

## REVIEW OF ROLLAND D. MCCUNE'S *PROMISED UNFULFILLED*

[I prepared the following book review for [John Woodbridge's](#) "History of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism" course in fall 2007 at [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School](#). Special thanks to [Rolland McCune](#) for reading my review and providing a lengthy response at such short notice. His rejoinder is included below with his permission. –Andy Naselli]

[McCune, Rolland D.](#) *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*. Greenville, S.C.: [Ambassador International](#), 2004. xvii + 398 pp.

*Promise Unfulfilled* is the most penetrating book-length evaluation of the "new [evangelicalism](#)" (about fifty years after its genesis) by a self-identified [fundamentalist](#). [McCune](#) (b. 1934) is former president and current professor of systematic theology at [Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary](#). He testifies, "I first heard that there was such a movement called 'new evangelicalism' when I entered [Grace Theological Seminary](#) in the fall of 1957. . . . In 1967 I began teaching on the seminary level and annually lectured on the new evangelicalism. This book"—McCune's first—"is a partial harvest of all my years of research, study, and teaching on the subject" (p. xv).

### Summary: Tracing the Argument

The title reflects McCune's thesis: Evangelicalism (which is now synonymous with "modern," "new," and "neo-evangelicalism") deliberately distinguished itself from fundamentalism in the 1940s and 1950s with a fresh promise and strategy, but its promise is unfulfilled and its strategy has failed. By "new evangelicalism" McCune means "a strain of conservative, traditional, Protestant, religious thought that coalesced into a movement in the mid-twentieth century, purporting to avoid the fundamentalist right and the neo-orthodox/neo-liberal left" (p. xvi). McCune argues his thesis by discussing historical and theological issues, divided into nine parts (and twenty-five chapters).

1. "Historical Antecedents" (pp. 1–26) recounts the rise of [liberal or modernist theology](#) and how that resulted in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in America. Fundamentalism's "*esprit*" is principally its militant separatism. Fundamentalism is a movement, not an attitude of belligerence, ugliness, or a negative mentality as often depicted" (p. 16). The fundamentalist movement's "essence" consists of (1) "core biblical truths, principally those concerning Christ and the Scriptures," (2) "ecclesiastical separation," and (3) "militancy" (p. 16).

2. "The Formation of the New Evangelicalism" (pp. 27–63) begins with "four crucial issues": (1) Unity/separation: The [National Association of Evangelicals](#) began in 1942 and declined to merge with [Carl McIntire's American Council of Christian Churches](#). (2) Social concern: [Carl Henry's The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism](#) (1947) decried "the lack of social concern in the fundamentalist movement of which he considered himself a part" (p. 34). (3) Scholarship/intellectualism: [Fuller Theological Seminary](#) began in 1947, partly as a reaction to fundamentalists who "simply were not up to par intellectually" (p. 38). (4) Evangelism: [Billy Graham's](#) evangelistic

crusades from 1949 to 1957 came to a head at the [1957 New York Crusade](#), which “finally made the two camps irreconcilable” (p. 45) because of Graham’s new and compromising policies on both sponsorship and convert referrals. “Graham brought an end to evangelical unity” (p. 55).

Eight other factors contributed to evangelicalism’s formation: (1) [Vernon Grounds](#)’s “The Nature of Evangelicalism” in *Eternity* (Feb. 1956); (2) [Christianity Today](#), created in 1956; (3) “Is Evangelical Theology Changing?”, a symposium in *Christian Life* (March 1956); (4) [Harold Ockenga](#)’s [news release](#) announcing evangelicalism’s change of strategy from separation to infiltration (Dec. 8, 1957); (5) [Robert O. Ferm](#)’s 100-page [Cooperative Evangelism: Is Billy Graham Right or Wrong?](#) (1958); (6) [Edward Carnell](#)’s [The Case for Orthodox Theology](#) (1959); (7) [Donald Grey Barnhouse](#)’s support of evangelicalism from 1953 until his death in 1960; and (8) articles by evangelicals published in the liberal [Christian Century](#).

3. “[Ecumenism](#)” (pp. 65–123) defines the term as the effort to implement a unity that ignores or greatly minimizes “doctrine, truth, and group distinctives” for “a united front,” particularly “the collaboration between evangelicals and non-evangelicals in promoting various religious and spiritual projects” (p. 65). This ecumenism errantly extends to evangelism, church councils, accolades, journalism, [charismatism](#), and [Roman Catholicism](#).

4. “Ecclesiastical Separation” (pp. 125–54) explains arguments for non-separatism ([pragmatism](#), infiltration, apostasy, and the impossibility of a pure church), refutes them, and then explains four “categories of separation”:

- (1) Christians must separate from *heresy*, which denies what is essential to Christianity (Acts 20:28–30; Rom 16:17–18; 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:8–9; Phil 1:15–18; 1 Tim 6:3–5; Titus 1:3; 2 John 9–11; Rev 2:14–15).
- (2) Christians must avoid *unequal alliances* by separating from non-Christians in spheres such as worship, marriage, and ministry (2 Cor 6:14–7:1).
- (3) Christians must separate from *organized apostasy*, which includes belonging to apostate denominations or associations, giving them money, speaking for them, and sponsoring them (Rev 18:4; cf. Isa 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45; 2 Cor 6:17).
- (4) Christians must separate from *disobedient Christians* (2 Thess 3:6–15; cf. Matt 18:17; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:22). This fourth category is unique to fundamentalism and is known as “secondary separation,” which “is the refusal to cooperate with erring and disobedient Christians who do not adhere to primary separation and other vital doctrines” (p. 146). “Ecclesiastical separation does not really admit of ‘degrees.’ [n. 26: “Bob Jones, “Scriptural Separation: ‘First and Second Degree.’”] Separation is directed to the other person because of *his* deviations from Scripture in whatever ways he may express them. If the erring brother runs with the wrong crowd, separation at this point is from *him* as well as from the unbiblical company he is keeping. The reason for separating may well involve someone’s unscriptural involvements, but in reality this is no more ‘secondary’ than a ‘primary’ separation from apostasy” (p. 147).

Separation “is not one-size-fits-all,” but includes three levels that “carry their own doctrinal and practical requirements”: (1) personal, (2) local church, and (3) organizational (p. 154).

5. “The Bible and Authority” (pp. 155–94) chronicles the controversy over biblical revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy. This issue arose largely because of neo-orthodoxy’s influence.

6. “Apologetics” (pp. 195–228) argues that “the new evangelical view” of apologetic methodology is “semi-rationalism or semi-biblicism” (p. 198–99) and concludes that after fifty years of evangelicalism, its leaders “have abandoned the sense of an absolute and infallible religious authority, and today the evangelical movement is groping to find some kind of a basis or an authority to meet a rootless, non-absolutist, relativist culture on the culture’s own terms with the claims of the living and true God” (p. 195).

7. “Social Involvement” (pp. 229–74) traces the history of evangelical social activism and contrasts it with “the biblical idea of social action,” which (consistent with [Alva J. McClain’s form of dispensationalism](#)) maintains “there is not presently a messianic kingdom of God in existence; there is no ‘kingdom now.’ The church is not the kingdom and cannot participate in any social proposals attributable to the kingdom, and for that reason there can be no tenable sociopolitical kingdom advancement by the church in the present age” (p. 264).

8. “Doctrinal Storms” (pp. 275–308) highlights three unfortunate controversies in evangelicalism: (1) the status of the unevangelized, (2) the destiny of the finally impenitent, and (3) the open view of God.

These internal controversies have not caused groups to break away from the evangelical movement because division, schism, and separation are the scarlet sins in new evangelical thought. What happens is that the *avant garde* ideas cause internal controversy and calls then go out for more prayer, more open-mindedness, more finessing, and more effort to find some kind of tolerable middle ground. These summons may be accompanied by not-so-veiled charges of causing disorder in the body of Christ, but when the turmoil quiets down, the new element is simply absorbed into the general new evangelical movement, and life goes on in the name of Christian brotherhood. Meanwhile as the movement has become doctrinally diluted and less and less biblical there is internal debate about what an evangelical really is. In the end, no one seems to be excluded from being considered an evangelical (p. 275).

9. The “Conclusion” (pp. 309–60) evaluates evangelicalism:

The new evangelicalism has been slowly but decidedly moving toward neo-orthodoxy and beyond. . . .

When ultimate religious authority cannot be successfully identified, the gospel has no sure parameters. When the gospel cannot be precisely defined, what it means to be a Christian cannot be agreed upon. If the marks of a genuine Christian cannot be construed, then the question of what the Christian church is becomes moot. In liberal Protestantism the church became everyone and, in reality, was no one and thus nondescript. If everyone is a Christian, then no one is a Christian in this amorphous blob of religion. The new evangelicalism appears to be well on its way toward becoming such a conglomerate bereft of true biblical distinctives.

A movement that wants to be called evangelical and yet has to debate itself over what the genius of Christianity actually is, is putting the finishing touches on its own coffin. It seems certain that the new evangelicalism is incapable of self-correction (pp. 309, 319–20).

Following this evaluation is a critical review of Robert Webber's *The Younger Evangelicals*, a time line of major events in evangelicalism from 1942 to 2003, and an informative annotated bibliography.

## Analysis

### *Strengths*

In the summers of 2000 and 2001 (following my sophomore and junior years of college), I was privileged to take two seminary classes at DBTS from McCune. I stocked up on his lengthy course syllabi and devoured them (about 900 pages on systematic theology as well as lectures on hermeneutics, apologetics, and the like). I have listened to dozens of his audio lectures and sermons, read his [journal articles](#), interacted with former students (including one of my former pastors) who esteem him as their mentor, and interacted directly with him a bit (e.g., I interviewed him for my dissertation on Keswick theology). His thinking is rigidly logical, his conclusions firm, his commitment to God and His word immovable, and his character unquestionably above reproach. *Promise Unfulfilled*, which I first read when it was published in 2004 and then a second time in October 2007, evidences McCune's strengths:

1. It is well researched, which is not surprising since it is the result of nearly four decades of teaching and research on the subject. This is evident simply by scanning the footnotes, bibliography, and index.

2. It is unusually well informed. McCune has intimate, first-hand knowledge of many of the people and events he discusses.

3. It is logically and clearly organized (with some exceptions, e.g., the headings in chap. 2).

4. It is genuinely earnest and courageous. McCune did not dispassionately write this book as a mundane, scholarly exercise to climb the academic ranks or secure tenure. He is committed to obeying God by guarding the gospel. He knew that it would not be a popular book, but rather than floating along with the current, McCune addresses a controversial issue head-on, including the application of a series of Scripture passages that many others are inclined to ignore or at least not study in detail (e.g., Rom 16:17–18; 2 John 9–11; 2 Thess 3:6–15). It is disappointing that many are unaware of or perhaps have ignored his work. (To my knowledge not a single review of *Promise Unfulfilled* has been published in a theological journal, and now most journals consider the book too old for a review.)

5. It is convincing. McCune successfully proves his thesis with the vast majority of his supporting arguments. [Spurgeon's downgrade controversy](#) is an exceptionally moving illustration supporting ecclesiastical separation (pp. 126–28), and numerous evangelical analyses of evangelicalism (several of which McCune mentions in his annotated bibliography) corroborate McCune's thesis.

### *Weaknesses*

From my young, inexperienced, limited perspective, *Promise Unfulfilled* also has some weaknesses (besides more than a handful of typos and formatting issues). Since I do not want to give the impression that I have everything worked out infallibly, I submit these suggestions [corrigibly](#) and respectfully (though not timidly).

1. It appears at times to shape fundamentalism into what McCune thinks it ought to be rather than stating what it is or presenting arguments with which most fundamentalists would agree. (1) It does not critique fundamentalism as intensely as it critiques evangelicalism. One of the fundamental rules of book reviewing is to analyze a book on its own terms rather than criticizing the author for not writing a different book, so I simply mention that a similar critique of fundamentalism could be embarrassing for fundamentalists. (2) It argues for the superiority of [Van Til's presuppositional apologetics](#), but many evangelicals are Van Tillian and many fundamentalists are not Van Tillian. (3) It rejects evangelicalism's social activism partly because it does not line up with [McClain's postponement theory of the kingdom](#), a subset of revised dispensationalism (pp. 36; 263–66), but some fundamentalists reject dispensationalism and a much larger group rejects that particular variety of dispensationalism.

2. It lacks sufficient [nuance](#), notably in the following five areas.

(1) Some of its arguments do not logically follow. For example, “Promise Keepers has many strata of belief and practice, one stratum of which is charismaticism, as seen in the charismatic conference speakers and their writings (such as Greg Laurie, Chuck Smith, and Jack Hayford), *the conduct of the public gatherings (including the music and hand lifting/waving)*, and the composition of its governing board” (p. 108, emphasis added). Moving from such “conduct” to charismaticism is a non sequitur since many non-charismatics worship with similar music and “hand lifting/waving.” That seems to be an unguarded statement that would understandably frustrate non-charismatics who worship with that kind of music and “hand lifting/waving.”

(2) It employs a slippery-slope argument, namely, that evangelicalism, because it rejects at least some categories of separation, inevitably leads to doctrinal aberrations such as non-inerrancy, neo-orthodoxy, or open theism (cf. the concluding evaluation in Part 9 quoted above). It does not logically follow, however, that *all* evangelicals tolerate such error or are moving on an unavoidable trajectory in that direction. For example, Ligonier Ministries has avoided this slippery slope. Further, there are many churches (some of which I have visited) that McCune would not consider to be fundamentalist but that do separate from heresy, unequal alliances, organized apostasy, and disobedient Christians.

(3) It includes “interdenominationalism” as an objection to ecumenical evangelism since it cannot agree on “what is truly essential and what is non-essential or peripheral” (pp. 74–75), but this objection lacks sufficient qualification. No doubt his description of interdenominationalism is often—perhaps usually—the case, but this is not necessarily so. McCune acknowledges that fundamentalism itself is interdenominational (pp. 17, 20; cf. McCune’s “[Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism](#),” *DBSJ* [1996]: 178–79). Furthermore, evangelicalism includes many doctrinally sound groups that are interdenominational, six of which readily come to mind:

(1) [Ligonier Ministries](#) led by [R. C. Sproul](#); (2) [Desiring God Ministries](#) led by [John Piper](#); (3) [9 Marks](#) led by [Mark Dever](#); (4) [The Shepherds' Fellowship](#) led by [John MacArthur](#); (5) [Together for the Gospel](#) led by [Mark Dever](#), [Ligon Duncan](#), [Al Mohler](#), and [C. J. Mahaney](#); and (6) [The Gospel Coalition](#) led by [D. A. Carson](#) and [Tim Keller](#).



(4) Its criteria for applying “secondary” separation based on 2 Thess 3:6–15 could be clearer. McCune explains that fundamentalists sometimes tolerate “those who fellowship with new evangelicals, or those who engage in entangling unbiblical alliances of various sorts, or whose standards of personal deportment and music are intolerable. . . . If, after the passing of reasonable time, and appropriate biblical confrontation, it is apparent that the organization is unable or unwilling to put its house in order, then the Bible-believing separatist has no choice but to withdraw” (p. 148). At what point do fellow believers qualify for separation with reference to their “personal deportment and music”? How does positive Scriptural teaching on unity fit into this paradigm?

(5) It lacks nuance when distinguishing fundamentalists from evangelicals. Sometimes McCune’s description of fundamentalism is unrealistically narrow:

Broadly speaking, ecclesiastical separation is the refusal to collaborate with or the withdrawal of a working relationship from an ecclesiastical organization or religious leader that *deviates from the standard of Scripture* or that *does not believe and obey the word of God in doctrine or practice*. Separation is the refusal to join hands or make common cause with those who *deny or disobey the Scriptures* (p. 138, emphasis added; cf. 125, 148, 151).

Based on that definition, I would have to separate from *everyone*—including myself since I often “disobey the Scriptures”! McCune obviously means that only certain types of deviation from the Scriptures (i.e., flagrant, habitual unbelief or disobedience) merit separation, but his statements lack nuance and clarity.

At other times he has an “us vs. them” mentality that seems to view all evangelicals as disobedient Christians from whom fundamentalists must equally separate. For example, while McCune greatly appreciates many aspects of their ministries, he lists the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) as an example of “organized apostasy” (p. 146) and [John Piper](#) and [John MacArthur](#) as “disobedient Christians” (pp. 151–53). Many who are intimately familiar with the SBC, Piper, and MacArthur (including some within fundamentalism) would disagree with McCune’s assessment. Such people might counter that (1) efforts by men such as [Mark Dever](#), [Al Mohler](#), and [Tom Nettles](#) in the [SBC’s conservative resurgence](#) are similar to what [David Beale](#) calls “nonconformist fundamentalism” (*In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* [Greenville, S.C.: Unusual Publications, 1986], pp. 3–12) and that these men are worthy of support on several levels and (2) Piper and MacArthur are militantly orthodox but *apply* the same principles of separation differently.

The issue here seems to be nuance. People have a tendency to broad-brush groups of which they are not a part, often because they fail to see distinctions from a distance. Movements are complex, and pockets of people within a particular movement are often frustrated when others critique their movement without acknowledging its complexity or diversity. For example, many [Mormons](#) are understandably frustrated when the media lumps them together with fringe Mormons who are [polygamists](#), and many fundamentalists are understandably frustrated when evangelicals lump them together with, say, the [King James Only movement](#), [anti-intellectualism](#), or [legalism](#).

At least two groups are similarly broad-brushed in *Promise Unfulfilled*. (1) Many non-cessationists (e.g., [D. A. Carson](#), [John Piper](#), or [Wayne Grudem](#)) would be understandably frustrated with McCune for how he implicitly lumps them all together with charismatics whose “presence in the new evangelical ranks has contributed to the deterioration of evangelical theology as a whole and has fostered an experience-oriented Christianity” that gives “an enormous boost to the ecumenical movement” (pp. 108–9). (2) Many evangelicals would be understandably frustrated with McCune for how he lumps them all together as non-separatists. It seems that evangelicals and fundamentalists tend to caricature each other with the result that evangelicals have as much trouble fitting intellectually respectable fundamentalists like McCune and [Kevin Bauder](#) into their conceptual grid of fundamentalists as fundamentalists do fitting militantly orthodox men like Carson, Dever, MacArthur, Piper, and Grudem into their conceptual grid of evangelicals. (See, e.g., Bauder, “What’s That You Smell? A Fundamentalist Response to *The Smell of Sawdust*,” part 2 in [Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail: Evangelical Ecumenism and the Quest for Christian Identity](#), ed. Timothy George [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004] and “[A Fundamentalism Worth Saving](#)”; and Grudem “Why, When, and for What Should We Draw New Boundaries?” chap. 10 in [Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity](#), ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth [Wheaton: Crossway, 2003], pp. 339–70.) McCune seems to treat all non-fundamentalist Christians as “new evangelicals,” as though the current theological milieu is the same as it was in the 1950s. The fundamentalist-evangelical landscape, however, has changed considerably.

## Conclusion

Despite the disproportionate space given to them, the alleged weaknesses are relatively peripheral to McCune’s thesis, which he argues convincingly. McCune is on the side of the angels. Evangelicalism has become increasingly diluted, and the result is that it has compromised what is most precious to Christians: the gospel. *Promise Unfulfilled* is a sober, eye-opening reminder that all believers are charged with the important and often difficult responsibility to guard the gospel.

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May be updated and published at [www.AndyNaselli.com/theology/](http://www.AndyNaselli.com/theology/).  
 Related: [Review of Iain Murray’s \*Evangelicalism Divided\*](#)

## **A BRIEF RESPONSE TO ANDY NASELLI'S REVIEW OF *PROMISED UNFULFILLED***

[In email exchanges on October 16, 2007, Rolland D. McCune graciously wrote, “Andy: Thanks loads for the review; it is well-written and well-taken. You must have spent a tremendous amount of time and cerebral energy to put it together. Attached is my brief and somewhat hasty response to some of the weaknesses. I am happy for the interface on these issues. You may use my comments as you wish; all, some, or none. Whatever suits your purposes. Cordially, for the Cause, RDM.” After I sought clarification to make sure that McCune did not mind if I shared his reply with my TEDS class or later posted it on my blog, McCune replied, “You may use the response in any way you prefer.” –Andy Naselli]

### **1. The New Evangelical Paradigm, Motif, or Even its *Sina Qua Non***

I think I tried to make clear that there is no “official” maximum/minimum set of explicit that are true of all card-carrying new evangelicals (pp. xvi, xvii). The same can be said of virtually any movement, be it fundamentalism, Republicans, Democrats, or what have you. Any such movement, endeavor, or coalition has its peculiar motif, and one is always vulnerable when trying to extract it. There are always varying shades of difference and/or expression within that can be claimed as atypical. E.g., failure to see this formed many of new evangelicalism’s early answers to fundamentalist criticism. They could always point to some new evangelical(s) who *didn’t* hold to a particular aberration and thereby could cleanse the whole movement. But, nevertheless, one must press on as objectively and honestly as he can.

A somewhat reverse argument *for* interdenominationalism is made when it is stated that “many doctrinally sound groups . . . are interdenominational” (six groups are listed). This is true, of course, but based on highly subjective and pragmatic footings, I would think.

### **2. Logical Non Sequiturs**

Regarding Promise Keepers, “moving from such ‘conduct’ to charismatic is a non sequitur since many non-charismatics” also have such conduct.

This is formally true but is probably itself a non-sequitur since many things charismatics do are done in almost all churches. (See the preceding point.) But hand-lifting/waving and a particular style of music rhythm, among other phenomena, have distinguished the tongues/charismatic movement from the beginning. This was not true in the early evangelical/fundamentalist coalition nor the new evangelicalism itself until comparatively recently (1960s). My take is that this was imported into the new evangelicalism by propinquity or more direct means. Witness the second-class citizen status of tongues/charismatics in the NAE from the 1940s to the mid-60s or so. Also note Carl Henry’s strong resistance (wanting to scrap the NAE and begin over again with an obviously non-charismatic platform, p. 105) in contrast with Barnhouse’s, Packer’s, Pinnock’s, and many others’ much less restrictive, if not positive, attitudes toward charismatic practice and doctrine.



### 3. Slippery Slope Separatism

I would argue that repudiation of ecclesiastical separation has been a significant factor in the inroads of neo-orthodoxy, and worse, into the new evangelicalism. Harold Lindsell tacitly affirmed the same when he said that deviations/denials of inerrancy would lead to the “sapping” of the movement and the dissolution of its doctrinal base (p. 140). But, incredibly, while he held that inerrancy was a test of orthodoxy, it was not to be a test of organizational fellowship (i.e., not an article of ecclesiastical separation, p. 167). Lindsell’s and Henry’s lamentations over the virtual demise of the movement in the later 1970s and 80s, to say nothing of M. Erickson’s quasi admission that neo-orthodoxy had seeped into evangelicalism already in the 1960s (p. 309), must be accounted for somehow, and non-separatism (or inclusivism) in its many manifestations contributed a major portion thereof.

So, in the book I lay a good share of evangelicalism’s decline on its non-separatist (actually anti-separatist) stance, which was one of the crucial pillars of the beginnings of the movement in the early 1940s. (Technically, new evangelicalism had no viable and workable rubrics of separation at all, certainly not from the apostasy; it sported largely a visceral reaction to fundamentalist separatism. The inclusivism of Billy Graham forced a biblical look at the issue, *Cooperative Evangelism* by Robert O. Ferm being one of the first such attempts.)

My tome puts heavy guilt on the non-separatist principle of “dialogue” in numerous areas (see the index, and especially Part Nine, as you note). Exceptions, such as Ligonier Ministries, et al., do not, in my judgment, invalidate my conclusion about some of the unavoidable of non-separatism. As well, there are undoubtedly many in the NCC and other such institutions/organizations who have not imbibed the apostasy, but those anecdotal exceptions bear no weight, in my thinking, regarding the much larger (biblical, doctrinal) issue.

It is true that some elements in the SBC, for instance, are working “from within” to capture the denominational political/ecclesiastical machinery and thus reinstate orthodoxy. But fundamentalists, then, rightfully wonder why Al Mohler, et al., had a lead role in the Billy Graham Louisville ecumenical evangelistic crusade a few years back. And why/how Mohler, Dever, Nettles and other resurgents can also fellowship with liberalism, small and ineffective as it may seem to them, within the SBC? Further, it appears that the orthodox resurgence in the SBC for many years has been less interested in a purge of the apostates as much as maintaining a high form of plurality over them. (For a while it seemed as if a vacuous polarity was going to be sufficient.)

I guess I am saying that the “nonconformists” in the SBC at this late stage are not really comparable to the nonconformist, separatistic fundamentalists in the NBC and northern Presbyterians who eventually became formal separatists in about 1930. Mohler, Dever, Nettles, and many other good men in the SBC show no signs of a come-out mentality. Indeed, the opposite is evident. I applaud and support those who are trying to regain lost ground in the [GARBC](#), for example, and can still have a certain amount of organizational fellowship with them (I am one of the speakers at the Bible Conference at [FBBC&S, Ankeny, IA](#), in a couple of weeks.). But the GARBC has not taken the apostasy on board like the SBC did long ago.

#### 4. Not Critiquing Fundamentalism

It is suggested as a weakness that the book does “not critique fundamentalism as intensely as . . . evangelicalism.” This is certainly the case, but I wonder if you haven’t surrendered the point by acknowledging an author’s option to write what he wants and states as his purpose. How can that option be construed as a weakness here? A “similar critique of fundamentalism could be embarrassing” may or may not be true, but seems somewhat irrelevant in this case.

By the by, I *do* come down on some of my fundamentalists forebears and contemporaries on certain issues, such as social programs (hospitals, for one example) on the mission fields as pre-evangelistic or pre-missional endeavors, entertainment evangelism at home and abroad (such as gospel magic, sword chopping a watermelon off the pastor’s stomach, among numerous other forms), certain breezy worship styles and orders of service, fundamentalist interdenominationalism, etc. However I have not felt the burden to be our movement’s general watchdog in this regard; we have plenty of these, within and outside our ranks, who do that for us.

#### 5. Nuancing Ecclesiastical Separation

The doctrine of ecclesiastical separation certainly could be nuanced much more than I did, but other constraints did not warrant. For one, I don’t think it is feasible to draw up a complete list of rubrics and contingencies that would settle all situations. The legalistic offspring of such parentage would be uncontrollable and totally unworkable. Second, I’m not convinced that the real, load-bearing issues today are all that different from those in our general history. I.e., I’m not sure that our day presents *unique* and unheard of separational issues or that the “fundamentalist and evangelical landscape has changed considerably.” Third, admittedly, my writing of the book was essentially finished by 2002, well before all the nuanced forms of hyphenated fundamentalism and evangelicalism became fashionable. But in numerous blogs ([Sharper Iron](#), among others) I have contended that the current nuanced “labels” are too subjective and in the end are basically irrelevant to ecclesial decision-making anyhow. These nuances usually subordinate Scripture to themselves, subliminally or otherwise.

The suggestion (in jest, I’m sure) that you would have to separate from *yourself*, to say nothing of *everyone* else, save for the hyphenations proposal, probably carries more truth than fiction. The reason is that separation in the last and most primitive sense, in almost every practical application and scenario, does come down to one’s individual soul liberty and conscience. This is what drives the idea of “levels” of cooperation/separation that I speak of in the book. To go against conscience, whether it is right or wrong, is still sin (Rom 14:22-23). So there is an inevitable subjectivism or individualism in the final analysis. But fundamentalism (and a local church, or association of churches, et al.) can, must, and always does have as well a general “corporate conscience” or common soul liberty in this and numerous other areas that informs the movement or endeavor. And while I try to be charitable to individuals and institutions, long-standing patterns and track records of bad and/or unbiblical decision-making and ecclesiastical behavior warrant separation.

The frustration of the nuanced “pockets of people” and their “conceptual grids” (Carson, Piper, and MacArthur are mentioned) underscores the point I am making. Such categorical structuring of fundamentalism and modern evangelicalism is counterproductive. It tacitly employs group-think and not individual scrutiny. But, personally, I want to look at their belief-system and its inevitable ensuing practical, behavior patterns in light of the Bible rather than in whose hyphenated pocket they are. I wish to be judged that way, and I’m sure the aforementioned would feel likewise.

## **6. Van Tillian Apologetics**

Presuppositional, transcendental, Van Tillian apologetics is not an article of fundamentalist faith to be sure. One can be a Van Tillian new evangelical as well as a Clarkian/Carnellian/Geislerite fundamentalist in this discipline. But in the early stages of the formation of new evangelicalism, both Millard Erickson and Ronald Nash declared the verificationist methodology as the “official” stance of the new movement. And Henry, Ramm, Carnell and Pinnock certainly wrote with that assumption in mind even if it were not formally expressed. Fuller was the flagship new evangelical institution in apologetics and philosophy of religion and, while most assuredly not promoting hillbilly evangelicalism, was anything but of the corrective Reformed school of Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Van Til, and others, which I espouse. My options were to ignore the issue, despite Erickson and Nash, or give the only viable rebuttal I know of, and I chose the latter. But, as stated at the first of this point, I do not speak for fundamentalism on this matter. (Naturally, I do have a strong opinion on the subject. See my “Is There or Should There Be A Fundamentalist Apologetic Methodology?” DBTS, [MACP](#), Oct 18-19, 2001).

True, the old fundamentalist/evangelical coalition got their rational and semi-rational apologetics and philosophy of religion honestly from old Princeton, and much of it was carried over into both fundamentalism and new evangelicalism. But as I tried to demonstrate, the intellectual autonomy of Thomism, via Butler and Paley, carried much of the water that is required to make the old Reformed methodology function. In my judgment, this intellectual autonomy eventually ate up true biblical presuppositionalism so that new evangelicalism was essentially presuppositionless in the end. Thus there was a certain pragmatic intellectual freedom also brought to the table in the controversies over revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy. This spilled over into the separation/cooperation issue and probably others, and genuine biblical authority suffered.

## **7. Dispensationalism and Social Activism**

Dispensationalism as an approach to understanding the Bible has always been pessimistic toward the social and theological progress of the present church age. With the discovery (some evangelicals would say recovery) of social and political sensitivities as incumbencies on the NT church in post WW II, evangelicalism came to the need for an evangelical biblical/theological justification for such. The driving engine of non-evangelical activism had always been, and still is, the social gospel and a “kingdom now” eschatology. While the social gospel was not an option early on in the new evangelical coalition, the insights of the relatively recent “inaugurated eschatology” or “realized eschatology” were at hand. And so dispensationalism with its delayed kingdom doctrine was totally unsuitable for the new evangelical vision, and it had to go. It took a while but eventually

the theology, notably of George E. Ladd and Fuller Seminary, was able to penetrate the premillennial ranks and turn the tide away from dispensationalism toward a modified covenant premillennialism. But it was the “already/not yet,” “kingdom now” that furnished the biblical basis for sociopolitical activism for the institutional church because the messianic kingdom has a wide social dimension and the church was the instrumental vanguard in bringing the kingdom to the whole of society and the whole of the human personality.

But if there is no present form of the *messianic* kingdom, then social activism is shorn of a biblical mandate. Dispensationalism, up until the 1980s, declined to identify the present age as a form of Messiah’s reign. So I would say that there is more to the issue than “not lining up with McClain’s postponement theory of the kingdom,” which phrase has pejorative overtones in much of current scholarship; instead it was an understanding of the Bible that was at stake for many. Henry and others saw the need to excise dispensationalism from the new movement, according to Marsden’s *Reforming Fundamentalism*. This was unacceptable to many fundamentalists and was thought to have bordered heavily on the old liberal social gospel. (Historically, I think there is good evidence that such has happened.)

Sticking to the biblical data, I don’t see how dispensationalists can have any choice here without abandoning their approach to understanding the Bible. If there is a kingdom now in any messianic sense, then the church is obligated to be socially active in spreading the kingdom ethic to the whole of mankind. If there is no form of the messianic kingdom, then the focus of institutional church ministry does not entail these particular obligations. It is true that “a much larger group,” along with some fundamentalists, “rejects that particular variety of dispensationalism,” but again, I wonder if that particular datum is really relevant to the issue. What is significant is that the progressive dispensational proposal with its inaugurated eschatology has at last found a place at the evangelical table here, but at what cost? Bruce Waltke (who of all people ought to know) and others rather quickly called the dispensational credentials of the new progressives into serious question, and I think they are right.

What troubles me is that many of the so-called young fundamentalists are advocating a global social agenda for the local church without any understanding of its theological underpinnings. And I am not sure as yet if their new (to fundamentalism) philosophy of ministry is a sub rosa feeling to be “with it” and come out of the dispensational fundamentalist ghetto and join their contemporaries on the subject, or whether the putative basis is more of a string of proof texts bereft of theological correlation. Maybe it is neither.

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