

Neo-Evangelicalism

Introduction

A. God has revealed Himself to us. This brings the believer to the position of a profound opportunity and profound responsibility.

B. The twentieth century theological scene.

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| 1. Liberalism. | 4. Neo-Orthodoxy. |
| 2. Neo-Liberalism. | 5. Neo-Evangelicalism. |
| 3. Existential Theology | 6. Biblical Evangelicalism |

C. In addition to these six positions there is the Ecumenical Movement which is seeking to unite all those holding these positions and ultimately all religions into a single organization.

I. The History of Neo-Evangelicalism.

Three significant events marked the emergence of neo-evangelicalism. The first was the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) with the avowed intention of defending orthodoxy on the highest academic plane possible. The second was the world-wide evangelistic campaigns of Billy Graham, which called for inter-church cooperation. The third was the founding of the journal Christianity Today (1956). (A Handbook of Contemporary Theology. P. Rammm, p. 88)

II. The Description of Neo-Evangelicalism.

A. There is a noticeable, though indecisive change in the doctrine of biblical inspiration and authority

B. These scholars are ready to agree with liberal theologians that biblical texts ought to be studied in literary context

C. In regard to the sciences in general, and particularly in relation to the biological theory of evolution, some concessions are being made

D. . . . New social concern

E. Even the stress on sharply defined, exclusive doctrine shows signs of softening. A trend toward greater flexibility has developed, largely under the efforts to bring together conservative Calvinists and Armenians, Baptists and Nazarenes, Lutherans and Free Methodists. This requires considerable breadth of dogmatic tolerance (Summarized from Present Trends in Christian Thought, L. Harold DeWolf, pp. 44-47).

III. Three Basic Characteristics of Neo-Evangelicalism.

A. The characteristic tendency to adopt principles of Biblical interpretation which would allow for the acceptance of currently attractive scientific and critical viewpoints.

The younger evangelicals today are deeply distressed ... they long for the swift reconciliation of theology and science ... the espousal of concepts like "progressive creationism" and "threshold evolution". . . the dust of man's origin may have been animated (Contemporary Evangelical Thought, Carl F. H. Henry, pp. 250,282.)

- B. The characteristic tendency to deemphasize the Biblical doctrine of ecclesiastical separation.

An up-to-date- strategy for the evangelical cause must be based upon the principle of infiltration. . . . Why is it incredible that the evangelicals should be able to infiltrate the denominations and strengthen the things that remain, and possibly resume control of such denominations? ("Resurgent Evangelical Leadership, Christianity Today, Harold J. Ockenga October 10, 1960).

Contemporary orthodoxy is a curious blend of classical and cultic elements, for whereas it claims to be true to general Biblical doctrine, it defends a separatist view of the church. Behind this inconsistency is the familiar error of thinking that possession of truth is the same thing as possession of virtue. As long as orthodoxy is comforted by this error, it imagines that it is sufficiently virtuous to decide who are, and who are not members of the church. (The Case for Orthodox Theology, Edward J. Carnell, pp, 132,133).

- C. The characteristic tendency to compromise the Biblical doctrine of inerrancy.

Over against this old view of an inerrant Bible has come the re-emergence of a view of the Bible which negates the old view. It comes from a group that claims to be theologically conservative. . . the holders of the new view have given ground on the subject of inerrancy. . . If you ask the neo-conservative whether he believes in an inspired Bible he can answer in the affirmative. If you ask him whether he believes in a verbally infallible Bible he can still answer in the affirmative. Yet he does . . . believe that the Bible is an inspired, infallible, although not inerrant, Book. He does believe that it is verbally infallible, in terms of its spiritual message and the purpose for which the Bible was written. Yet he does not consider it infallible in terms of fact, history and science since it was not written to convey accuracy of fact, history and science. . . If neo-conservatives can maintain its view of an inerrantly-errant Bible without further departure from the remaining basic doctrines of the Christian faith, it will succeed in doing what no other group or institution has been able to do in American religious history. ("Is the Bible Wholly Reliable?" Harold Lindell, Christian Life, Kay, 1965, pp. 30-32,56).

Contemporary evangelical Christianity has demonstrated great vitality both in its stress on an unchanging gospel and in its forthright proclamation of saving truth. Yet in spite of this . . . the present evangelical situation is fraught with extreme perils . . . Today, however, one observes with amazement and with sorrow that in the very orthodox circles where the twentieth-century battle for biblical authority has been most courageously fought, voices are being raised against the inerrancy of Holy Writ. . . theologians who should be testifying to Scripture's total truth are preferring to avoid the word "inerrancy" are making no efforts to explain apparent discrepancies in the Bible and are re-defining "truth" so that the Scripture can -we are confidently told - retain its absolute revelational veracity without de facto historical accuracy*

(Guest Editorial" John Warwick Montgomery, Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society, Autumn, 1965, pp. 125,126)

Conclusion

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ said; . .The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35. Search the Scripture, read the books, decide for yourself - and then obey the Bible in being ready to give an ". . . answer of the hope that is in you." I Peter 3:15.
- B. See my booklet, Neo -Evangelicalism for a bibliography. Victor M. Matthews