Three Critical Issues Facing the Evangelical Church

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Thesis

The three most critical issues for the evangelical church and academia to address are a departure from the God of the Bible, an unbalanced Trinitarian understanding, and acceptance of the tension between transcendence and immanence of God.

Departure from the God of the Bible

If Froese and Bader’s research is statistically valid, then nearly 70% of Americans living today have a rude awakening ahead.\(^1\) In my assessment, this alarming statistic is primarily the result of two significant trajectories – one scholarly and one secular. The scholarly trajectory beginning with the rise of rationalism in the eighteenth century has consistently eroded the peoples’ faith in the veracity of the Bible. Further, the relatively unchallenged attack upon God’s word naturally filtered into many learning institutions that have been systematically churning out generation after generation of essentially apostatized clergy who, lacking the foundation of scriptural truth, have turned America’s churches into little more than social clubs as Gerald Bray states, "Promoting good works and blessed thoughts."\(^2\) However, attacking God's word is nothing new despite the intellectual pride of the rationalists. Satan has been attacking God's word since the beginning, "Indeed, has God said…” (Genesis 3:1). The second most significant developmental trajectory has been the rise of postmodernism into the void left by the failure of modernism. Without the foundational truth of the scriptural God who will judge sinful man, people are freed from personal responsibility for their actions. Scripture tells us, "and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10, NASB). McRaney’s observation is key, "Typically individuals see

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\(^1\)Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America’s Four Gods: What We Say about God and What That Says about Us* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26. The statistics indicate that only 31% of Americans believe in the "Authoritative God" which, from their categorical description, is the best overall interpretation of the God of the Bible.

themselves as the final arbiter of truth and reality.” Not knowing God means that people can do what is right according to their own beliefs (cf. Judges 21:25). In response to these two trajectories theologians today should be mindful of Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers” (2 Timothy 2:14, NASB). Secondarily, evangelical Christians need to reacquaint themselves with the actual God of the Bible not a God of their own creation. As I am intrigued by the substantial illiteracy of American Christians asserted by Froese and Bader, I will be reading their reference source: Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know-But Doesn't by Prothero in order to more fully understand this dynamic of American evangelical culture.

*Unbalanced Trinitarian Understanding*

The second critical issue within the evangelical church and academia is rediscovery of Trinitarian soteriology. Bray asserts, "The doctrine of the Trinity must form the basis of our proclamation and [emphasis Bray's] of our pastoral practice." Evident today are the manifestations that result from an over emphasis or a negation of one of the three persons of the Trinity. Openness Theology ultimately fails because of “the lack of an adequate Christology… the single biggest defect in open theism.” Another is Oneness Pentecostalism which doctrinally affirms that there is only one God named “Jesus” manifesting Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. Finally, the affirmation of the person of the Holy Spirit is often forgotten as Gordon Fee observes in regard to mainstream evangelicalism, "Despite the affirmations in our creeds and hymns and the lip service paid to the Spirit in our occasional conversations, the Spirit has been largely marginalized both in the halls of learning and in the life of the church as a community of

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4 Bray, 229.


faith." This will be the area of personal spiritual growth relating to the doctrine of God I look forward to pursuing upon the completion of seminary. Initially, I will do this by reading Erickson's *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions*. I have been exposed to the writings of Erickson through my coursework at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and I have come to trust his objective consideration of Christian doctrines even when I do not always agree with his conclusions.

**Harmonious Tension between Transcendence and Immanence**

Finally, I believe the third critical issue facing the evangelical church and academia is the need to acquiesce to the simple truth that the God of the Bible is both absolutely transcendent (*cf.* Deuteronomy 29:29a; Proverbs 25:2; Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36) and absolutely immanent in His self-revelation (*cf.* Deuteronomy 29:29b; Psalm 139:1-16). It should be exciting for believers to witness the harmonious tension between transcendence and immanence where the psalmist writes, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee" (Psalm 139:17-18, KJV). The transcendent God became very personal for me about twelve years ago when I participated in a 12-week study by Henry Blackaby called *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. The way I perceive my relationship with God was fundamentally re-worked as a result of Blackaby's insights. I came to understand God has substantially revealed Himself with regards to His expectations as Blackaby states, "Scripture is a record of God's revelation of Himself to man." The God of the Bible wants to be known. Theologians practicing good theology should, therefore, focus their efforts on helping people understand and know the God of the Bible. Such a presupposition in approaching the study of God's word will put aside the unfounded speculations that only serve to further confuse and

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divide evangelicalism. I plan to read Peter Toons *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* which is recommended as an important book for both pastors and laity. Armstrong writes, "Toon understands evangelicalism and writes to our most obvious needs theologically."⁹

*God’s Call upon Me*

The actions I plan to take in response to not only the doctrine of God class but my seminary career as a whole is to join God in His work as He has called me to writing and teaching ministries. Within the past two weeks God has both opened a window for a writing ministry through a contact with West Bow Press and a teaching/discipleship ministry within my church. After the New Year, I will begin fleshing out a manuscript idea that began more than a year ago. Additionally, my pastor has requested that I assume greater discipleship responsibilities within the church. I have already planned to develop and teach courses regarding the Holy Spirit, spiritual warfare, and servant evangelism in the next year.

*Conclusion*

In this essay, I have set forth what I believe to be the three most critical issues facing evangelicalism and academia: a departure from the God of the Bible, an unbalanced Trinitarian understanding, and acceptance of the tension between transcendence and immanence of God. I have attempted to defend my assertions through relevant Scripture and authors to which I have been exposed in *Theology 626 – The Doctrine of God*. Clearly, in an essay assignment of this length an exhaustive discussion of all the issues facing the church and academia and all the related counter-arguments is simply not possible. What I have presented is essentially my rationale for my post-seminary career based upon what I believe is the call of God upon my life. In the final analysis, is not that all any of us can hope to do?

Bibliography


