of shifting contexts and realities. But this sea-change has not happened in a vacuum or in any sudden sense. There has been at least fifty years of change taking place within evangelicalism. Much of this change has been incremental and a result of modernity's fragmentation, reductionism, and rationalism. However, the change that the church is now facing is unprecedented and wholly new. We are challenged to re-incarnate the gospel in this changing American society. This change is not incremental or a continuous

adaptation to our culture. These seismic shifts in American culture are entirely “other” and discontinuous. And they are forcing evangelicalism to reassess itself.

The subject of this paper’s query is how evangelicalism was disestablished in the latter part of the twentieth century and how the emerging post-evangelical church is engaging this new context. To accomplish this task one must have a sense for how deeply ingrained evangelicalism is with modernity’s assumptions. After looking into this foundation the next task is to explore the history of evangelicalism in the latter part of the twentieth century. One must therefore consider the unique changes that postmodernity has placed before the church. Finally, it is important to suggest ways in which the church is presently attempting to engage contemporary, postmodern America.

### **From whence we come: our modern roots**

Martin Marty has said that “Evangelicalism is the characteristic Protestant way of relating to modernity” (Carpenter 1997:235), indeed evangelicals relate well to modernity’s compartmentalization because of the intense emphasis on individual religious experience (Ibid 1997:235). As a product of Enlightenment thinking, modernity was born out of the intellectual ponderings of philosophers in the seventeenth century. Stephen Toulmin highlights four fundamental transitions that characterize the emerging modernity of the time. First was a shift from the orality to the literacy. Modern philosophy moved away from “arguments” as “public utterances” to “proofs that could be set down in writing, and judged as written” (1990:31). Thus a reliance on the internal rationality of a written argument superceded the veracity of oral communication and

dialogue. This would have profound effect upon evangelicalism and the inerrancy debate of scripture.

The inerrancy of the Bible became a defining characteristic of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. To view the Bible as inerrant was to attest to its “historical and scientific reliability” (Marsden 1987:111). This dogmatic view of Scripture had been around since the seventeenth century, but with the coming of higher criticism in the late nineteenth century, efforts to make inerrancy a defining category of orthodoxy rose. Dispensationalists were particularly vehement regarding this interpretation of scripture. Understanding the Bible as literally accurate in every respect, especially regarding the time-lines of the eschaton, became a rallying cry for Dispensationalists and the litmus test of one’s fundamentalist credentials (Ibid 1987:111-112). The inerrancy understanding of scripture has much in common with modernity’s fondness for the written, objective argument. Writing freezes communication, it makes the argument static and unmoving. This has great benefit when wanting to objectify and critique.

However, orality, which has come to possess something of a second-class citizenship in modernity, is temporal and dynamic. As soon as a word is spoken it disappears and survives only in memory. Walter Ong has written extensively on orality and oral culture. He states,

Language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature.... Writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into

‘grapholects’.... [but] writing can never dispense with orality. (Ong 2002:7-8).

The dogma of inerrancy among fundamentalists and evangelicals follows modernity’s move from orality to literacy. The value placed on the written word as being superior to the spoken is an unfortunate consequence of modernity. It has caused not only deep division in the church, but a narrow and unsatisfactory appropriation of scripture.

Second, there was a shift from the particular to the universal. Toulmin points out that until the seventeenth century, moral decisions were based on situational or case-by-case procedures. This was within keeping with the Aristotelian tradition as presented in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Toulmin 1990:31). Aristotle states, “the Good has no universal form, regardless of the subject matter or situation: sound moral judgment always respects the detailed circumstances of specific kinds of cases” (Ibid 1990:31-32). Philosophers of the seventeenth century repudiated this form of particularity in morality and opted for universality in decisions. “Modern philosophers have generally assumed that – like God and Freedom, or Mind and Matter – the Good and the Just conform to timeless and universal principles” (Ibid 1990:32). These “comprehensive general principles” would permeate modern philosophy. Evangelicalism was thus infected with a penchant for objective, universal truth. This is clearly seen in Campus Crusade’s four spiritual laws.

The late Bill Bright’s evangelistic organization, Campus Crusade for Christ, has had a tremendous impact and ministry on many college and university campuses around the world. One of the key strategies used in evangelism is the presentation of the four spiritual laws. These laws, or to use Toulmin’s language, universal principles, are as follows:

1. God *loves* you, and has a wonderful *plan* for your life.
2. Man is *sinful* and *separated* from God, thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.
3. Jesus Christ is God's *only* provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
4. We must individually *receive* Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives (Quebedeaux 1974:31).

While there is much to be applauded about Campus Crusade's evangelistic endeavors, the language of "laws" is markedly modern and rationalistic. The assumption is that these laws are unchanging, undisputed principles that hold equally for all persons in all situations. There is no recognition of local diversity or particularity.

Third, there was a shift from the local to the general. Again, Toulmin highlights that "Ethnographers are unmoved by inconsistencies among the legal customs of different peoples; but philosophers have to bring to light the general principles that hold in a given field of study – or preferably, in all fields" (1990:33). Modernity has thus had a sustained disregard for the idiosyncrasies of local culture and customs, in favor of abstract generalities. These gleaned generalities from a given field of study have held much authority for modernity. This is clearly evident in the Church Growth movement, as well as Charles Finney's principles for effective revival.

While the Church Growth movement has had many marvelous results, there is an underlying foundation of modernity. Arthur Glasser, former Dean of the School of World Mission, now known as the School of Intercultural Studies, at Fuller Theological Seminary, writes that the "dominant concern of the Institute of Church Growth, the heart of the SWM.... [was that it would] solely represent a series of principles and procedures

for heightening the effectiveness of missionaries and church leaders laboring to see the Holy Spirit work through them in fullness” (1986:406). Certainly, this is not to question the effectiveness or ability of the Holy Spirit, but “principles and procedures” are definitely grounded in an Enlightenment worldview. Likewise, Charles Finney, the nineteenth century American evangelist, constructed revivals as a scientific endeavor that was to be planned in order to maximize conversion (Bebbington 1989:8). Again, the underlying modern assumptions of general principles that could be extrapolated to the masses were prevalent.

Fourth, there was a shift from the timely to the timeless. Modernity emphasizes timeless, universal, general principles. “For Descartes and his successors, timely questions were no concern of philosophy: instead, their aim was to bring to light permanent structures underlying all the changeable phenomena of Nature” (Toulmin 1990:34). Before this philosophical change, “all problems in the practice of law and medicine [and religion (?) were] ‘timely’. They referred to specific moments in time – now not later, today not yesterday” (Ibid 1990:33). The way in which these timeless principles overtook the time-bound human concerns helps one understand the evangelical over zealotry of spiritual salvation against social concerns and issues.

Fundamentalists, and all too often evangelicals, are frequently guilty of an overemphasis on “reducing the Christian message to one of salvation alone” (Nash 1963: 24). Where this is the case, it usually corresponds that there is little attention given to growth and social action or justice. This is a deep grievance. Though salvation is a timeless reality it does have implications for our time-bound world. It is a sad state of affairs when Christians, of any variety, become so heavenly-minded that they are no

earthly good. This dichotomy need not exist, but because of modernity's reductionism and compartmentalization it has become a notable evangelical trait.

### **Our Evangelical Past**

Modernity has shaped so much of evangelicalism that it is compelling to consider how it must change now that modern era is coming to a close. This is not to say that within the constraints of modernity that evangelicalism had only one face. It certainly did not. The evangelical faith courted modernity in two primary ways, modernist liberalism and fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism came to prominence out of the decline of traditional revivalist evangelicalism during the first half of the twentieth century (Marsden 1987:4). Prior to this time, American evangelical Protestantism "had been the dominant religious ideology in a nation noted for its religion" (Ibid 1987:4). However, this version of evangelicalism collapsed during the early years of the twentieth century (Ibid 1987:4). With the advent of modernism many religious leaders sought to reconcile the Bible and the faith with the new modernizing trends of science and rationalism. Conservatives, who became known as fundamentalists, because of their insistence upon maintaining the fundamental elements of Christianity, reacted strongly to this modernizing trend. They insisted upon adherence to fundamental doctrines, such as the virgin birth of Christ, miracles, Christ's bodily resurrection, the second coming, and an inerrant understanding of Scripture (Ibid 1987:4).

Following the Second World War, evangelical Christianity has been in constant transition. With the narrowness of fundamentalism pushing the faith ever more into

sectarian hovels and liberalism consistently capitulating to modernism, a third way needed to be born. Until the mid-twentieth century the dominant forms of Protestant Christianity in the U.S. were fundamentalism and liberalism. Neither offered a compelling attraction to the American populace. With the coming of Fuller Theological Seminary evangelicalism would find a new home. The “new evangelicals” were the next step in evangelicalism’s adaptation to a changing culture.

Marsden makes the point of highlighting how Fuller Seminary, in its inception, was part of three religious traditions; fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and new evangelicalism. James Bradley notes that during the seminary’s first decade it was unclear if it would move to a more conservative fundamentalist prospective or a more progressive “new evangelical” one (1988:67). This “new evangelicalism” was birthed through Fuller’s leadership. Harold Ockenga and Carl F. Henry, both founders of Fuller Seminary, began using the phrase “new evangelicalism” in the 1940s and 1950s (Marsden 1987:3). Fuller, though founded with fundamentalist roots, quickly moved away from this separatist crowd.

But what precipitated this move away from fundamentalism? “Most simply understood, the ‘new evangelical’ reformers repudiated both the doctrinal and the cultural implications of a thoroughgoing dispensationalism while they remained loyal to the fundamentals of fundamentalism” (Marsden 1987:6). The new evangelicals were weary of the separatism of the fundamentalists; they sought to reform the church from within. However, because of their fundamentalist roots, separation from a decrepit institutional church was still held as a justifiable option for new evangelicals. “New evangelical reformers thus did not repudiate all separatism....they did reject making separatism a high principle” (Ibid 1987:7).

Jerry H. Gill notes, in a review of Marsden work, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, that the central issue in the “transformation to evangelicalism was the authority of scripture” (1990:132). Fundamentalism “was and is bound to a narrow, literalist epistemology, leaving no room for symbolic or mythic truth” where as the new evangelicalism affirmed scripture “as absolutely true in matters of faith and practice” (Ibid. 1990:132).

However, this new evangelicalism is deceiving. It is not a unified movement and certainly has not remained consistent doctrinally or organizationally since its inception in the 1940s and 1950s. Donald Dayton proclaims that “there is no such thing” as “the evangelical movement” (Sweeney 1991:74). Meanwhile, Timothy Smith holds to a “kaleidoscopic diversity of our [evangelical] histories, our organizational structures, and our doctrinal emphases” (Ibid. 1991:74). Various forms of evangelicals are identified by Richard Quebedeaux in “The Young Evangelicals”. Though the distinctions may be somewhat forced (Sweeney 1991:70) and not necessarily contemporary, since the book was written in 1974, it is still useful for gaining a broad view of how evangelicalism developed post-Second World War. Quebedeaux’s four categories of evangelical streams are “Separatist Fundamentalism”, “Open Fundamentalism”, “Established Evangelicalism”, and “New Evangelicalism”.

Quebedeaux first describes, what he calls, “Separatist Fundamentalism”. They are by far the most conservative of his four categories. Their spiritual and theological forbearers are those from the Fundamentalist-Modernist dilemma and they felt the need to separate dramatically from any vestige of liberalism or modernism. Separatist Fundamentalists hold a very conservative theology, maintaining three fundamentals of the faith: (1) complete separation from ungodliness, (2) verbal inspiration and inerrancy

of scripture, and (3) a dispensationalist, premillennialist eschatology (1974:19-20). Due to their premillennialist outlook, social action is downplayed and even held in contempt. The world will have to get worse before the rapture of the church; therefore, social justice has no real spiritual value (Ibid 1974:21). Quebedeaux gives a pointed evaluation, “If we are looking for an expression of Orthodox Christianity genuinely concerned about spiritual renewal and the wholeness of the Gospel, we shall have to search elsewhere.... Separatist Fundamentalism is totally destitute of a social conscience” (Ibid 1974:25).

Quebedeaux’s second category in the evangelical tradition is “Open Fundamentalism”. Like the Separatist variety, Open Fundamentalism holds dispensationalist views and a literal interpretation of the Bible (1974:26). “But Open Fundamentalism repudiates the explicit alliance of Fundamentalism with ultraconservative politics in the belief that the religious and the political spheres ought to be separate” (Quebedeaux 1974:26). The main centers of intellectual thought within Open Fundamentalism are Moody Bible Institute, Talbot Theological Seminary (corresponding with BIOLA), and Dallas Theological Seminary. For Quebedeaux’s time the most prominent and popular expression of Open Fundamentalism was Hal Lindsey’s, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This bestseller popularizes a traditional dispensationalist theology and relates current events of the time to end-time prophecy. Open Fundamentalism is a “more moderate expression of Orthodox Christianity than Separatist Fundamentalism” but “it too offers very little or nothing to the contemporary search for spiritual renewal” (Ibid 1974:27). And, like its more conservative cousin, Open Fundamentalism lacks a compelling social ethic (Ibid 1974:28).

Quebedeaux’s third categorization of evangelical streams of thought is “Established Evangelicalism”. This expression of evangelicalism maintains an

authoritative understanding of scripture, but not as literalistic as the previous two fundamentalist streams. Dispensationalism is not a defining factor within Established Evangelicalism, but even still much of its theology has dispensational roots. Most notably, Established Evangelicalism does not maintain a separatist attitude, but is open to dialogue and cooperation with other varieties of Christian thought (Quebedeaux 1974:28-29). Key centers for intellectual thought within the movement include institutions such as Wheaton College, Westmont College, Asbury Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Organizations such as Youth for Christ and Campus Crusade for Christ fit neatly within the bounds of Established Evangelicalism (Quebedeaux 1974:30). While Established Evangelicalism is a significant step away from the isolationist tendencies of fundamentalism, and while it does show more concern for social welfare and unity among disparate Christian traditions, it does not move in a meaningful way toward a constructive unity of the church or an active engagement with issues of social justice (Ibid 1974:37).

At this point in our journey terms begin to get confusing. As mentioned previously, Harold Ockenga and Carl F. Henry began using the phrase “new evangelicalism” in the 1940s and 1950s. At the time “new evangelicalism” was associated with the newly established Fuller Seminary, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) of which Ockenga was a founding member and president, and *Christianity Today* of which Henry was its first editor. The movement eventually came to also carry the designation of “neo-evangelicalism”. As such, Donald Bloesch, along with Quebedeaux, contends that the “new evangelicalism” which is highlighted in the 1970s is another new evangelicalism which is “wider and deeper than the original ‘neo-evangelicalism’, which was limited mainly to those who were seeking to eschew the

excesses of fundamentalism but at the same time remain solidly biblical” (Bloesch 1973:30). The new evangelicalism for which Bloesch and Quebedeaux were advocating was a converging of theological trends and currents (Ibid 1973:30).

Therefore, Quebedeaux’s fourth category of evangelicals called “New Evangelicalism”, from which he gleans his title, *The Young Evangelicals*, is for the mid-1970s another new expression of evangelicalism that steps beyond the constraints of the Established Evangelicalism of his day. Quebedeaux identifies five prevailing characteristics of the 1970s version of the new evangelicals. First, there is a confidence in the authority of scripture as the Word of God, but with a corresponding embrace of higher criticism. There is an insistence that the Word of God in Jesus Christ should not be “set against the written Word” (1974:38). Second, New Evangelicals re-emphasize the work of sanctification following conversion. There is a corresponding desire to practice one’s faith, not to merely attain personal salvation. Third, dispensationalism is rejected. In its place, the New Evangelicalism embraces a more positive outlook on society and attempts to connect with real human need and suffering. The pessimism of dispensationalist eschatology does not serve the New Evangelical desire for a “positive Evangelical social ethic” (Ibid 1974:38). Fourth, New Evangelicals display a strong motivation to respond in faith to social need. “For them, individual conversion is the precondition for revolutionary social transformation, yet conversion *by itself* is not enough to bring about such change” (Ibid 1974:38, emphasis in original). Fifth, conversation, dialogue, and unity with Christians from a wide variety of traditions are expected. The goal is not to dilute the gospel, but to clarify its truth (Ibid 1974:39).

Having considered Quebedeaux’s categories of evangelicalism and the movement during the mid-twentieth century away from fundamentalism to a new and more open

evangelicalism, one is prompted to question what precipitated such change. Since Quebedeaux considers the previous “new evangelicalism” to be defunct and absorbed into institutional, established evangelicalism, one wonders what produced this change. Many of these pressing questions are best understood in light of the social, cultural, and intellectual seismic shift in American society precipitated by postmodernity. The current, early twenty-first century state of evangelicalism will be considered shortly, but before this is possible it is necessary to understand something of the postmodern shift.

### **The seismic changes: postmodernity here we come**

Much has been written of late regarding this shift from modernity to postmodernity. Naturally, not all agree that this shift is actually taking place. Some may consider postmodernity as a passing trend or fad, however from anecdotal evidence on the street to the staid traditions of higher academia there is a growing awareness that, in Bob Dylan’s immortal words “the times they are a’changin’” (1964). “Approaching the third millennium, we are at the point of transition from the second to third phase of Modernity – or, if you prefer, from Modernity to Post-Modernity” (Toulmin 1990:203). As Toulmin suggests postmodernity is an expression of modernity. It is helpful to remember that as much as postmodernity is a radical new expression of modern thought and culture, it is still a response to modernity. As such, postmodernity carries with it the baggage and benefit of modern thought and culture. Therefore, the argument could be made that we are really in the continuing process of the Enlightenment (Outram 1995:12) or have entered into the radical consequences of modernity (Giddens 1990:3) or “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000). However, it is also appropriate to speak of postmodernity as

a reaction to modernity. Postmodernity rises up against and out of the confines of the modern world; it sketches, certainly in no unified manner, a response to the shortcomings of modernity's rationalistic worldview.

Stanley Grenz emphasizes three ways in which postmodernity responds to modernity. First, in this new postmodern world, it is no longer assumed that knowledge is inherently good. Progress is not inevitable and the optimism of modernity is replaced with "gnawing pessimism" (1996:7). Second, modernity's rationalism is overturned in favor of holism. Truth can be perceived and encountered by more than just the mind. Third, knowledge is not objective. The world cannot be encountered as merely an observer to a mechanistic process. Rather, one relates to the world as a participant (Ibid 1996:7).

These three areas bring to light the change that is afoot in America today. Strict adherence to a modernistic, Enlightenment worldview is declining, and in fact has been declining slowly for the last several decades. Alister McGrath contends that, "with the collapse of confidence in the Enlightenment, evangelicalism has suddenly found itself with an unexpected advantage over its rivals" (McGrath 1995:183). While this may or may not be entirely true, evangelicalism does seem to be well on its way to responding to the cultural change known as postmodernity. In some ways, the diversity and frequent "new" evangelicalisms throughout the previous last half century are evidence of the growing postmodern condition. As modernity and its rationalistic assumptions have been increasingly questioned, not least of which are the atrocities of the Second World War and the disparaging conditions of the poor in capitalist countries, so too has evangelicalism been forced to redefine itself. This was evident in the 1940s with Henry and Ockenga and in the 1970s with Quebedeaux and Bloesch. McGrath warns, "The

movement needs to learn from its own history, which alerts it to the errors of the past. Without this perspective, it may do little more than repeat yesterday's mistakes, resulting in tomorrow's decline" (Ibid 1995:189). Taking this needed word of caution to heart would be wise for evangelicalism. With this warning, the important history of the movement, and the changing contemporary context in mind, it is now possible to consider the new currents in evangelicalism.

### **Post-evangelicalism: Christianity in a postmodern world**

Following Quebedeaux's and Bloesch's 1970s account of evangelicalism renaissance, the preceding years were ones of relative prosperity for evangelicalism. *Newsweek* proclaimed 1976 as the *Year of the Evangelical*. The 1980s saw the rise of the American mega-church, an apparent "success" of evangelicalism. Eddie Gibbs insightfully comments that mega-churches were, in fact, representative of "evangelicalism's media-hyped response to modernity" (2000:26). These massive monuments to evangelicalism's "success" in the modern world "will need to make the transition from an invitational strategy to one of dispersal, with a sustained commitment to infiltrating each segment of this fragmenting [postmodern] world" (Ibid 2000:26). But despite the apparent gains within evangelicalism, there are many calling for a new approach to church and the faith.

Toulmin, in an almost prophetic insight, comments that "the choice we are faced with as we enter this third millennium" is between "two attitudes to the future – one of imagination, the other of nostalgia.... The choice is one between *facing* the future... or *backing into* it" (1990:203). Stanley Grenz is one of those who calls the church to move

into the third millennium in a face-forward posture. Clark H. Pinnock, in a review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*, comments that Grenz calls for the church to be a "believing community" and "the place where theology is done", but to do so it must move beyond a theology grounded in epistemological foundationalism (2002:607).

Dave Tomlinson, vicar of St. Luke's Anglican Church in North London, attempts to cultivate this kind of theological thinking in his recent work *The Post-Evangelical*. He writes this somewhat controversial book as a "pastoral essay directed at those who...struggle with restrictions in evangelical theology, spirituality, and church culture – yet who still desire to pursue their faith journey" (2003:15). Tomlinson's intention is that there are those within evangelicalism that feel a gnawing discontent with business as usual. They do not wish to become ex-evangelicals, but desire a fuller embrace of their faith of which they cannot find in evangelicalism proper. These are those whom Tomlinson designates as post-evangelicals. "To be post-evangelical is to take as given many of the assumptions of evangelical faith, while at the same time moving beyond its perceived limitations" (Ibid 2003:28). Postmodernity, naturally, plays a large factor in the move to post-evangelicalism. "Post-evangelicals differ from evangelicals especially in that they are influenced by a different culture than the one that shaped present-day evangelicalism" (Ibid 2003:28). This different culture is one of postmodernity, with its more fluid boundaries, pluralism, and relativism. It is little wonder that the youth and young adults who profess faith in Jesus Christ "have tired of listening only to the evangelical networks...they have tuned in to other stations, too" (Ibid 2003:25). These post-evangelicals desire "a more 'grown up' environment" where "there are fewer predigested opinions, fewer categorical conclusions, and a lot more space to explore alternative ideas. Post-evangelicals also want room to express doubt without having

someone rush around in a mad panic trying to ‘deliver’ them from unbelief” (Ibid 2003:25).

By Tomlinson’s own admission, *The Post-Evangelical* is not an “academic work or alternative systematic theology” (Ibid 2003:19). He writes this as a foray into a conversation about the future of evangelicalism. Some of his conclusions and analysis are overly general and lacking in historical perspective. But he does put his finger on a growing trend within evangelicalism. To observe this trend one need not go any further than their personal computer. The internet is teeming with thousands of post-evangelical websites. The trend to categorize themselves under terms like “emerging church”, “missional church”, “postmodern mission”, and the like. Websites such as [www.theooze.com](http://www.theooze.com) and [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com) give a voice to the emerging generations of Christians who are no longer satisfied with the status quo in the American church. Whether post-evangelical is the best way to describe these newest of the young evangelicals may be up for debate, but without a doubt evangelicalism must change in order to incarnate the gospel for the postmodern generations.

Spencer Burke, creator of TheOoze.com, recently published *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on emerging conversations about God, community, and culture* which explore these issues. In it he illustrates seven metaphors for this transition from a modern evangelicalism to a postmodern. They are as follows:

1. from tour guide to traveler – a conversation about “leadership”
2. from teacher to facilitator – a conversation about “learning”
3. from hero to human – a conversation about “spiritual growth”
4. from consumer to steward – a conversation about “ministry”

5. from retailer to wholesaler – a conversation about “missions”
6. from adversary to ally – a conversation about “faith”
7. from warrior to gardener – a conversation about “evangelism” (Burke 2003)

These are helpful metaphors to use as a lens through which to view the emerging evangelicalism.

The Christian world is not the only one to notice a shift in evangelicalism’s constituency and atmosphere. Both *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Los Angeles Times* have recently reported on the changing face of evangelicalism. The cover of December 8, 2003 edition of *U.S. News and World Report* proclaimed in bold *The New Evangelical*, with a special report on *The New Old-time Religion*. The article reports that “from the White House and the halls of Congress to a vastly expanding spiritual self-help movement to the most vigorous Christian missionary effort in the developing world, the growing influence of evangelicalism is everywhere” (Tolson 2003:38). The normative evangelical institution for the article is the mega-church. The article is observant of a general populace level of evangelicalism’s influence and presence in America. As such, it does not take into account theological and cultural shifts taking place in the margins of evangelicalism. Even still, it is informative to note how secular media perceive and understand evangelicalism.

The *Los Angeles Times* article is even more enlightening as it concentrates on Fuller Seminary specifically. The article, from the Sunday magazine section on November 23, 2003, is entitled *The New Believers* with the revealing tag-line, “The ‘Post-Evangelicals’ embrace both science and the Bible, oppose war and abortion, and believe Right can meet Left. Their inspiration: Fuller Theological Seminary. Are they dangerously deluded, or scary smart?” (Rifkin 2003:cover). The evangelicalism noted in

this article is more in keeping with Tomlinson's variety than the general populace variety. But similar to the *U.S. News* article it is interesting to note how the secular media views evangelicalism. Biblical inerrancy, an issue that has time and again provided much contention within evangelicalism, is something of a non-issue for these post-evangelicals. The article's author, Alan Rifkin, cites Tony Jones, a Fuller alumnus and a leader in The Emergent Village, in reference to biblical inerrancy as saying, "It's not where we're going to land the plane" (2003:24). This post-evangelicalism or "post-conservatism", as Roger Olson refers, or "postmodern evangelical", as Nancey Murphy contents, is a contextualized response to the postmodern shift. Rifkin notes some of its features,

You're post-con [post-conservative] if: You still believe that the Bible is morally authoritative, that Jesus atoned for your sins, that He rose again and that He orders you to spread the good news – simultaneously emphasizing some of Jesus' most daring and progressive views on peacemaking, socioeconomic justice, forgiveness and engaging the culture (2003:25).

This description is notable in what it leaves out. There are no references to believing a specific interpretation of scripture, immutable definitions of conversion, salvation, or eschatology.

Throughout much of the global south, Christianity is stronger than ever. Philip Jenkins, in *The Next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity*, reminds the church that "as Christianity becomes increasingly Southern, it cannot fail to absorb habits and thought-worlds of the regions in which it is strongest" (2002:112). Obviously, a similar pattern was evident as evangelical Christianity lived, and thrived, in a modern world. Now that modernity has ended and postmodernity is becoming the increasingly dominant feature in the western world, particularly in urban America and Europe, it is to be expected that Christianity will take on the ethos its surrounding context. Rifkin's account

of Fuller Seminary is one example of this process taking place, as is Tomlinson's *The Post-Evangelical* and Burke's *Making Sense of Church*. Time will tell how these new expressions of evangelicalism and interaction with postmodernity play out.

Certainly there is much similarity between these most recent conversations and the ones to which Quebedeaux and Bloesch refer from the 1970s. Perhaps, this is a situation of not learning from our past and being doomed to repeat the same mistakes again. However, it is more likely a complex situation that involves the several decade shifts from modernity to postmodernity.

### **Conclusion: The road goes ever on**

In conclusion, for evangelicalism in the dawning of the third millennium it is possible, perhaps more now than ever before, to say with Bilbo Baggins of the Bag End;

The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say (Tolkien 1989:58).

The story of evangelicalism continues and new movements are afoot even now. Whether post-evangelicalism takes a strong foothold or another expression becomes dominant, it seems highly likely that evangelicalism will survive in the twenty-first century. However, as has been evident throughout its history, evangelicalism will change and adapt to the shifting postmodern culture. Just as evangelicalism broke free from its fundamentalist moorings, it has the potential to surrender its modern inclinations and re-establish itself as a vital Christian response to postmodernity.

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