RELIGION AND CULTURE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN THE NEXT GENERATION

GEORGE VAN PELT CAMPBELL*

Every generation of Christians faces its own challenges and prospects in God's providence. The last generation of evangelicals, lead by such people as Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth S. Kantzer, and Billy Graham, sponsored numerous initiatives intended to address the urgencies of their day. These included the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), the Evangelical Theological Society (1949), and the journal *Christianity Today* (1956), all of which accomplished positions of their founders' visions.

As we look forward to the next generation, what are the challenges and the prospects which stand before evangelical scholars? The purpose of this article is to assess those challenges which are most urgent for the integrity and effectiveness of evangelicalism in, and in relation to, American culture in the next generation.

While there are certainly many things evangelical scholars can and must do which are here assumed, my distinctive proposals can be summarized under three headings. We must address issues related to the common good, the common man, and a common voice.

I. THE COMMON GOOD

1. *We must face the common issues raised by globalization.* If we as evangelical scholars are going to speak to our world and to our culture in the future, rather than just to ourselves, we must concern ourselves with facing and giving Christian responses to common problems which affect the common good. One such set of problems is raised by globalization.

There are two broad ways in which we can and should address issues raised by globalization (or globality, as it is more and more commonly called). The first is by addressing the major challenges which globality poses for the world at large, offering Christian solutions for the common good and at the same time an apologetic for the value of Christian faith. The second way we must face globality is by understanding and addressing the challenges it poses for the integrity and effectiveness of the Christian faith. After defining globality, we will give an example of each sort of problem and response.

* George Van Pelt Campbell is assistant professor of sociology and humanities at Grove City College in Grove City, PA.

In 1995, sociologist Malcolm Waters made clear how recent is the development of consciousness of globality when he wrote, "Social change is now proceeding so rapidly that if a sociologist had proposed as recently as ten years ago to write a book about globalization they would have had to overcome a wall of stony and bemused incomprehension. But now, just as postmodern was *the* concept of the 1980s, globalization may be *the* concept of the 1990s. . . . "[1] Waters's prediction has proven true. Globalization has become a major concern among social scientists, displacing the older paradigm of "modernity," and progressively displacing also discussions about "postmodernity."[2] British sociologist Martin Albrow, in his *The Global Age*, declares that "postmodernity is only the latest radical form of modernity." Instead, he writes, "We have to listen to the language of the new age in a wider discourse. It resounds most in [the word] 'global' and all its variations."[3] The epochal change we are witnessing is not "the end of history" (in the sense of all of the ideological conflicts of human history coming to an end), but the dawning of "the global age."[4] It has become widely recognized that the globe is "the most salient plausibility structure of our time."[5] Therefore, we as evangelicals scholars must address preeminently the issues raised by globality.

A number of distinct approaches have emerged regarding how globality is best conceived.[6] Based upon his recognition of a tripartite view of society (recognizing economic, political, *and* cultural spheres), ability to take religion fully into account, comprehensiveness, and flexibility we must agree with Waters that Roland Robertson is "the key figure in the formalization and specification of the concept of globalization."[7] Robertson opens his major study of globality with a definition of the topic: "Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."[8] By "the compression of the world" Robertson means "global interdependence."[9] Waters elaborates upon this definition when he defines globalization as "[a] social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding."[10] Globality is a complex matrix of ideas and issues, but we will address some basic issues here as samples of the sort of interaction with it that is necessary in the future.

[1] Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 1.

[2] See, for example, Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

[3] Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Oxford: Polity, 1996) 8.

[4] This "end of history" perspective was argued in Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free, 1992).

[5] Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992) 53.

[6] See, for example, the surveys in Simpson, "Globalization and Religion: Themes and Prospects," in *Religion and Global Order*, vol. 4 (ed. Roland Robertson and William R. Garrett; New York: Paragon House, 1991) 1–17; Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994) 14–44; Waters, *Globalization* 38–62.

[7] Waters, *Globalization* 39.

[8] Robertson, *Globalization* 8.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Waters, *Globalization* 3.

The first way we can address globaliztion is by addressing the major challenges which it poses for the world at large, offering Christian solutions for the common good and at the same time an apologetic for the value of Christian faith.

One such problem which globality poses for humanity at large is the problem of pluralization, that is, the problem of a plurality of options being present in a society (not an endorsement of the "value" of a multitude of options). The dawn of the global age signaled the end of the age of social isolation. There are many particular ways that pluralization impacts humanity, but one is that diverse cultures and religions progressively come into close proximity in a culture. Global compression means that inevitably communities which were previously isolated come into prolonged contact. One common result of such contact, cultural and religious, is violence, which will undoubtedly increase globally in the future. Robertson writes, "[S]ome now claim that cultural clashes between civilizations constitute the primary source of current worldwide political and military tension."[11] As sociologist James Hunter points out with reference to religious tensions in America, "culture wars" often turn into shooting wars.[12] In fact, the periodic murder of abortion doctors ought to demonstrate to us that the United States is not immune to religious violence, and that the Christian community is not above the practice of violence, particularly in an environment when the mood of the Christian community is alarmist, our rhetoric is inflammatory, and we have no clear philosophy of Christian social engagement to guide us and to set limits upon our efforts to achieve our goals. Thus, globalization leads to pluralization, and pluralization often leads to violence worldwide.

Another effect of pluralization is that the violence it tends to generate itself spawns a sense of suspicion among those who may become the victims of violence. Religious violence around the world has thus created worldwide suspicion of religions other than one's own. We see this suspicion in the generalized American tendency to view all Muslims and Arabs as potential terrorists, when in reality most Muslims are no more violent than most Christians, or most Americans. This same dynamic applies to American evangelicals. We live in a time when evangelicals are often pictured as extremists and as dangerous to a free pluralistic society. Among social scientists it is now routine to parallel Muslim Shi'ite fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism, and to lump all "fundamentalists" together as a growing social problem and threat to a civilized world order.

Yet another effect of pluralization is the growth of tolerance, which serves as a means of coping with the effects of pluralization.[13] Obviously, tolerance is in many ways a very good thing, and something which evangelical

---

[11] Roland Robertson, "Globalization and the Future of 'Traditional Religion'" (unpublished paper presented at the Princeton Theological Seminary/World Vision Conference, "The Church and the World in a New Century: Faith and Responsibility in a Global Future," in October 1998) 9.

[12] See James Davison Hunter, *Before The Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture Wars* (New York: Free, 1994).

[13] See the analysis of tolerance in American culture in Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987) 25–43.

Christians are happy to endorse. For example, the decline in the vituperative rhetoric, which often attended discussions between Roman Catholics and Protestants in the past, is a welcome result of such increased tolerance, as is the relative decline in overt racial prejudice. But in the United States, tolerance has also often translated, for example, into a growing public acceptance of neo-pagan religious practices incompatible with Christian faith. Thus the growth of tolerance has resulted in substantial changes in American public life, and has made the incompatibility of historic Christianity with increasing numbers of contemporary American practices more apparent. This, in turn, has issued in a changed perception of American evangelicals. Evangelicalism's minority opinions, combined with the general suspicion of other religions that we examined earlier, and the perceptions generated by the outrageous acts of some fringe Christians, have combined to create an environment in which evangelicals are increasingly perceived as fomenters of intolerance and perhaps of violence.

The United States, and the world, is moving step by step toward the great pluralistic melting pot that was the ancient Roman empire, but with greater intensity because of the modern condition. Our environment in the United States is becoming more and more like that inhabited by the Christians to whom Paul wrote, characterized by pluralism in regard to language, religion, and culture. Can we mine from the Scriptures, a substantial portion of which were written in such an environment, that which will guide us as we enter a new era, and that which will offer hope for others, even those who do not respond to the gospel and yet are created by our God and cared for by him? Could not we as Christian scholars set ourselves to the task of developing Christian proposals that might help to ameliorate the global problem of religious violence, to reduce suspicion of religion—ours and others'—by other religious bodies and by secularists, and to promote a healthy view of tolerance that safeguards religious liberty as well as freedom of conscience? Might we engage as those who address these urgent world needs with ideas that, though they could apply to everyone, are distinctly Christian and therefore consistent with truth and capable of working?

Obviously addressing such issues raised by globalization is a great challenge. We see our global neighbors lying by the road, beaten by the results of pluralism, and bleeding. Will we pass by on the other side? Will we ignore the suffering ones, as we white evangelicals did in the civil rights struggle a generation ago? Or will we emerge as those who loved our neighbors enough to offer constructive proposals?

When Carl Henry and his contemporaries rose to provide leadership to the evangelical cause more than a half-century ago, one of the great needs was a revival of evangelical scholarship. Perhaps it is time to say that that project has been largely accomplished and that the time has come to turn our efforts outward to the more constructive task of scholarly engagement with contemporary concerns.[14] The problems raised by globalization are contemporary concerns worthy of our scholarship.

---

[14] See Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

2. *We must face the American crisis of cultural authority*.   Globalization also generates problems for movements within cultures. A second way evangelical scholars should face globalization is by addressing the challenges it poses for movements. As an example of such problems we will analyze what is perhaps the major effect of globalization called the "relativization of tradition," and one effect of relativization, the contemporary American "crisis of cultural authority" and the problems this poses for the integrity and effectiveness of contemporary Christian faith. The implications of this analysis are of benefit both to evangelicals and to others.

Simply stated, the "relativization" of tradition is seeing one tradition "relative to" another tradition. (Relativization is related to the current sociological discussion of "detraditionalization.")[15] It is the confrontation with an alien tradition which results in seeing one's original tradition in a new light, the light of a hitherto unrecognized alternative. Relativization is the recognition that one's taken-for-granted viewpoint is but one alternative among a plurality of opinions and results in the process of rethinking one's own tradition because of that recognition. In other words, relativization is awakening to the fact that what one previously perceived as "reality," or "the truth," may actually be only a "viewpoint." As globalization proceeds, this experience is more and more common.

Traditions serve several functions in the contemporary world, but the most important for our purposes are what Thompson calls the "hermeneutic" and the "identity" aspects of tradition.[16] By the hermeneutic aspect of tradition is meant "a set of background assumptions that are taken for granted by individuals in the conduct of their daily lives, and transmitted by them from one generation to the next," and which serve thereby as "an interpretive scheme, a framework for understanding the world."[17] The other aspect of tradition respects its function in the formation of individual and collective identity. Because our interpretations of the world around us, and our individual and group identities, are formed by the traditions we accept, the relativization of those traditions which results from globalization has profound effects upon us.

The dynamic of relativization may be stated thus: *Relativization is the generation, in a confrontation with an alien tradition, of a sense of threat and of insecurity about the assumptions people use to make sense of the world and of the self, calling into question such things as the definitions, boundaries, categories, and conclusions through which they have understood the world and established their identity. This insecurity, in turn, generates secondary effects such as intellectual disorientation, bewilderment, doubt, and fear*. By "intellectual disorientation" is meant not mental derangement in the psychiatric

---

[15] See Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris, eds., *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Kurt A. Richardson, "Disorientations in Christian Belief: The Problem of De-traditionalization in the Postmodern Context," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (ed. David S. Dockery; Wheaton: Victor, 1995) 53–66.

[16] John B. Thompson, "Tradition and Self in a Mediated World," in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity* (ed. Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris; Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 89–108.

[17] Thompson, "Tradition and Self" 91.

sense, but the loss of clarity regarding one's sense of the proper meaning of the world and the loss of clarity regarding one's sense of identity in relation to the surrounding world. By "bewilderment" is meant a sense of confusion caused by a variety of conflicting and incompatible alternatives.

There are four types of relativization: relativization affecting an individual, a group, a culture, and a transcultural constituency. When relativization affects an entire culture, it has the effect of calling into question the public and private values that have been accepted as authoritative by a plurality of the citizenry. This sort of relativization has been described by Lears and Guinness (though apart from the larger framework we have described) as a "crisis of cultural authority."[18]

Describing the period of 1880–1920 in American culture by the phrase "crisis of cultural authority," historian T. J. Jackson Lears contends that the beliefs and traditions which had been previously accepted as public and private standards by a plurality of Americans lost their compelling power, that is, America's "cultural authority" experienced a crisis.[19] Sociologist Os Guinness, drawing upon Lears's work, makes the same observation regarding contemporary American culture.[20] Historian William McLoughlin, in his suggestive *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform* (1978), proposes a larger framework for this recurring cultural phenomenon.[21] The works of Lears, Guinness, and McLoughlin provide persuasive evidence that the United States is experiencing another "crisis of cultural authority," what Hunter calls a "culture war."[22]

Cultural relativization is of particular significance for Christians because it tends to generate group relativization, that is, relativization in a culture tends to create doubt about beliefs and confusion about identity *in groups* within the culture in which it occurs. It is therefore no surprise that, at a time when American culture is experiencing a crisis of cultural authority generated by a relativization of its traditions, American evangelicalism is also experiencing an internal crisis. In fact, the current evangelical crisis corresponds precisely in time with the larger cultural crisis, just as the last American crisis of cultural authority coincided precisely with the last great evangelical internal struggle, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy (c. 1875–1925).[23]

The current internal crisis to which I refer first became evident in the "battle for the Bible," which began at Fuller Theological Seminary on "Black

---

[18] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Os Guinness, *The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning and the Once and Future Role of Faith* (New York: Free, 1993).

[19] Lears, *No Place of Grace* 5–6.

[20] Guinness, *The American Hour* 1993.

[21] William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[22] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[23] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1875–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 141–216.

Saturday" in 1962.[24] When *Newsweek* proclaimed the "Year of the Evangelical" on October 25, 1976, the article noted the internal divisions which threatened evangelicalism at the height of its apparent cultural victory. What I believe is the continuing manifestation of this internal struggle has recently been described by Roger Olson as a struggle between conservative evangelicals and what he calls "postconservative" evangelicals, and by Millard Erickson as a dispute between traditional evangelicals and the "evangelical left," and by both Olson and Erickson as a dispute about the evangelical response to "postmodernism."[25] We are, in fact, embroiled in a generation-long struggle which corresponds in time to the American cultural struggle, and which I call the "Evangelical Post-conservative Controversy." It might also be called the "Evangelical Post-modernist Controversy," which would better highlight its similarity to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy at the turn of the century, but this name might suggest too close a relationship of post-conservative evangelicals with post-modernism.

The evangelical post-conservative controversy is a reaction to the relativization of tradition. The relativization of our tradition is evident among us in at least six ways: (1) the existence of an internally and externally perceived identity crisis; (2) serious internal disputes over the meaning of numerous defining evangelical beliefs (such as the doctrines of God, Scripture, and salvation); (3) widespread disputes about the proper external boundaries of evangelicalism; (4) numerous internal new religious movements (including new movements regarding politics, psychology, and spiritual warfare); (5) internal ethos effects (regarding tolerance, nostalgia, paranoia, and enthusiasm); and (6) significant numbers of evangelicals who are defecting to other faith traditions.[26]

There are in fact four broad types of responses, with variations, to the relativization of a community's tradition. There are (1) closed responses, which react by defending the tradition; (2) open responses, which respond with willingness to learn from other traditions; (3) reinvention responses, which reconfigure the tradition by selection, deletion, or addition; and (4) exit responses, which abandon the tradition.

[24] George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Theological Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 208–215.

[25] Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age," *Christian Century* 112/15 (May 3, 1995) 480–483; idem, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," *Christianity Today* 42/2 (February 9, 1998) 40–50; Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); idem, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); see also Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[26] Regarding the identity crisis, see James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicgo Press, 1987); regarding defining evangelical beliefs, see Erickson, *The Evangelical Left*; regarding the external boundaries of evangelicalism, see Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Waco: Word, 1995) and James S. Cutsinger, ed., *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); regarding defections, see e.g. Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar, 1992) and Peter Gillquist, ed., *Coming Home: Why Protestant Clergy are Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar, 1992).

Clearly to assess causes is not to determine answers. The issues raised in the evangelical post-conservative controversy must be settled based upon research, evidence, and argumentation, as must any theological dispute. The fact (as I take it) that these issues have arisen in a predictable manner does not mean that they are illegitimate, but such knowledge does alert us to the context in which they have arisen, and such awareness should assist us to make a more prudent response.

The value of the sort of sociological analysis I have just performed is that it helps us to understand the broader framework within which many contemporary issues arise, whether those issues affect our culture or our movement. Globalization has discernible effects upon cultures and upon movements, and if we do not attempt to understand these forces, we will be condemned to responding without discernment. While some good work has already been done, much more work remains. Some of us as evangelical scholars must labor to understand the forces which globalization exerts upon culture and upon movements. Such explorations will serve the common good. They will also assist us as evangelicals in responding to the particular issues we face in an informed way which will maximize the integrity and effectiveness of evangelical Christianity.

3. *We need a public philosophy for the public square*.   A third common problem to which evangelical scholars should respond for the common good is the problem of the role of religion in public life in a pluralistic democracy. More and more around the world, religion—of any sort—is perceived as a nuisance in public life or as a threat to tolerance and to harmonious social functioning. In large part this is due to the fact that the cultural and religious pluralism generated by globalization raises questions about the relation of religion and "secular" culture which have as yet not been fully answered. By addressing such issues, evangelical scholars might be able to provide the solutions which could help ensure social peace, safeguard religious liberty for all people, and promote conditions which would facilitate constructive social discourse that allows religious views to be presented and defended in the public square, all of which serves the common good, as well as the evangelical good.

As globalization proceeds, this problem will become more and more acute. By addressing this common problem, evangelical scholars can offer both important solutions for the global common good and an urgently needed solution to a contemporary internal evangelical problem of evangelical effectiveness in American culture.

Evangelical scholars can address this major global problem of religion and culture in the next twenty years by the develoment, for the evangelical community, of a comprehensive philosophy of Christian engagement with the world. American evangelicals have no clear philosophy of Christian public engagement. For fifty years after the Scopes Trial, that is, roughly 1925–1979, evangelical Christians, contrary to their tradition, were unengaged in American political life. The 1979 founding of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority signaled a change in evangelical practice but not a change in evangelical

principles. Throughout American history, evangelical political involvement has been characterized by four principles, according to Noll: (1) moral activism; (2) populism; (3) intuitionism; and (4) biblicism.[27] By "intuitionism" Noll means that evangelicals have trusted sanctified common sense more than formal theology. Kantzer explained in 1985 the result of this intuitionism when he said of evangelical political activity, "in the last half-decade, evangelical Christians have moved back into politics with a vengeance. But they are doing so largely lacking a well-thought-out philosophy of government or even a theology of citizenship. They lack a road map."[28] Noll set this problem in its larger framework when he declared, "The eon between the first coming of Christ to the world and the future second coming has never been the object of systematic evangelical attention. For evangelical commentary on public life there has been no Thomas Aquinas . . . and no felt need for such. . . . "[29]

The result of this unreflective engagement by evangelicals, despite some successes, has been our failure to make an impact upon American culture for the gospel as a critical moment: we are losing the "culture war." The first, and obvious, conclusion that must be drawn is that after millions of dollars and millions of man-hours, the Christian Right failed in its main aims, despite succeeding in putting a number of issues on the agenda of national discussion.[30] Ed Dobson, who wrote the Moral Majority platform, said,

> We filed in our efforts for two reasons. First, we didn't realize just how wrong the values had gone in our culture. The political process was simply not adequate to reverse such a decline. Worse yet, we didn't realize just how little difference there was between the day-to-day values within the church compared to the culture at large. . . . I think we're losing the culture war, not in the public arena, but within the church. Until we renew what it means to be a Christian *in the church*, we won't have credibility to speak to the world.[31]

Our lack of thought has yielded unfortunate results. We are losing the culture war because of the following reasons: (1) the goals of Christian activists have often not been consistent (and many Christians would argue that they have often been unbiblical); (2) the means used by Christians have varied little from those used by secularists, and in many cases they have been shameful!; (3) Christians have been perceived as fighting for "just us" rather than for "justice;" (4) Christian rhetoric was often harsh and abusive; (5) persuasion was often absent; (6) various groups of Christians have been

[27] Mark A. Noll, "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection," in *Being Christian Today: An American Conversation* (ed. Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel; Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992) 70.

[28] Kenneth S. Kantzer, "The Issue at Hand: The Christian as Citizen," *Christianity Today* 29/7 (April 19, 1985) 2–3.

[29] Noll, "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection" 70; see also Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 208.

[30] Robert Booth Fowler, "The Failure of the Religious Right," in *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right in American Politics* (ed. Michael Cromartie; Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993) 57–74.

[31] Ed Dobson, "When the Foundations Tremble: A Conversation with Leith Anderson, Ed Dobson, Os Guinness, and Haddon Robinson," *Leadership* 14/2 (Spring 1993) 134–142.

at odds with each other in the public square; (7) strategy was often poorly thought-through.[32] The result is that, to my knowledge, not one major piece of favored legislation was passed by the Christian Right's efforts.[33] The secular pundits who predicted at the beginning that the Christian Right could not be effective were right! So at a critical time in American culture, American Christians have, by and large, squandered their opportunities to make an impact on American culture for the gospel. We have squandered our opportunity not from lack of concern but from lack of thought, from lack of what Guinness calls "a common vision for the common good."[34]

The sober judgment of Carl F. H. Henry states it accurately:

> I have two main convictions about the near-future of American Christianity. One is that American evangelicals presently face their biggest opportunity since the Protestant Reformation, if not since the apostolic age. The other is that Americans are forfeiting that opportunity stage by stage, despite the fact that evangelical outcomes in the twentieth century depend upon decisions currently in the making.[35]

All of these negatives might have been avoided had evangelicals had a philosophy of public engagement. We have been unwise to ignore the judgment of our best leaders, whether older evangelical leaders, such as Carl F. H. Henry and Kenneth Kantzer, or younger evangelical leaders, such as Mark Noll and Os Guinness, that evangelicals urgently need a philosophy of Christian public engagement.[36]

An evangelical philosophy of public engagement would have to face and answer many difficult questions, and some useful work has already been done.[37] Some of the important questions that must be addressed are, On what basis may political activity be justified for the Christian? What, beyond evangelism, is the proper relation of the Christian to the secular world and to a secular government? What is the relative importance of political action in the life of the Church and in the life of the individual Christian compared

---

[32] The comment about "just us" rather than "justice" is borrowed from Os Guinness, *Let God Be God: Breaking with the Idols of our Age* (ed. Os Guinness and John Seel; Chicago: Moody, 1992) 83; Skillen has documented how Christians have been at odds with each other in the public square in James W. Skillen, *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

[33] Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco: Word, 1986) 394.

[34] Os Guinness, "Tribes People Idiots or Citizens? Evangelicals, Religious Liberty and a Public Philosophy for the Public Square," in *Evangelical Affirmations* (ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 463.

[35] Henry, *Confessions* 381.

[36] Carl F. H. Henry in *Confessions* 393–399; Kenneth Kantzer in "The Issue at Hand" 2–3; Mark Noll in "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection" 59–93; and Os Guinness in "Tribes People Idiots or Citizens?" 457–497, and in *The American Hour* 135–277.

[37] Regarding some of the important questions that must be addressed, see Guinness, "Tribes People Idiots or Citizens?" and *The American Hour* 239–277. Regarding some useful work already done, see Noll, "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection" 85–87; Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964); James Davison Hunter and Os Guinness, eds., *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace: The Religious Liberty Clauses and the American Public Philosophy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990); Don E. Eberly, *Restoring the Good Society: A New Vision for Politics and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

to other mandates, such as evangelism? What are the proper goals of political involvement for the Christian? How much of Christian belief is it legitimate to strive to enact into law? How do God's attributes, such as his justice, translate into proper political goals in a secular state? What means are justified for the Christian to use in political activity, and what are the limits of those means? What attitudes should Christians take toward their political opponents? What limits does belief in religious freedom properly place upon the Christian as a participant in the public square? And can Christians who come from divergent theological positions, such as Reformed and Anabaptist positions, agree on broad Christian approaches? These and other questions need careful attention.

The best approach to these issues of which I am aware is the "chartered pluralism" proposed by Os Guinness and worked out for one arena in the Williamsburg Charter.[38]

Two things are necessary for this goal to be realized. The first is the production by evangelical scholars of a responsible and comprehensive philosophy of public engagement. The second is the dissemination of that philosophy throughout the Christian community. The first requires scholarly labor. The second requires popular writing. What begins among scholars must be spread through seminaries, denominational resolutions and position papers, Sunday School material, discipleship manuals, and popular books. If evangelicalism is to remain a vital force in what is still the world's leading society and to export around the world a good model for facing global issues, it is a matter of vital importance that we produce a Christian public philosophy for the public square.

The three issues which I have addressed are the three which seem to me to be the most urgent needs for the next twenty years in regard to religion and culture. I follow these with three broad suggestions which I believe are important if evangelicals are to make an impact upon American culture in that time.

II. THE COMMON MAN

1. *We need a new generation of apologists.*   If evangelicals are to make an impact upon American culture, we need a new generation of C. S. Lewis-quality evangelical apologists.

It is clear, by definition, that half of the people in America, and therefore half of the people in our churches, are below average in intelligence. As a result, it is unrealistic for evangelical scholars to continue the standard procedure of writing books on apologetics directed at Christians, assuming

---

[38] Regarding "chartered pluralism," see Guinness, "Tribes People Idiots or Citizens?" and *The American Hour* 248–257; Hunter and Guinness, *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace* 1–16; regarding the Williamsburg Charter, see Hunter and Guinness, *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace* 123–145 and Edward McGlynn Gaffney, ed., "Symposium on the Williamsburg Charter," *Journal of Law and Religion* 8/1 and 2 (St. Paul, MN: Hamline University School of Law, 1990). See also the "principled pluralism" advocated by Skillen in Skillen, *The Scattered Voice* 181–212 and James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

that those Christians will assimilate the information and become articulate spokespersons for the faith to intellectually inclined non-Christians. Some always have, and some will continue to do so, so there will always be a market for the standard approach. However, that market should be the second priority of evangelical scholarship in apologetics. Most Christians are not capable of elaborate argumentation in defense of their faith. This is so because of the intellectual ability of the average person, and also because presentation of a defense of the faith (which is more than *a testimony to the faith*) depends substantially also upon an ability to debate, an ability which most people do not have (including many intellectuals). A great need for the future is for books written by articulate Christian thinkers *intended to be read by non-Christians*. Only in this way is it reasonable to expect that substantial numbers of non-Christians will be exposed to the gospel. Surely we have a responsibility that some of us address the needs of non-scholars.

In order to be read, such books would have to be engagingly written. The goal would be that non-Christians who are intellectually curious would find the books appealing enough that they would continue to read them once they started reading them. It is clear that writers with the gifts of a C. S. Lewis, or a Dorothy Sayers, or a G. K. Chesterton, are rare. The ability under discussion here is an ability to communicate well rather than simply an ability to think well. Yet why should ability to communicate well be assumed as proof of inability to think well? Good communication need not translate into "entertainment" without content. If the writers just named are insufficient proof that good thinking and good communication can make a good marriage, we have only to consider the genius of the authors of the Biblical narrative literature, authors who used a wide array of literary devices to make their stories subtle, powerful, and beautiful. Reading Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* would help evangelical scholars do well in communicating.[39]

One of the great needs of our time is for a basic introduction to the Christian faith written by a living evangelical that can be handed to a friend on campus or over coffee and that presents the faith with clarity and power. Such books are difficult to find, and I am unaware of even a single one written by a living American.

Further books cry out to be written on a multitude of contemporary topics which the average Christian can never hope to master without help. Where are the tracts for the times which articulate a Christian view of the environment and argue that Christian faith offers the best rationale for ecological responsibility? Where is the book which compares and contrasts Islam and Christianity and makes an eloquent plea for Christ? Where can one find a thoughtful treatment of human, and of female, dignity based upon the *imago Dei* which will convince an upwardly mobile female professional that Christianity is the ultimate home for her soul and not the chauvinist prison that modern feminism declares us to inhabit? Where can one turn to find a

---

[39] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

book which one can hand to a friend who is wrestling with marital problems which will share the Christian faith's advantage in the most intimate and important relationship between people?

It seems to me that such goals are worthy of our effort and of strategic importance for the advance of the gospel in our culture.

2. *We need a theory for average Christians*. An urgent need if evangelicals are to impact American culture in the next generation is that the evangelical community develop—more precisely, reestablish—a Biblical cohesiveness. For this to occur, evangelical theologians need to make theology interesting to average Christians.

Evangelical Christians are not famous for their intellectual prowess.[40] But perhaps that is in large part because they are not intellectuals nor the sons of intellectuals. Without wishing to discount the intellectual critique of the evangelical mind, I suggest that evangelical scholars need to labor to make theology interesting to non-scholars. In this way we will, Lord willing, increase our impact upon our culture through strengthening the Christian community as the witness to the gospel. The goal here is that the evangelical community be cohesive, and evangelical cohesiveness must ultimately derive from Biblical theology (although such identity may involve more than theology).[41] There are three areas in which I suggest this is important.

The first is that the evangelical community urgently needs a sense of clear identity. Noll has observed that there is now a "minor industry" functioning to define what it means to be an "evangelical."[42] Of course, this is due to the global causes discussed earlier, particularly the relativization of tradition. Boundary disputes regarding Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodoxy, for example, have further clouded this already difficult issue.[43] Yet no movement can function well if it is unsure of who or what it is! We need, soon, to develop a clear consensus on what "evangelical" means and communicate it throughout the evangelical community. Perhaps the Evangelical Theological Society, or some other evangelical organizations, could sponsor symposiums of scholars to address this issue.

A second practical suggestion I borrow from Os Guinness. We need a contemporary catechism aimed at all evangelicals. The practice of catechizing the young and new converts is a wholesome one and is widely practiced among evangelicals, as it has been from the earliest times, as seen, for example, in

---

[40] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962, 1963) 55–141; Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1963); Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965) 1–95; Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

[41] Some useful suggestions (along with some not as useful) are contained, for example, in Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993).

[42] Noll, "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection" 61.

[43] Colson and Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*; Cutsinger, *Reclaiming the Great Tradition*.

the *Didache* (second century?), Augustine's *How to Catechize the Uninstructed* (c. AD 400), and the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms (1647). Yet a common catechism which addresses perennial and contemporary issues, which addresses both belief and behavior, and which could be used across the board by evangelicals would be a great help for solidifying evangelical identity and maturity.

A third need is for an interestingly-written theology that Christian laypeople could understand and use. I once heard Haddon Robinson suggest that the Bible contains only a small number of ideas—perhaps 8 or 10 or 12—which are elaborated and applied throughout the Biblical materials. It ought to be possible to write a theology text which would isolate and develop those dozen or so ideas as the crux of the Christian faith, and then show the implications of those ideas for faith and life. Such a book would need to be interesting to read, which could be accomplished by showing the relevance of each Biblical idea to the felt needs of people, as any good sermon does. Such a book might be a good introduction to the faith for non-Christians as well. Further, it might serve as the basis for the catechism described earlier. Such a book could help establish, or strengthen, the cohesiveness of the evangelical community, which is a critical step in our witness.

All of these things must be done by evangelical scholars if they are to be done well, though the audience must not be scholars if they are to work well.

III. A COMMON VOICE

The final suggestion I make is the most difficult of all—or, perhaps, surfaces the difficulty of what I am suggesting throughout this article. One of the greatest needs for evangelicalism in the next twenty years in matters related to religion and culture is something which is always needed and always exceedingly difficult to obtain. That is the *need for leadership*. This is needful for several reasons.

First, we need leadership to coordinate strategic planning for evangelicalism. Without a papacy, or a denominational or movement headquarters, we yet need some leadership to help coordinate our self-assessment and our direction. If evangelicals could agree on where we are (our strengths and weaknesses and greatest needs), we would be on the way toward resolutions for our time.

Second, we desperately need leadership to speak responsibly for us to our culture. If media celebrities continue to be the primary recognized evangelical voices, we have little chance of making headway in our culture. When we have no one to distance us from, for example, the murder of abortion doctors, the culture can hardly be blamed for assuming that evangelicals support what confessed evangelicals do.

Third, we need leadership for the corporate exercise of discipline. Perilous as this would be, some avenue for this seems preferable to the alternative of anyone and everyone claiming the name "evangelical" with no one to speak for evangelicals to the contrary.

Conferences have been useful in the history of the church, whether at Nicea or Lausanne. The creation in 1942 of the National Association of Evan-

gelicals by the last generation of evangelical leaders was an attempt to address this need, yet the results have not measured up to their original expectations. The British Evangelical Alliance stands as a good model for us, and perhaps a good goal.

IV. CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, there are many things which evangelical scholars can and must do which I have not addressed because they are understood and assumed. My distinctive proposals in this article can be summarized thus: (1) we must address globality, the crisis of cultural authority and politics for the common good; (2) we must address theology and apologetics to the common man; (3) for these tasks we need leadership, so that we might speak with a common voice.

The only reasonable reaction to my suggestions in this paper is *"Who is equal to these tasks?"* The only reasonable answer is equally clear: no one! Yet we serve a God who knows no limits, and furthermore, who uses people like us to accomplish his will. Therefore, let us be scholars who continue to live by prayer and dependence upon God. Then, let us live godly examples. Finally, by diligent research and passionate writing, let us aim for the stars. Perhaps as we see the needs, God will grant that we might be used to meet them.