

ENGAGING THE ENEMY...BUT ON WHOSE TERMS? AN ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES TO THE CHARGE OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

by
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Open any critique of evangelical ideology by its opponents, and you will not read long before stumbling across a reference to the “anti-intellectualism” of evangelicalism.² This criticism has been with us for better than a century now, and has become entrenched in the non-evangelical mind as one of the primary characteristics of evangelicalism.³

Most early fundamentalists were acutely aware of this charge, but refused to agree to the terms of liberal intellectualism and willingly acquiesced to exclusion from the ivory towers of the prevailing academy. Almost all were resolute in their forced “retreat to the hinterlands” of the intellectual arena.⁴ In the decades that ensued, fundamentalism spent time regrouping and formulating systematic

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²See, e.g., Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962), pp. 48–49, n. 8.

³Throughout this paper I consistently use the term *evangelical* to refer broadly to that group which believes in (1) biblical authority and (2) conversionism (belief in the new birth as a personal, instantaneous, life-changing experience). During the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, *fundamentalist* and *evangelical* were synonymous terms. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, evangelicalism bifurcated, with fundamentalist evangelicalism on the one hand and the “new” evangelicalism on the other. Though there has been some inconsistency in the usage of the term, *evangelical* seems to prevail in modern historiography as the best umbrella term for orthodox practitioners in both groups. If I wish to refer specifically to the “new” evangelicals, I will identify them as such.

⁴George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 249.

responses to academia.⁵ Some continued to be content functioning in exile from the prevailing academy, resulting in a crop of new, fundamentalist institutes and colleges.

Other evangelicals, however, resented this exclusion. As George Marsden puts it, they

felt keenly their lack of respect at the centers of culture. Academia was especially tightly closed. Only rarely did a bona fide conservative Bible believer gain a significant university position.... Universities were crucial to the future of the nation, and fundamentalist evangelicals could point to no nationally recognized scholar who spoke clearly for their cause. Most of their own scholars could gain little recognition outside the Bible conference circuit.⁶

To salve the embarrassment of this fate, a group of evangelicals organized in the 1940s and 1950s as the “new” evangelicals, a group that had as one of its chief objectives the demonstration to the prevailing academic elites that evangelicalism had jettisoned its anti-intellectualism. To meet this objective they had to prove that they had successfully separated themselves from their anti-intellectual fundamentalist counterparts. This they did by publicly “recognizing with a wry smile the truth in the liberal jibe: ‘Fundamentalism is too much fun, too much damn, and too little mental!’”⁷

The efforts of these early new evangelicals failed. In his fascinating history of Fuller Seminary, the flagship school of the new evangelicalism, George Marsden notes that Fuller Seminary was unable to gain any sort of a broad hearing within Academia and unable to expand their enrollment beyond a few hundred (almost exclusively white male) students until Fuller made far-reaching concessions,⁸ concessions that, in this author’s opinion, rendered their description as evangelical dubious at best.⁹

⁵Joel Carpenter provides this fairly positive analysis of the decades immediately following the fundamentalists’ defeat in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies in his *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶*Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 13–14.

⁷Vernon, G. Grounds, “The Nature of New Evangelicalism,” *Eternity* 7 (February 1956), p. 13.

⁸See particularly Marsden’s epilogue, “The Mega-Seminary,” in *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁹Of particular note was their abandonment of scriptural inerrancy which is well documented in *ibid.*, pp. 246–47; 266–69; 302–3, and esp. the “Sequel” on pp.

Though the new evangelical experiment is generally regarded as having ended during the inerrancy controversies of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the new evangelicals did not return to fundamentalism. Instead they maintained a more-or-less separate identity as what we might call “non-fundamentalist evangelicals.”¹⁰ What continues to distinguish them is a matter of no small debate, but can probably be reduced broadly to disparate views of anthropology and apologetics as they are reflected in practical models of worship, evangelism, and ecumenism.¹¹

The emphasis on evangelical scholarship did not slow, however, with the failure of the new evangelical experiment, and in recent decades, much work has been done to analyze this scholarship. While George Marsden has been the most prolific of these analysts,¹² Mark Noll’s *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*¹³ has probably proved the most important book in popularizing the topic of evangelical intellectualism. Noll opens the book with the observation, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind,” and notes on the same page, that, “despite dynamic success at a popular level, modern evangelicals have failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life.” He laments that there is not a single research university or scholarly journal within all of evangelicalism that has risen to meet the rigorous demands of American intellectual life, and exhorts evangelicalism to emerge from this malaise.¹⁴

Noll and Marsden, with their attempts to analyze and rejuvenate evangelical scholarship, have gained a lot of attention within the evangelical world, and, more specifically, within fundamentalism. As a

277–90: “The Last Battles with Fundamentalism.”

¹⁰It is for this very good reason that many fundamentalists persist in describing this group as new evangelical, despite the fact that they themselves have abandoned the label.

¹¹See the excellent article by Rolland D. McCune, “The New Evangelicalism and Apologetics,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2001): 75–115.

¹²See in addition to his *Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* his “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219–64; *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

¹⁴pp. 3–4.

troubling result of this steadily increasing stream of criticism of fundamentalism for its “anti-intellectualism,” however, the exodus of fundamentalists from their own movement has intensified. And I fear that the proverb that “those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it” is in danger of coming true.

In this presentation I hope to create a countercurrent to this trend by (1) assessing the charge of anti-intellectualism historically to determine its origin and veracity and (2) briefly describing and evaluating three responses to this charge.

THE CHARGE OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

In determining the veracity of the charge of anti-intellectualism, I would like to start with a brief survey of Protestant religious thought and note specifically the progression of Bible-science and apologetics¹⁵ from the Reformation to the present. For the American portion of this task I draw heavily from James Ward Smith’s article, “Religion and Science in American Philosophy,”¹⁶ and also from several more recent works that have built on Smith’s seminal article.¹⁷

Medieval Theology

Most historical analyses of the relationship of the Bible and science in Western thought begin with the First Scientific Revolution (c. 1600–1800), but it helps us to know why this is so. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church had imposed on the Western world its authority. God was God because the Church said so. Truth was truth because the Church said so. The Bible was helpful, as was science, but only so far as the Church exercised her own, inherent authority over them. We cannot deny, of course, that Thomas Aquinas (together with

¹⁵On p. 1 of his apologetics syllabus Van Til defines apologetics as “the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.” It encompasses the means to identifying God and apprehending truth, and is the starting point for all theology and evangelism. It answers the question, “How do you know that God exists and has revealed himself in Scripture?”

¹⁶In *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 402–4.

¹⁷Mark Noll, “Christian Thinking and the Rise of the American University,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 9 (January 1979): 3–16; Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia”; John C. Hutchison, “The Design Argument in Scientific Discourse: Historical-Theological Perspective from the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (March 1998): 85–105; and James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: the Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

other medieval scholastics) recognized five rational proofs for God's existence: (1) from motion to an Unmoved Mover; (2) from effects to a First Cause; (3) from contingent beings to a Necessary Being; (4) from degrees of perfection to a Perfect Being; and (5) from Design to a Designer. These proofs would eventually become the basis for the rational apologetic discussed below. I would contend, however, that in the 13th century few people cared. The Church was entrenched as the people's authority, and new philosophical and scientific musings held little sway on prevailing praxis; in fact, even the primordial stages of the first scientific revolution necessarily occurred "underground."¹⁸

Calvin and the Reformers

When the Reformation began, things began to change. Calvin and Luther debunked the Church as the final authority, and appealed directly to Scripture. For the Protestants, *Sola Scriptura* became the new final court of appeal.

In theory, this had been true during medieval times as well; after all, the Roman Church had never explicitly denied the authority of Scripture. However, there was a significant difference: the Roman Church denied that *individuals* had the capacity to determine the canon or to interpret it for themselves—this right belonged to the Church alone. Among the Reformers, Calvin in particular began an epistemological war by sourcing his knowledge of God and his ability to interpret divine revelation not in the Church, but in the Spirit-empowered reading of the self-authenticating Scriptures.¹⁹ All people could intuitively recognize God and his revelation, and with the "unction" of the Holy Spirit imparted at regeneration (1 John 2:27), man could not only recognize truth, but also welcome it as truth apart from any intermediary. Epistemology was individual, not corporate.

External factors (natural revelation and scientific experimentation) and internal factors (reason and the human conscience) had a role in the Reformers' epistemology, but they played a secondary role. These could harmonize with what the believer already knew through the

¹⁸Copernicus, for instance, delayed publication of his *De Revolutionibus* for decades, and was convinced to do so only a few years before his death by a Protestant academic from Wittenburg.

¹⁹See his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), all of book 1, but esp. chap. 7. Interestingly, neither Calvin nor Luther accepted the novel scientific theories of Copernicus, but their reasoning differed from that of Roman Catholicism: faithfulness to extreme literalism, not to church dogma, governed their rejection of Copernican theory as pseudo-science.

self-authenticating Scriptures, but could never establish or even corroborate truth in any independent sense.²⁰

As the Reformation developed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, confidence in external measures to establish truth grew steadily. The scientific discoveries of Kepler, Boyle, Newton, and others spilled into the popular realm, and believers were overjoyed to see how marvelously and intricately God had designed the world. In fact, *Newtonian*, as an adjective, came to mean “the view of nature as a universal system of mathematical reason and order divinely created and administered.”²¹ Any man in any field, regardless of his spiritual condition, could establish truth not only individually, but also *independently* through his own research. Every day God was being lifted higher and higher as the great designer of the universe—science was proving the God of the Bible! The whole Protestant world was being swept into a rational apologetic, and virtually no one was opposing them.²²

The Enlightenment

As the world of science grew and expanded, however, the question of the relationship of science to faith loomed greater. Francis Bacon, one of the earliest and best-known inductivists, had argued that there were “two distinct categories: the truth of religion, and the truth of science,” and scientific truth alone could be secured by inductive

²⁰For explanation of this subtlety in a modern context, see the discussion in Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidences* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980). For Van Til and for Calvin, science could never make the Bible *more* certain—that certainty is already complete. But true science always harmonizes perfectly with the Bible.

²¹*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, s.v. “Newton, Sir Isaac,” by H. S. Thayer.

²²Jonathan Edwards was one of the few who retained Calvin’s epistemology and resisted the rationalist tide in apologetics (see the discussion in Turner’s *Without God, Without Creed*, pp. 49–51, 58, 60, 63, 90). Unfortunately, just as so many of his theological ideas, his apologetic was brushed aside by his contemporaries as arcane and outmoded.

Because of Edwards’s delight in nature and emphasis on a “reasonable” faith, John Gerstner (and others) have seen in Edwards a rather developed natural theology, and have claimed him as a champion of rationalism. However, it is important to note that when Edwards spoke of a “reasonable faith,” he was not speaking of a faith based on rational evidences. He was speaking of a faith that was internally self-consistent and non-contradictory (see esp. his sermon, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. Edward Hickman, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974], 2:12–17).

experimentation.²³ Those who followed him, however, sought to close the gap, either from above²⁴ or below.²⁵ The physical and metaphysical realms became one and the same, though debate swirled over which realm had final authority.

David Hume exploded the Newtonian world by asserting that matters of faith were not matters of “fact” but of “value,” an understanding that was picked up by Immanuel Kant and the English Deists. Since faith was in a different category than fact, one could not use “pure reason” to arrive at faith.²⁶ Since the Bible was scientifically unprovable, it could be received only with great tentativeness, and interpreters were obliged to accommodate scientific discovery when conflict arose. Aquinas’s argument from design to a “Designer” was heavily invoked to suggest that “Nature’s God” had started the universe in motion so that it ran according to “Natural Laws,” but this God no longer made any scientifically verifiable forays into his creation. It was impossible to make any assertions about God and religious values beyond the fact that they existed.

In response to this skeptical approach, Thomas Reid and the Scottish Common Sense Realists contested that faith was not outside the realm of science. Reid maintained that it was not necessary to observe an idea by external scientific means for it to be scientific. Instead, God had endowed all men with a measure of “common sense” by which they could *intuitively* recognize non-observable truth: it was “self-evident.” Reid failed, however, to delimit parameters to what was “common,” a failure which led to the fragmentation and eventual downfall of Common Sense Realism.²⁷ Any individual or group of individuals could impose onto Reid’s philosophy whatever they autonomously determined to be “common,”²⁸ leading to what Sydney

²³John C. Hutchison, “The Design Argument in Scientific Discourse: Historical-Theological Perspective from the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (March 1998): 87.

²⁴I would suggest that Robert Boyle fits here. Keenly aware of the depravity of man, Boyle attributed contradictions between the biblical and scientific records to faulty human observation in the realm of science. See *ibid.*, pp. 90–97.

²⁵I would suggest that Isaac Newton fits here. Newton had a great deal more faith in human nature than did Boyle, and, when the two “books of revelation” conflicted, he concluded that “cardinal theological doctrines like...the absolute authority of Scripture as an embarrassment to the new breed of scientist” (*ibid.*, p. 99).

²⁶Hence the title of Kant’s most influential work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

²⁷*Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.”

²⁸In Kant’s words, Common Sense Realism thrived only by “appealing to the

Ahlstrom called its “variegated role in Western thought”²⁹: not only was Common Sense Realism popular among Princetonian Calvinists, but also among Harvard Unitarians, Yale Liberals, and Oberlin Pelagians. And, ironically, Protestants missed what should have been an obvious flaw in their own logic: “Common Sense” proved not to be “common” at all, but had evolved into a rationale for theological autonomy on a wide scale. As a result, *all* the following groups imbibed Common Sense Philosophy.

- The Unitarian could deny the Trinity on the ground that the concept is irrational.
- The Pelagian could deny original sin because it is illogical to charge the entire human race with a sin that was committed by Adam.
- The Universalist could deny the existence of hell and affirm the universal salvation of the human race because it is irrational for a benevolent God to send men to hell.
- The Pluralist could affirm the legitimacy of all religions, because it is unfair for God to give his special revelation to a select group and not to everyone else.
- The Arminian could claim that it is illogical for God to make universal demands yet not supply ability to meet those demands.

So long as there was a general consensus about Christian theism, Christian origins, and Christian ethics, however, relative harmony persisted between rationalism and religion.

Darwinism and Modernism

The decision by believers to adopt a rationalist apologetic respecting the relationship of science and faith came so gradually that most “only half-realized that they had in fact made a choice—and never really stopped to consider its implications.”³⁰ They were completely oblivious to the fact that “in trying to adapt their beliefs to socio-economic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of

‘judgment of the crowd’” (Grave, *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, p. 5).

²⁹“Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History* 24 (September 1955): 257. See also *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Scottish Realism,” by Douglas F. Kelly; and Mark A. Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* (Summer 1985): 225.

³⁰Turner, *Without God, Without Creed*, p. 49.

knowledge, to the tightening standards of science, the defenders of God slowly strangled Him.”³¹ Never was this more evident than during the 19th century.

Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1833) was the warning shot of the impending disaster. In this book Lyell demonstrated that a purely scientific (uniformitarian) view of science proved the earth to be millions of years old, directly conflicting with the Genesis account. The rationalist apologists (even the stalwarts at Princeton) scarcely blinked, and chose to adjust their literal hermeneutics to account for the discrepancy. The days of Genesis 1 were not days at all, but eons, or perhaps days with one or more gaps between them. Science and Scripture were once more in harmony.³²

Charles Darwin’s 1859 publication of the *Origin of Species*, however, could not be accommodated by orthodox theology, and single-handedly leads to James Ward Smith’s lengthy but profound thesis:

First, that the adjustment of religious world view to science in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was persistently superficial; second, that philosophical revolution of the twentieth century is predicated upon taking science seriously, and upon refusal to countenance superficial accommodation. If these two points can be clearly established, we can support two further claims: first, that the loss of cosmic sense can be understood only to the extent that we understand the points at which the demands of science had never been squarely met by our traditionally religious view of the world; second, that only by rectifying the failure of the past can an intelligent revival of cosmic sense flourish.³³

Believers had granted science increasingly independent authority for two centuries, and in the popular mind, science’s authority had exceeded the Bible’s. So when irreconcilable conflict arose, the Bible was obliged to surrender. Darwin provided that irreconcilable conflict by

³¹Ibid., p. xiii. This is the thesis statement of Turner’s book.

³²In Turner’s words, the rise of geological evolution, which “wreaked havoc on prevailing literal readings of the Bible,” raised few deep concerns. Instead, “furor proved temporary: prudent retreat from extreme literalism saved the authenticity of Scripture. By 1850, few regarded geology as a serious threat to Christianity, much less to God” (ibid., p. 99; see also chap. 3 and pp. 145–46). Theodore Bozeman, suggests, in fact, that the new geology actually became the handmaiden to the prevailing post-millennial theology (*Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977], pp. 119–24).

³³“Religion and Science in American Philosophy,” p. 404. While Smith’s ideas about how we may “rectify the failure of the past” differ from mine, and his accommodation of religion to science is wrong-headed, I believe his assessment is essentially accurate as it stands.

(1) giving another explanation than God for the organization, design, and morality of the universe. God was no longer necessary (even though Darwin himself was not an atheist); (2) demonstrating decisively that Aquinas's five "proofs" for the existence of God logically pointed to *infinite regress*, not to a "Prime Mover" or "First Cause"; and (3) cutting out the heart of biblical theology by jettisoning original sin in the first Adam and all need for a "second Adam." The solidarity of the human race and the believer's solidarity with Christ had disappeared. Suddenly it also became obvious that, at least in a uniformitarianist scientific world, it was irrational to believe in miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the ascension—these were completely antithetical to science. Darwin had proved decisively that a consistent, brute common-sense rationalist could not be a fundamentalist.

The Fragmentation of Orthodoxy

Reeling from the Darwinian death blow to Common Sense Realism, three responses emerged in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestantism:

1. Some abandoned the faith and turned to liberalism or even agnosticism. As Turner aptly notes in his discussion of this group, "some Christians now insisted on following that road [Common Sense Realism] even if it led away from Christianity. The strategy [of defending the faith scientifically] had turned against its originators. As the scope of natural theology narrowed, the creeds began to be squeezed out of the realm of knowledge."³⁴
2. Some turned to Kierkegaard and Barth, who allowed for contrary truths to be held in tension, a tension reconciled only through a "leap of faith." Theological paradoxes, antinomies, and mysteries were welcomed, and were justified by the existence of a totally transcendent God who may manage his universe illogically if he so desires.³⁵ This seems to be the solution offered by James Turner.³⁶

³⁴Turner, *Without God, Without Creed*, p. 159.

³⁵As an aside, this author is troubled by the haste with which some evangelical theologians dismiss knotty theological issues as "mysteries." There is no doubt, of course, that infinite comprehension of God is beyond our grasp, and answers to some theological questions are not forthcoming; however, it is our privilege and responsibility to pursue them as fully as we can (Deut 29:29). Dismissal of theological difficulties as antinomial, however, is not an option, for antinomies can be justified only by adopting Barthianism. We must be cautious lest laziness, desire for unity, or even genuine humility lead us toward this slippery, Barthian slope.

³⁶On p. 269 of his *Without God, Without Creed*, Turner concludes by observing that belief in God can only survive if believers discard their scientific defense of God

3. Others insisted that the Christian faith could still be harmonized with science. This group, however, was not monolithic, and this variety has led to a fragmentation of evangelicalism. It is these distinctively evangelical variegations to which we now turn.

**EVANGELICAL RESPONSES TO THE CHARGE
OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM**

Summary of Historical Apologetic Methodologies

Before identifying and analyzing these evangelical fragments in brief, I offer the following generalized summary of historical epistemological views from which these fragments derive.

	The Identity of Truth	The Veracity of Truth
Medieval Romanism	Whatever the Church says is truth...	because the Church says so. [<i>Ecclesiastical Fideism</i>]
The Reformation	Whatever the Bible says is truth... ³⁷	because all men instinctively recognize its self-authenticating quality, though only believers welcome it as true. [<i>Presuppositionalism</i>]
Enlightenment Ideaism/ Barthianism	Whatever I observe in Nature is truth, and whatever I believe about what I can't observe is truth <i>for me</i> .	The first category of facts (what I observe in Nature) is true because science has proved it to be true [<i>Rationalism</i>]; the second category of facts (what I believe about what I can't observe) is true <i>for me</i> because I believe it. [<i>Autonomous Fideism</i>]
19th Century Common Sense Evangelicalism ³⁸	Whatever I observe in nature is truth, and whatever the Bible says is truth...	because science (whether verifiable externally or simply "common" to all people) has proved <i>both</i> to be true. [<i>Inconsistent Rationalism</i>]
Darwinism/ Liberalism	Only what I observe in nature is truth and <i>nothing else</i> ...	because science has proved it (and <i>nothing else</i>) to be true. [<i>Consistent, Uniformitarian Rationalism</i>]

and adopt a "transcendental" apologetic. The term *transcendental* has been used to describe Barthianism on the one hand and Dutch Calvinist Presuppositionalism on the other, and while Turner does not detail the "transcendental" position he mentions here, it seems likely that he is suggesting something closer to the former.

³⁷The Reformers conceded that what is observed in nature may also be truth, but human depravity is such that one cannot trust his observations implicitly. Only as they are filtered through the truth deposit of Scripture can observations be classified definitively as truth.

³⁸I use the designation Common Sense *Evangelicalism* because Thomas Reid and other early Common Sense Philosophers would not have made these claims (see the discussion above). It is only as Common Sense Realism developed an evangelical strain that these claims emerged.

Three Responses to Anti-Intellectualism

For centuries the vast majority of orthodoxy had opted for the fourth of the options outlined above (19th Century Common Sense Evangelicalism), crowning *independent* science as the standard of intellectualism. Now that this option had failed them, however, evangelicalism was forced to choose among the other options to rebuild their intellectual house a new way. By changing the ground rules of intellectualism, they naturally received the classification “anti-intellectual.” As we will see below, however, “changing the rules” was the only workable (not to mention biblical) solution.

Here, then, are three evangelical models constructed in the face of the charge of anti-intellectualism:

True Anti-Intellectualism

Some evangelicals have happily accepted the label of anti-intellectualism, wearing it proudly as a badge of distinction, and have renounced all scholarship as illegitimate. Much as we would like to forget that this group exists, unfortunately, it does. And these, of course, have fully earned the label anti-intellectual. For these I have no better response than that supplied by B. B. Warfield to his students in 1911: “A minister must be learned, on pain of being utterly incompetent for his work. But before and above being learned, a minister must be godly. Nothing could be more fatal, however, than to set these two things over and against one another.”³⁹

Humanist Intellectualism

Many evangelicals continued to seek the support of science as an independent strand of brute truth. In the face of the growing hostility of science to religion, this response alternately adjusted their concepts of inerrancy (e.g., C. I. Scofield, B. B. Warfield, and William Jennings Bryan,⁴⁰ among others, persisted in denying a literal six-day creation)

³⁹“The Religious Life of Theological Students,” an address delivered at the Autumn Conference at Princeton Theological Seminary, 4 October 1911, reprinted in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 1995): 182.

⁴⁰In the “trial of the century,” the 1925 Scopes trial saw William Jennings Bryan champion the fundamentalist cause of creationism against evolution. Bryan, often caricatured as a bumbling fool, was nothing of the kind. His breadth of scientific knowledge and oratory skills had earned him considerable esteem on a popular level for his creationism crusade in educational institutions around the country during the early 1920s. But in Dayton, Tennessee, he lost the respect of many observers, and in the aftermath of the trial, he lost his life as well. Why did he lose these things? In part, I believe, it was because of his mixed apologetic. During a stinging barrage of questions from his opponent (for whom he unwisely agreed to be a witness), he countered

and redoubled their scientific efforts (e.g., William Ramsay, who was converted by “proving” the Bible through archaeology).

If the Scopes Trial of 1925 demonstrated anything, it demonstrated that the evangelicals had lost a hopeless amount of ground to liberalism/humanism in the realm of science. It was not until about twenty years later that a group of evangelicals decided that they would catch up. This group grudgingly conceded the *historical* label of anti-intellectualism, but resolved to prove to the critics that there had been a recent change for the better.

So concerned was this group to distance themselves from fundamentalists who persisted in their anti-intellectualism that they willingly split evangelical fundamentalism into two groups: the old, outdated fundamentalist evangelicalism and their own “new” evangelicalism. This latter label they chose for themselves to describe their new agenda, distinct from that of the fundamentalists and in tune with the intellectual and social concerns raised by liberals, whom they were determined to befriend and win back.

In his introduction to Harold Lindsell’s *Battle for the Bible*, Harold Ockenga described the solution to anti-intellectualism in the following assessment of his movement:

Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, this address repudiated its ecclesiology and its social theory. The ringing call for a repudiation of separation and the summons to social involvement received a hearty response from many evangelicals.... It differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life.⁴¹

Here in this paragraph, we find the rationale for the new

sometimes with science, sometimes with adjustments to the biblical text, and still other times with his tenacious belief that the Bible was true regardless of science’s ability to account for it. He had put creationism on trial with an overemphasized rationalism coupled with an occasional retreat to fideism that was, unfortunately, all too typical of the fundamentalism of his day.

For a sympathetic view of Bryan and the fundamentalist cause represented in the Scopes trial, see Gerald L. Priest, “William Jennings Bryan and the Scopes Trial: A Fundamentalist Perspective,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (Fall 1999); for a more critical analysis, see Edward J. Larson’s *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴¹(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 11.

evangelicalism. The fundamentalist mindset, typified by William Jennings Bryan, had been an embarrassment to the movement⁴² and had thrust them from academic posts of influence and prestige. The solution for the new evangelical was to separate from the fundamentalists (ironically, on the ground that fundamentalists were themselves separatists), and “engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day.”

In the innocent-sounding term “dialogue” lies the apologetic methodology of the new evangelical. Instead of “retreating to the hinterlands,” the new evangelical proposed to engage the enemy *on his own humanistic terms*. Although “dialogue” can have the simple meaning “conversation,” Ockenga implies much more than conversation in this paragraph. Assumed in the term is the mutual agreement to hold discussions on *common ground*. And according to Ockenga, that common ground was the assumptions of the theology of the day—liberal and neo-orthodox theology. Most notably they agreed for sake of argument to temporarily set aside their presuppositions of inerrancy and of the supernatural in order to engage the liberal. From that day forward, the history of the new evangelicalism has been replete with individuals who temporarily set aside these presuppositions, and, after dialogue, failed to pick them up again.⁴³

I recently had opportunity to listen to a series of lectures by a gifted evangelical archaeologist. During a question/answer session he engaged for approximately fifteen minutes with an OT student grilling him on archaeological grounds concerning his theories of the Canaanite conquest account. The archaeologist’s responses were nothing short of brilliant, yet the questions kept coming. Finally, the archaeologist turned to the full group and gently asked, “Isn’t it about time we considered the possibility that the biblical account is true?” In this reply we find the basic assumption common to the new evangelical: If one can defeat the liberal *on his own terms*, and so impress or confound him with brilliant answers, he will be forced to grudgingly accept, or at least consider the Bible.

Unfortunately, this reasoning is just a slightly more sophisticated version of William Jennings Bryan: if the evangelical rationalizes long

⁴²See esp. Noll’s discussion of the “Intellectual Disaster of Fundamentalism” (chapter 5 of his *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) and Marsden’s “Fundamentalist Menace” (chapter 17 of his *Soul of the American University*).

⁴³*The Battle for the Bible* was only one of a long line of publications released by the new evangelicals to woo their own back to the fold. One of the most helpful results of the new evangelicalism was the articulation of an evangelical bibliology. But lest we forget it, the occasion for those books was to stop the bleeding of new evangelicalism—to prevent the whole movement from being sucked into the godless ideologies they were purportedly trying to arrest.

enough, in time his opponent will be obliged to make a fideist leap to accept God. But both have overlooked a key point of epistemology and anthropology: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot understand them because they are *spiritually* (i.e., not by intuitive rationalism, but by means of the indwelling Spirit of God) appraised” (1 Cor 2:14).⁴⁴

Presuppositionalist Intellectualism

A third evangelical alternative proves much more promising. In this approach, proponents concede the mistakes of their forebears, abandon the rational apologetic, and revert to the presuppositionalist apologetic that had lain discarded for almost 200 years. This approach does not dismiss science, but neither does it view science as an independent discipline. Instead, it is subservient at all points to the dictates of Scripture.⁴⁵ It calls on evangelicals not to seek a happy marriage with the pagan worldview, but rather to reject as irremediable any bit of pagan intellectualism that cannot first be demonstrated to have borrowed successfully from the Christian worldview. The evangelicals’ task is not dialoging with the pagan worldview, but “creating a Christian worldview.”⁴⁶

This response has always invited and will always invite the charge of anti-intellectualism. Paul warned us of this:

The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.... We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18–24).

We are not at liberty to emasculate the word preached by mixing it with science as some imagined neutral discipline. God’s Word is infinitely higher than and informs our science or it is not true science at

⁴⁴All Scripture citations are taken from the 1995 edition of the *New American Standard Bible*.

⁴⁵See Virginia L. Brereton, *Training God’s Army: The American Bible School, 1880–1940* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 34.

⁴⁶Note the recent analysis of Abraham Kuyper’s 1898 Stone Lectures by this title (Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]).

all.⁴⁷

This last response is by no means a call for preachers and theologians to become dummies. On the contrary, it begs preachers to waste less time using concessive dialogue to win the pagan mind and fewer social tactics to convince pagans to “try Jesus,” and to spend more time in their Bibles, commentaries, and theologies to know God, to bring their studies to bear on external disciplines, and to confront unbelievers directly with the uncompromised demands of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Both the testimony of history and the testimony of God’s Word have informed us that the world will not be convinced one whit of the truth of Genesis because of a mountain of creationist evidence or the discovery of Noah’s Ark. The world will not be convinced one whit of the truth of Exodus and Joshua because of a mountain of archaeological evidence. The “evidence that demands a verdict” will always return from the world a verdict of unbelief. The “search for the historical Jesus” or for the “historical Paul” will never convince men that Christ died and rose for them or that the New Testament is authentic. These might attract the nod of approval from a humanistic world that operates from a foundation of intellectual autonomy, but they will do nothing to change the heart.

The Holy Spirit can change the heart of the enemy of the gospel, but he never stoops to engage the enemy *on their terms*. He will only engage the enemy *on God’s terms*: the foolishness of the Word preached. Far be it from us to imagine we can improve on his methods. The world may call us “anti-intellectual,” but God will call us wise.

⁴⁷In his introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd’s *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1960), Rousas J. Rushdooney notes of Dooyeweerd’s truly Christian worldview, “The view thus which seemingly ‘rejects’ science becomes the only source of true science, whereas any view which makes absolute that which is relative ends up by destroying the value of that aspect of creation” (p. xv).