

Sunday, November 17, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 115
The New Evangelicalism: Ronald Nash Versus C.R. Stam, Part 1

Introduction

- In the previous lesson we finished our survey of the Grace Movement in the 1950s. As we traverse into the 1960s with this lesson, we will begin to consider the origins of the split between Stam and the GGF/GBC that occurred in 1968. The *Grace History Project* has spent much time pondering the best way to cover this intricate and sensitive subject. We have decided to proceed in the following manner.
- First, consider the thought development in the New (Neo) Evangelical movement between the 1947 publication of Carl F.H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* and the mid 1960s by surveying Ronald H. Nash's 1963 book *The New Evangelicalism*.
- Second, study Stam's response to Nash and the Neo-Evangelicals by considering his 1968 book, *This Present Peril*. This will be done to ascertain the context of the controversy within the Grace Movement.
- Third, reconstruct the events that led to Stam removing himself and the Berean Bible Society from the GGF and publishing *Silence Now Would Be Sin* in August, 1968 and later moving to form the Berean Bible Fellowship (BBF).

The New Evangelicalism (1963)

- In Lesson 111 Reforming Fundamentalism we surveyed the history and usage of the terms evangelical, fundamental, and neo or new evangelical. In this lesson we saw the movement after WWII to reform Fundamentalism in the United States. This movement was led by a new breed of "Christian intellectuals" such as Carl F.H. Henry, Charles Fuller, and Harold Ockenga among others.
- Fuller Theological Seminary founded in 1947 in Pasadena, California most influentially championed the neo-evangelical cause. "Though the Fuller faculty deemphasized dispensationalism, they did not immediately repudiate their fundamentalist heritage. They were sincerely dedicated to Charles Fuller's ideal of positive evangelism and were close associates of Billy Graham. The school paid its sincere respects to fundamentalist doctrinal militancy, as well, by requiring credal assent to the inerrancy of Scripture." (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)
- "During the 1950s, Billy Graham's success was rapidly changing the status of this predominantly positive evangelicalism that had been growing out of fundamentalism. Graham's vast popular appeal gave him virtual independence. The election of Eisenhower and Nixon in 1952 gave him entry into the White House. . . Most importantly, Graham's move toward the respectable center of American life precipitated a definitive split with the hardline fundamentalists in 1957. For his

New York City crusade, Graham accepted the sponsorship of the local Protestant Council of Churches. Strict fundamentalists were deeply offended by this cooperation with liberals and they anathematized Graham. In the aftermath of the resulting schism with the coalition, “fundamentalism” came to be a term used almost solely by those who demanded ecclesiastical separatism. They called their former allies “neo-evangelicals,” picking up on the term “new evangelicalism” coined earlier by Ockenga.” (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)

- In 1963, Ronald H. Nash published a book titled *The New Evangelicalism* in an attempt to answer the many questions that were being asked regarding the movement. Seeing that we have already devoted two entire lessons to discussing the neo-evangelical agenda, we will only comment on those aspects of Nash’s book that are relevant to our current purposes.

Chapter 1 The Fundamentalist Renaissance

- Nash began chapter one by quoting from a 1958 article by Arnold Hearn in *The Christian Century* titled “The Fundamentalist Renaissance.” In this article, Hearn observed, “Something has been happening within fundamentalism. Away from the centers of ecclesiastical power and theological education of the major denominations, there has been a remarkable renaissance of intellectual activity among fundamentalist scholars.” (Nash, 13)
- Nash claims, in 1963 that “new evangelicalism” is more than fundamentalism becoming intellectual. To prove his point, Nash quotes an article penned by Harold John Ockenga, the originator of the term “neo-evangelical”, also from 1958.
 - “The new evangelicalism breaks with . . . three movements. The new evangelicalism breaks first with neo-orthodoxy because it (evangelicalism) accepts the authority of the Bible . . . He (the evangelical) breaks with the modernist . . . inference to his embrace of the full orthodox system of doctrine against that which the modernist has accepted. He breaks with the fundamentalist on the fact that he believes that the Bible teaching, the Bible doctrine and ethics, must apply to the social scene, that there must be an application of this to society as much as there is application of it to the individual man.”

Chapter 2 From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism

- In this chapter Nash recounts much of the same history that we covered in Lesson 111. However, there are a few criticisms of fundamentalism offered by Nash that we must note. First, Nash argues that Fundamentalists did not just react to modernist attacks on the faith made via science and philosophy but they reacted against science and philosophy as such. Nash views this as indicative of Fundamentalism’s “anti-intellectual” bent and depreciation of scholarship in general. Echoing the sentiments of Carl Henry from 1946, Nash notes that Fundamentalism has failed “to supply an adequate and competent literature for many areas of thought . . . showing the implications of Christian theism for aspects of life other than religion.” (Nash, 27) In addition, Nash argues that “Fundamentalism” became a catch all descriptor for the “lunatic fringe” including Holy Rollers, snake handlers, and polygamists who identified themselves as Fundamentalists. These factors produced a reaction within Fundamentalism which came to be known as “The New Evangelicalism.” (Nash, 26-28)

- At the heart of this reaction to neo-evangelical criticism was the lack of scholarship within Fundamentalism. “In 1946 Gordon Clark bewailed the condition of fundamentalism and its lack of competent scholarship in such areas as philosophy, sociology, science, and politics.” (Nash, 29) To bring home his point, Nash references an article from *Christian Life* magazine titled “Is Evangelical Theology Changing?” that enunciated the following eight trends within evangelicalism: “1) a friendly attitude toward science; 2) a willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit; 3) a more tolerant attitude toward varying views of eschatology; 4) a shift away from so-called dispensationalism; 5) an increased emphasis on scholarship; 6) a more definite recognition of social responsibility; 7) a reopening of Biblical inspiration; and 8) a willingness on the part of evangelicals to converse with liberal and dialectical theologians.” (Nash, 31)

Note: The second section of Nash’s book, chapters three through five, deals with issues related to the Scriptures such as Inspiration, Authority, and Inerrancy. Lest we become side tracked at this point, the *Grace History Project* has deemed it best to skip over these chapters for the time being.

Chapter 6 To Separate or Not to Separate

- As the title suggests, the main focus of chapter six is to discuss the “hyper-separatism” that had come to characterize much of Fundamentalism. While Nash views fundamentalism’s separation from modernism as necessary, he questions the necessity of the multiple schisms and divisions that occurred with Fundamentalism since the 1930s.
 - “For when the fundamentalist found that he no longer had any more liberals to separate himself from, he began to find issues to dispute which he could use to justify his separation from conservative brethren.” (Nash, 88)
- Nash and his fellow neo-evangelicals question whether or not Fundamentalist separatism accomplished its stated purpose of maintaining the purity of the church. Regarding this question Nash states the following:
 - “One can hear them speak proudly and boastfully of their “militant fundamentalism,” “uncompromising fundamentalism,” “fighting fundamentalism” and so on, *ad nauseum*. The trouble is that these men are often refusing to compromise on issues that are of secondary importance and the people they are fighting are often those who simply refuse to follow their acceptance of these minor issues. When there are no more liberals within range, they don’t stop fighting. They simply change. So they now challenge all those who refuse to concur with their belief, for example, that the rapture takes place before the tribulation.” (Nash, 91)
- Twentieth-century separatism has failed to communicate with those with whom it disagrees, according to Nash. Furthermore, Nash alleges that this rudeness on the part of fundamentalists has contributed to liberalism’s misunderstanding of what orthodoxy believes. “Twentieth-century separatism must take much of the blame for orthodoxy’s surrender of many large areas of Christendom to liberalism. The separatists left whole denominations, together with seminaries, churches, and agencies, in the hands of the liberals.” (Nash, 94)

- According to Nash, “Ockenga has made it clear that one of the primary objectives of evangelicalism is the recapture of “denominational leadership from within the denominations rather than abandoning these denominations to modernism.” (Nash, 95)
- Chapter Seven (To Unite or Not to Unite) deals with the subjects of Ecumenicalism and Cooperative Evangelism. Besides mentioning Robert Ferm’s book *Cooperative Evangelism* and Fundamentalism’s assessment of Billy Graham (preaching the gospel in campaigns supported by liberal pastors) no new information is covered in this chapter that we have not observed elsewhere. Ferm defends Graham’s methods as neither unbiblical nor markedly different from those used by Edwards, Wesley, Finney, Moody, or Sunday. (Nash, 106-107)

Note: Part Four of Nash’s book deals with “Evangelicalism and the Defense of the Faith.” This section contains two chapters; one on “Philosophical Apologetics” (Chapter 8) and one on “Presuppositionalism and Its Critics” (Chapter 9). While these chapters make for interesting reading for those interested in the subject of Apologetics, there is nothing in them that merits comment for our purposes.

Chapter 10 Evangelicals: The Half-hearted Heretics?

- Chapter Ten is the first chapter of Part Five titled “Evangelicalism and Its Critics.” In this section of the book Nash responds to the critics of neo-evangelicalism directly. He begins this discussion by discussing the two different types of criticisms leveled against evangelicalism.
 - “Conservative critics of evangelicalism are divided into two camps. There are, on the one hand, those who believe that evangelicals are sincere but misguided brethren. The critics of this persuasion claim that evangelicals are mistaken in their methods, in some of their beliefs, and in some of their criticism of fundamentalism. Those who regard evangelicalism in this light are much concerned lest some of these errors eventually lead evangelicals away from orthodoxy. . . The other group of critics is convinced that evangelicals are, in a way, half-hearted heretics, i.e., they have already departed from the faith of their fathers in many important respects. In this chapter we shall look at some of the claims made by this latter group.” (Nash, 147)
- After probing the following questions, Nash concludes the Evangelicals are not half-hearted heretics but the defenders of Christian orthodoxy as much as any so-called Fundamentalist.
 - Are evangelicals compromising the faith?
 - Was evangelicalism born of compromise?
 - Is evangelicalism a movement nurtured on pride of intellect?
 - Is evangelicalism a movement growing on the appeasement of evil?
 - Is evangelicalism a movement doomed by the judgment of God’s word?
 - Are evangelicals divisive?
 - Are evangelicals unwilling to defend the faith?
 - Does evangelicalism preach a positivism without a negativism?
 - Are evangelicals surrendering some basic Christian beliefs?

- “The facts are in and the conclusions are clear. The charges implying the evangelicals are perhaps half-hearted heretics, i.e., men who are beginning to drift away from the basic centralities of the Christian faith, are totally without support. In most cases, we have found that the critics themselves evidence a general unfamiliarity with evangelical literature. It is unfortunate, however, that such crude misrepresentations will continue to gain a hearing in conservative circles and will continue to cloud and confuse the real facts concerning evangelicalism.” (Nash, 155)

Chapter 11 Evangelicals: The Misguided Brethren?

- In this chapter Nash addresses the first type of Evangelical critic identified at the beginning of chapter ten, namely the one who views them as simply misguided. Nash does this by reviewing Robert Lightner’s book *Neo-Evangelicalism*. The foremost take away from this chapter is Nash’s reiteration of the need for men preparing for ministry to receive a liberal arts education.
 - “A seven-year program preparing a man for the ministry provides ample time to major in Bible in seminary. In such cases, an undergraduate Bible major (which would be essential for men not going on to seminary) often produces needless repetition in some courses while keeping the student from a liberal arts background that will make his theological studies more relevant to the needs of the day.” (Nash, 166)

Chapter 12 A Warning, a Question, and a Statement of Purpose

- In the section labeled “A Question: Is Neo-Evangelicalism New?” Nash utters his most anti-dispensational statements found in the book.
 - “The evangelical believes in the virgin birth of Christ, His deity, vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection and his literal and physical return to earth. Although evangelicals are carrying on an intense and earnest inquiry into the nature of inspiration, they are unquestioning in their allegiance to the Bible as the inscripturated revelation of God.

If theological problems do exist between some fundamentalists and other Christians who would prefer to be known as evangelicals, this writer suggests that it is due to practice by some fundamentalists of illegitimately elevating minor and inconsequential doctrines to levels of undue importance. If evangelicalism does seem “new” to any people, it only proves how far they have drifted away from the moorings of Reformation theology (and the Scriptures) into the dismal morass of dispensationalism. Fortunately, most Christians recognize that it is still the historic creeds of the Church that define orthodoxy and not the writings of, for example, J.N. Darby. We repeat, then, that as far as the historic creeds and essential doctrines of the faith are concerned, evangelicalism and fundamentalism are one. However, problems will continue to arise as long as fundamentalists continue to define orthodoxy without regard to the basic creedal requirements of the Church.

It is our contention then that evangelicalism is not “new.” On the contrary, evangelicalism is a contemporary movement that is rooted deeply in the foundations of historic orthodox Christianity. It is simply and plainly Christian orthodoxy speaking to the theological, social, and philosophical needs of the twentieth century.” (Nash, 176-177)

- Nash concludes his book by restating the goals and objectives of The New Evangelicalism outlined by Ockenga in his article “Resurgent Evangelical Leadership” which appeared in *Christianity Today* October 10, 1960.
 - “Evangelicals want to see a revival of Christianity in the midst of a secular world which, because of its loss of contact with God, is facing imminent destruction.
 - Evangelicals want to win a new respectability for orthodoxy in academic circles. This requires the production of dedicated scholars who will be prepared to defend the faith on the intellectual’s own ground.
 - Evangelicals want to recapture denominational leadership from within the larger denominations rather than completely abandon these denominations to the forces of contemporary liberalism.
 - Finally, evangelicals want to make Christianity the mainspring in society reforms that it once was and that it ought to be.” (Nash, 177)
- In 1968 after nearly two years of dealing with controversy within the GGF surrounding the subject of neo-evangelicalism, Stam published *The Present Peril: The New Evangelicalism* in March. The last chapter of Stam’s book contains a reprint of a resolution adopted by the Berean Bible Society on Friday, September 9, 1966 regarding The New Evangelicalism. On the second page of this resolution Stam states the following regarding incursions of neo-evangelicalism into the Grace Movement:
 - “WHEREAS neo-evangelicalism is being promoted by some of the largest religious periodicals and institutions of learning, and has made serious inroads among fundamentalists and has even gained a foothold in the so-called “grace movement,” (Stam, 152)
- It is important to note that the Berean Bible Society adopted this resolution a full two years before formally leaving the GGF in August, 1968. In our next lesson we will consider Stam’s response to Nash in *This Present Peril*.

Works Cited

- Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.
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- Stam, C.R. *The Present Peril: The New Evangelicalism*. Chicago, IL: Berean Bible Society, 1968.
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