

EVANGELICALS CONCERNED, INC. STATEMENT OF OUR FAITH

We trust God, our Creator.

We trust Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

We trust The Holy Spirit, our Helper.

We believe the Bible, God's inspired Word. It is our infallible guide for faith and conduct.

We believe the Good News that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God and making possible our reconciliation with ourselves and each other.

We affirm the universal communion of believers.

We commit ourselves to be Jesus's followers.

EVANGELICALS (?!) CONCERNED

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CHRIST PREACHING TO THE PEOPLE. REMBRANDT

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Have you ever noticed that Grape-Nuts is neither? To evangelicals, Christian Science is neither. To most gay people, the Moral Majority is neither. But gay evangelicals are not like Grape-Nuts. Gays for Jesus are as unwelcome in evangelical churches as Jews for Jesus are unwelcome in synagogues, but in the gays' case they're excluded because their profession of faith in Jesus is doubted, and in the Jews' case they're excluded because their profession of faith in Jesus is believed. In both cases, half of who they are is believed and that makes the other half of who they are unbelievable.

For most evangelicals, it's easy to believe that we're gay; much harder to believe that we're their siblings in faith. We who are both gay and evangelical can well understand this. After all, didn't we ourselves find it easier to believe that we were gay than to continue to believe we were evangelical Christians as well? Some of you delayed coming to Christ, assuming you were not welcome just as you were. Some of you have stayed away until now -- and some are still not here today -- because you and they have been believing that vicious homophobes speak for Jesus. Some of us drifted away for a while, finding it possible to abandon, however reluctantly, a faith we had chosen, and impossible to leave behind sexual desires we did not choose.

But God chose us, as the Bible says, while we all were sinners Christ died for us all. Though we turned away from God, and we continually turn away, God never turns away from us. Paul wrote that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Neither homosexuality

nor homophobia, neither life nor death, neither good times nor bad times, neither the everyday grind nor a rare form of cancer; neither ecclesiastical executives nor TV preachers nor band-wagon politicians; nor whatever may come our way. Nothing can separate us from the overwhelming and undergirding love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord -- because God is God. Though so many establishment evangelicals fail to recognize gay Christians, Jesus Christ, whose we are, recognizes his own, just as he alone befriended the despised Samaritans, prostitutes, and tax collectors when the organized religious leaders of another day had no time for them. He lets us be his -- today and in all eternity.

The major periodical of the American evangelical establishment, *Christianity Today*, has called us "self-styled Christian homosexuals." (Feb 6, 1981) George Sweeting, president of Moody Bible Institute, complains that "some who say they are Christians" are among those who "accept homosexuality as a legitimate alternative life-style." (*Special Sermons on Special Issues*, p. 66) In introducing a report on a meeting of 80 evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders, the editor of the charismatic *Pastoral Renewal* magazine decries the fact that "Some evangelicals have begun to defend homosexual behavior." Missing the point, he thinks that this is evidence that, as he puts it, "the secular gay liberation movement has developed a wing within evangelicalism." (Peter Williamson, "Introduction," *Christianity Confronts Modernity*, p. 12) *Sojourners* publisher Joe Roos says that Christians who differ with his harsh anti-homosexuality are "simply accepting the verdict of a liberal culture." (Jul/Aug 1982, p. 6)

Among those at the aforementioned ecumenical meeting were Richard Lovelace of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Kenneth Kantzer of *Christianity Today*, but not George Sweeting of MBI. He probably would not much care to meet with "Romanists" and people who speak in tongues.

Lovelace thinks so very little of our profession of faith or he thinks that we value our evangelical faith so little that he says we should transfer our member-

ship to the Unitarians, an association that denies that Jesus was anyone more than just another spiritual teacher. Lovelace knows that in their stated purposes, the Unitarians are dedicated to "extend and strengthen liberal religion" specifically without any reference to Jesus Christ. This amounts to telling gay evangelicals to "go to hell," for Lovelace believes that there is no salvation apart from Christ. It is incredible that he advises that we join these Unitarians (who, after all, do officially support gay men and lesbians) simply in order to spare, as he puts it, "the major denominations an explosive controversy which could cause catastrophic loss in giving and church membership." (*Homosexuality and the Church*, p. 123) How sadly reminiscent is Lovelace's concern of that of the 19th century pro-slavery clergymen who, according to an abolitionist of the day, "cherish, above all things, the unity of their ... denominations." (cited in *Black Freedom* by Carleton Mabee, p. 242) Incidentally, to be fair, I should add that liberals are not immune from this same sort of selfishness. Responding to the attempt of the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church to gain membership in the fairly liberal National Council of Churches, the Council's Faith and Order Commission has taken the unusual step of studying the MCC's *theological* positions. According to Jeanne Audrey Powers of the NCC-member United Methodist Church, "At no time has the National Council of Churches ever acted on the theological perspective of another church." (reported in *The Advocate*, Jul 8, 1982) A Presbyterian (US) clergywoman agreed, saying: "I sit down with people on the council who do not recognize my ordination or my baptism." (*Idem*.)

My own one-time employer, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, published in its *His* magazine a few years ago, a list of resources for study about homosexuality. Though there was a section in it for *Christian* resources, my booklet, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, was listed under the category of *other* resources. With only one exception that I know about, no mainstream evangelical periodical allows us to advertise in its pages. The exception is *theOtherSide*,

which may or may not be called "mainstream," depending on how "far out" or "up the creek" you happen to be.

Well, as you can see, official evangelicalism, and others, is to say the least, uncomfortable with evangelical women and men who are themselves openly gay or are openly supportive of lesbians and gay men. So uncomfortable that evangelical leaders are quick to deny us our evangelical identity, as though *they* held the evangelical copyright. I appreciate the fact that many sincere evangelicals view us as they do because they understand scripture as they do. I would challenge them to search the scripture (all of it) as we had and have to do -- without their help and in spite of their hindrances -- to see if they might need to revise their knee-jerk reaction to both scripture and us, for their own benefit if for nothing else.

Gay leaders, on the other hand, are quick to deny us our gay identity, as though *they* held the gay copyright. For example, I have heard of more than a few whose own homosexuality was doubted by other gay men because it was concluded that either anyone who was monogamous must not be gay or, if gay, was wasting his homosexuality in a so-called non-gay lifestyle. I appreciate the fact that many sincere gay people view us as they do because they understand homosexuality as they do. I would challenge them to examine the psychodynamics and unintended effects of their gay media version of gay lifestyle, as we had and have to do -- without the help and in spite of the hindrances of much that passes for modern humanistic psychotherapy and sexual and gay liberationism -- to see if they might need to revise their knee-jerk reaction to gay lifestyle and us, for their own benefit if for nothing else.

With all of this hostility and misunderstanding of who we are all about -- gay and evangelical -- some might ask why in the world we in EC still want to call ourselves evangelicals. What's so important about our first name? Are we gluttons for punishment? Why don't we simply change our name to something more politically palatable, like "dignity," or "integrity," or "affirmation?" There's nothing of-

fensive about those names -- or at least not 'til now. But even as "gay" has lost its older meaning and has taken on something "smelly," as one Oxbridge neuroscientist recently said to me, I suppose that among those evangelicals who are "in the know," so to speak, "dignity" and "integrity" are beginning to smell since these are simply euphemisms for "queer" Catholics and "homoEpiscopalians."

Here in Evangelicals Concerned, we're fond of an "EC" tucked here and there into "conNEction," rECord, "sECond Saturday," EChoes in Seattle and sPEctrum on Long Island. Well, I suppose we could retain the "EC" by calling ourselves "dECency," "rEConciliation," "resPEct." Perhaps "the persECuted" or "the rejECted." Some would want us to call ourselves "dECeit" or "the dECEived" and "the dECEivers." Some of our critics see our sexuality as flip and just fooling around while others confuse us with those Paul used to illustrate a point in Romans 1, so they might think we should call ourselves "the rECreationists." That would do double-duty. Since he urges us to withdraw from *his* churches, Lovelace would probably prefer us to call ourselves "sECession." We could be sub-titled "sECond-rate Christians," adopting our de facto state among even the less hostile of our evangelical sisters and brothers and, at the same time, taking the less desirable places at the feast -- as, after all, we should do. Those who wish we'd stay hidden away in our closets might suggest we call ourselves "sECclusion." And if we're not exactly a full-fledged cult, maybe at least an unimportant "sECt?" What about "sECular humanism?" Some would certainly say, "Amen." Maybe simply: "Ecch!, Inc."

Even "Christians Concerned" might not be so bad. "Christian" can be, after all, pretty generally bland these days. But "Evangelicals!" We're just asking for big trouble from everybody. With visions of Jerry Falwell and grimaces of disgust, gay men and lesbians ask: "What do you mean, *Evangelicals* Concerned?" With visions of "Sodom" and a haughty self-righteousness, evangelicals ask: "What do you mean, *Evangelicals* Concerned?" And well may we, too, from time to time, discouraged by hostility from other believers

and other gay people, well may we ask: "What do we mean, *Evangelicals* Concerned?"

Before attempting to define it, let's first note that evangelical Quaker Elton Trublood, for one, sees good reason to keep the term "evangelical." According to him: "'Evangelical' is the only Christian adjective which is better than 'catholic.' All of us, if we are sincere," writes Trublood, "try to be catholic, knowing full well that Christ has other sheep which are not of our particular fold. But, in spite of this, we also know that no existent Church [sic] is truly catholic, for each is a fragment at best. The emphasis on universality is consequently a matter of hope, far more than it is a matter of experience." (*The Future of the Christian*, pp. 71f) "By contrast," says Trublood, "the evangelical faith ... is a current experience." (p. 72)

As you probably know, it's not a simple thing to define an "evangelical." Bernard Ramm, the evangelical Baptist scholar, frankly admits that "It is impossible to give one, neat, precise definition of an evangelical." (*The Evangelical Heritage*, p. 13) Historian Martin Marty doesn't do much better than to say that evangelicals are "people who find Billy Graham or his viewpoints acceptable." (*Newsweek*, Apr 26, 1982, p. 89) Well, according to Billy Graham himself, "Evangelicalism is a great mosaic God is building," but even Graham grants that "if you asked me to, I'd have a hard time giving you a definition of what it is today." (*Idem.*) No wonder that Marty, writing in *Christianity Today* (Jul 17, 1981, p. 48), cautions that "the evangelical strands are wispy, tangled, and elusive ... gossamer." How fairy-like they are!

And not without some good reasons, Pentecostal biblical scholar Gerald Sheppard maintains that *evangelicalism* can be better understood, at least in some significant ways, in "sociological rather than theological realities," as "social symbols" instead of as "religious affirmations." ("Biblical Hermeneutics: The Academic Language of Evangelical Identity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Winter 1977, p. 87) No doubt this explains, in part, why so many evangelicals, as well as others, fail to recognize us as the evangelicals we are. We wear, as it were, a "non-evangelical"

dress. Also, as Sheppard perceives it, "any analysis of evangelicalism must consider the *politicizing* of the term in a given period in addition to any theological basis that it may seem to have."

Evangelical Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch shrewdly noted, back in 1973, before the time of the New Religious Right, that "one can ask whether the evangelical renaissance is rooted in a profound spiritual awakening or in the counter-revolution of middle America against the vagaries of the New Left." (*The Evangelical Renaissance*, p. 18) Yet some who are not at all comfortable with contemporary New Right connotations of the word "evangelical" nevertheless want to continue to use it to apply to themselves and thereby "rescue it from current distortions and restore its original emphasis on unmitigated diligent witness to the gospel." So says *Lutheran Standard* editor Lowell Almen (quoted in *The Christian Century*, Sept 30, 1981, p. 959). We may note, though, in passing, that a recent Stanford University study showed "that the country's political swing to the right was greater among non-evangelicals than [what were called] born-again Christians" and a *Christianity Today* - Gallup Poll before the 1980 Presidential election indicated that many more people who intended to vote for Carter considered themselves evangelicals than did those favoring Reagan. (Princeton Religious Research Center, *Emerging Trends*, Sept 1980, p. 2) You will recall, too, that all three candidates, including Anderson, considered themselves to be evangelical Christians.

For some people, there are basic *economic* reasons to use the term. Writing in the *American Bookseller* (Jul 1982), James E. Carlson, the president of the nation's largest Christian publications distribution firm, advises general bookstores to stock evangelical titles because of their outstanding "marketing strength." He points out that they are the books "that sell consistently" in the \$300,000,000-a-year religious book business.

Closely tied to economics, as was evident in Lovelace's opposition to gay Christians in the United Presbyterian denomination, is what Sheppard speaks of when he says that "Any objective interpretation of

evangelicalism must also reckon with the frequent slogging of the term for ecclesiastical rather than theological advantage." (op.cit., p. 90) This astute observation goes a long way in accounting for the strong resentment we face from those who, in the present religio-political climate, want the designation "evangelical" all to themselves. For ecclesiastical reasons, some leaders want to be the *official* evangelicals and to pass on who and who is not one of them. This is a sobering analysis in view of what the scriptures say about the nature of sin. Dutch Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer, (whom even D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called "classic [and] right up to date") makes it plain in his huge volume on sin that "the real depth and the real danger of sin are apparent in its boasting of itself as a religious and not an anti-religious force." (*Studies in Dogmatics: Sin*, p. 239) Scottish theologian T. F. Torrance put it this way in his 1981 Payton Lectures at Fuller Seminary: "No one may boast of his orthodoxy any more than he may boast of his own righteousness." (*Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 18) It would be well, in this connection, for us to examine our own motives in our desire to be seen as evangelicals today.

We're aware, of course, that not all of those on the Religious Right want to be called evangelicals. Jerry Falwell rightly calls himself a Fundamentalist, not an evangelical. The Bob Joneses would suspect you of heresy if you wanted to be called an evangelical rather than a Fundamentalist. But as evangelicals today, we are not exactly Fundamentalist, though Fundamentalists can be seen, in a sense, to be evangelicals. Not that we are "holier-than," but we must recognize frankly what *is* and *is not* historically and theologically entailed in "that unfortunate movement" as Calvin College historian Ronald Wells calls Fundamentalism. (*The Reformed Journal*, May 1982, p. 19) Ned Stonehouse, who taught New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary from its founding in the 1920s to his death in 1962, can hardly be called a liberal and yet Stonehouse can be quoted by Berkouwer as having said "that fundamentalism evidences a lack of sound biblical knowledge and historical perspec-

tive and has 'certain emphases and peculiarities' that make it impossible to identify it with orthodoxy." (*Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture*, p. 22) This is still true, as is reflected in Clark Pinnock's observation that "Fundamentalist thinking ... seems oblivious to ... the historical roots of fundamentalism itself." (*Christianity Today*, Jan 1, 1982, p. 66) In his analysis of the Religious Right, *The Religious Right and Christian Faith*, theological professor Gabriel Fackre looks at the theology of Right-wing Fundamentalism and discovers that, ironically, it is not so much Christian orthodoxy as it is a form of what the movement claims itself to dread, namely secular humanism.

Calvin College historian George Marsden, in his definitive work, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, says that historically, Fundamentalism "was a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought." (p. 4) Indeed, Marsden defines the Fundamentalists' militancy as "the key distinguishing factor that drew the fundamentalists together." Lest one thinks that this is overstatement, this bottom line of Fundamentalism is ascribed to the movement by George Dollar, the foremost Fundamentalist historian and teacher at Bob Jones University. It's no surprise that in his BJU Press book, *A History of Fundamentalism*, Dollar defines Fundamentalism from within the movement in one sentence, printed in huge bold type taking up a whole page: "Historic Fundamentalism is the literal exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes." (p. xv) However we may agree or disagree with him on what precisely those biblical and non-biblical affirmations and attitudes are, we must take seriously his use of the term "militant." Even Stonehouse, in recalling the beginnings of Westminster Seminary in his admiring biography of its founder, J. Gresham Machen, the true gentleman-scholar, speaks in terms of Westminster's resolve "to perpetuate the Princeton tradition so far as scholarship and militant commitment to the Reformed Faith

were concerned," (p. 459) although as Stonehouse reports, Machen's approach was not at all militant enough for Carl McIntire and others who later left to form what they perceived to be an even more militantly evangelical ministry. And 20 years ago, still further separation from these very separatists took place in the Covenant Seminary group, but more from a sense of returning to a less rigid militancy. Just this summer, however, in the spirit of these times, that Covenant branch joined the more recently militantly separatist Presbyterian Church in America.

Christianity Today, with appropriate sadness, has observed editorially that "For a full century, evangelicalism has suffered because its identity was based to too great an extent on its opposition to liberalism." Calling such a strategy a "mistake," the editors confess that "fundamentalism in much of its modern form could well be defined as evangelicalism shaped by its battle against liberalism." (Jul 16, 1982, p. 12)

All of this is not at all to imply that there were not plenty of very good reasons to oppose liberal theology and so-called Modernism. There were. I myself once assisted a group of evangelicals to leave the vapid United Presbyterianism of the late 1950s to get involved with the more evangelical Covenant Seminary branch of the Presbyterian tradition -- what, of late, was called the Reformed Presbyterian Church - Evangelical Synod. And there still are very good reasons, I think, to oppose what Torrance describes as "Modern liberal theology['s] ... assimilation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ to the human spirit." (op.cit. p. 15) But the militancy of 1980s Fundamentalism, so closely tied to Right-wing secularism, is a mentality from which we would differ. It has less to do with biblical theology and more to do with ultra-conservative Americanism. Its point of view is sadly captured in a trendy slogan pushed by David Noebel, a protégé of Billy James Hargis. This 4-word slogan sums up the Fundamentalist militant agenda, for example for nuclear weapons and *against* gay people and environmental protection programs. The violent slogan is this: "Nuke the gay whale!" (*Journal of Summit Ministries*, Jan 1982, p. 2) That, for Fundamentalists, evidently says

it all. But it is *bad* news for everybody, including Fundamentalists.

Interestingly, it is gay militancy that the anti-gay Fundamentalist militants so frightfully call to the attention of their militantly Fundamentalist constituencies in fund appeals. They scare the pants off their followers with phrases such as "the militant homosexuals," "the militant lesbians," "the militant sex educators," "the militant pornographers," etc. (cf. e.g. *Action Alert Bulletin* of Murray Norris' Christian Family Renewal, n.d. as well as other publications of such organizations as James Robison's, Jerry Falwell's, and Pat Robertson's.

It is true, too, that much of the gay liberationist movement pictures itself by a raised and clenched fist and hostile rhetoric, and Fundamentalists seem especially drawn to this specter of another's militancy in something of a love/hate relationship. Militancy seems to fear nothing so much as another's militancy, doubtless because militancy knows what it itself is prepared to do and projects this onto its enemies -- perhaps with some reasonable cause. But "pro-life" Fundamentalism's fondness for bigger expenditures for bigger and bigger bombs, its hostility to "The Peace Movement," and its uncritical endorsement of even atrocities committed against innocent civilians in the name of the security of a political state Fundamentalists selfishly confuse with the geography of their own penultimate heavenly bliss far outdistance the relatively harmless shouts and shenanigans of even the most rowdy gay "militants." Didn't Jesus remind us that "those who take up the sword also perish by the sword?" (Matt 26:52)

Well, why, besides trying to get away from all this unpleasant militancy do I say that we are not Fundamentalists? Why is it so important to spend the time and effort correcting the false impression in the secular media, as well as in the gay religious media, that we who are evangelicals must not be confused with Fundamentalists? *Because there is something that the world needs to hear.*

What the world needs to hear is the Evangel, the Gospel, the Good News. Therefore, we must do our best to proclaim this Good News, living it as faithfully as

we can instead of obscuring it by freezing it into an outworn form from an earlier era or from our days of childish beliefs rather than child-like faith. We must do whatever we can do to avoid what David H. C. Read of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church calls "the familiar phrases and clichés of Christian evangelism [that] get between us and the liberating news." (*Curious Christians*, p. 83) In his *Letters to Malcolm*, an unusually short-sighted C. S. Lewis asked rhetorically: "What soul ever perished for believing that God the Father really had a beard?" Lewis's old friend, Alan Bede Griffiths, wisely replies: "It may be that no soul ever perished for this reason, but the impoverishment of religious faith due to this, and the scandal caused to unbelievers by such childish religious beliefs, are surely just as harmful as any liberal theology that takes refuge in abstractions." (in *C. S. Lewis At The Breakfast Table*, p. 13) Addressing Fundamentalist shortcomings when applied to issues of homosexuality, Missouri Synod Lutheran clergyman and psychologist Harold I. Haas has concluded: "there is risk that the Gospel will not be effectively preached and souls will be lost because the church based its ministry on human attitudes and emotions. And impeding the work of the Holy Spirit through interference with the Gospel is the most serious offense the Scripture knows. The issue," Haas says, "is as stark as that!" (*Currents in Theology and Mission*, Apr 1978)

I should say, at this point, that some of those "human attitudes" that so distort the Gospel, come, of course, as well from the left as from the right. This is illustrated by the testimony of New York University psychologist Paul C. Vitz who, before his becoming a Christian sometime in 1974 or 1975, says that he had "assumed that Christianity (though not necessarily Eastern religion) was totally outmoded and in the process of disappearing completely." He recalls that "this attitude was supported ... in part by the obvious doctrinal surrenders of the occasionally visible liberal Christians of the time." (*Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, Spring 1982, p. 53)

Still, we evangelicals must realize that it is by revising the form of the ancient truth of the Gospel in

new circumstances that truly preserves that ancient truth, but it is in preserving outworn forms that most perverts the ancient truth. As Helmut Thielicke, the evangelical Lutheran theologian, puts it: "A past which is conserved traditionalistically is an alteration rather than a preservation of the past. The fidelity of unchanged repetition is a sham fidelity. ... for all the 'literal' appeal to it. Real fidelity is achieved when the old truth is related to the questions that agitate modern man, when its beam is focused on his present-day situation, and when it is stated in terms taken from his own vocabulary. ... The resultant strangeness of the old truth might seem to affect its identity but in fact it preserves it. For this identity," Thielicke argues, "is that of a truth that applies directly to, and is contemporary with every present. This carries with it a constant need to transpose it, to put it in new terms. The apparent strangeness, which often jolts the indolence and non-commitment of the well versed, is simply a variation on the strangeness that the old truth has always had." Thielicke adds: "The parables of Jesus were shockingly strange when first uttered." (*The Evangelical Faith*, Vol I, p. 121) Much the same thing is said by Bloesch when he points out that calls for a "return to the beliefs and practices of our forefathers" represent "an arid traditionalism" and "can be a form of culture-religion." Bloesch explains that, as such, "it often entails absolutizing the attitudes and mores of a particular period in history. Many evangelicals," he writes, "seem content simply to lean upon the confessional statements of past ages without realizing that the times in which we live call for new confessions." (op.cit., p. 23) At the same time, we must be on our guard lest we fall into the easy temptation of absolutizing our own era, for it is just as relative, just as provincial, in terms of insight and experience, as is any other era. Nonetheless, we must be responsible for information, experiences, and insights which we have been given which were not available in by-gone eras. After all, we must live in our own day, as Jesus said we must. Let's keep in mind, too, what Torrance told his audience at Fuller Seminary, that our confessions and all our apparently sophisticated systematic

theology, no matter how well-informed and up-to-date, are not in themselves the Truth. In Torrance's words: "the very beliefs which we profess and formulate as obediently and carefully as we can in fidelity to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ are themselves called into question by that revelation, for they have their truth not in themselves but in him to whom they refer, and are therefore constantly to be revised in the light of the Truth that Jesus Christ is in himself in God."

Torrance suggests that "This is the crux at which fundamentalism is put to its severest test, when it should become clear whether it is genuinely evangelical or not, that is, ultimately obedient to Christ and his gospel or not." (op. cit., p. 19) Thieliicke addresses this concern when he states: "Language, including theological language, is the verbal medium of sinners. Being justified, sinners aim at goals that transcend the medium. Ultimately they are assessed and judged, not by what they are, but by that to which they look." (*The Evangelical Faith*, Vol III, p. 414)

Thus, we as evangelicals, dare not get bogged down in merely parroting a "hand-me-down" theology that was really somebody else's. We must not become involved in the commandment-breaking idolatry which makes gods of doctrinal systems. We should translate for us and our contemporaries that which inspired our forebearers and which, in essence, has been faithfully passed on to us in turn.

Who among us, in search of what the Bible really has to say about homosexuality, for instance, hasn't experienced what New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce recalls when we, too, have gone anew to old scriptures? Bruce shares that "fresh insights can be obtained from a thorough reexamination of familiar material." (*Christianity Today*, Oct 10, 1980, p. 21) And in gaining such "fresh insights" we would do well to remember the grace and modesty expressed by a dear Harry Ironside, once the pastor of the theologically-sensitive Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. In his *Lectures on Colossians*, Ironside wrote: "To pretend to great zeal for the truth of the one Body, while failing to manifest the love of the Spirit, is to put the emphasis in the wrong place. Doctrinal correctness will never atone

for lack of brotherly love. It is far more to God who is Himself Love, in His very nature, that His people walk in love one toward another, than that they contend valiantly for set forms of truth, however scriptural." (p. 27) By the way, as some of you know, I printed his words on a book mark that was then sent out with our spring mailing of *RECORD* and *REVIEW*. Back came the angry scribble of a "liberal" religious gay man who, missing Ironside's point, faulted us in his own "great zeal for the truth" of feminism. He condemned the book mark as "sexist." Perhaps by today's "enlightened" standards it was "sexist," and yet it was surely also full of love. Even at our best, we're only some mixture of love and much that does not measure up.

While showing true love, we must at the same time not run away from our obligation to think as well as we can, and that thinking, of necessity, has content which, if you please, may be called "doctrine." According to Trueblood: "People without a sound theology are bound to have a poor one, for theological questions are intrinsically unavoidable." This is a significant endorsement of the importance of doctrine, for Trueblood, the professional philosopher, is also a theologically-simple Quaker. He goes on to say: "Beliefs are important, partly because they determine, in large measure, what men [and women] do." (op.cit., p. 64) Psychologically and biblically, of course, this is realistic. But in it all, we must, nevertheless, take care so that our diligent effort at "figuring out" God not be only a "pious" disguise for trying to control God as well as other people.

Well, there are evangelicals and there are evangelicals. And there are evangelicals. There are as many kinds of evangelicals as there are individual hearts and minds turned in honest submission to Jesus Christ. This is naturally what one would expect of a branch of the larger Christian church which, worldwide, is otherwise divided into 150 major ecclesiastical traditions, 20,800 denominations and sub-divisions, and thousands of organizations besides little Evangelicals Concerned. (cf. David B. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*)

Few things may be shared among us, though, in terms

of lifestyle, personality, political persuasion, mentality, tactics, the adiaphora, and so on. We in EC may agree with some evangelicals but not with others. On some matters and not on others. We may feel at home with some people and not that much at home with others -- even in EC, perhaps. Just as there are all sorts of homosexuals, there are all sorts of evangelicals. Someone has said: "Thank God for gays. If it weren't for us, the Sistine Chapel would be blue." Well, of course, there are plenty of homosexuals without artistic talent, aren't there. "Name two," you say. And, of course, there are plenty of evangelical leaders who do not take the Falwell line on homosexuality. "Name two," you say.

Well, in January 1981, *Christian Life* magazine released the results of a survey it conducted among 45 well-known evangelical leaders and some Fundamentalist leaders. The survey aimed at what these leaders thought of such controversial issues as abortion, ERA, divorce, the draft, pornography, and homosexuality. You'll notice that even though this is a typical Right-wing list of concerns, there emerged several unexpected replies. For example, responding to the query "Should homosexuals be prohibited from teaching in public schools and in holding positions in government involving national security?" 28 said "yes," but 5 said "maybe," 4 said "no," and 8 had no opinion. Eight evangelicals without an opinion! Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, said "yes" to "teaching" but added that "National security is another matter. A homosexual who is out in the open is no more susceptible to blackmail than a heterosexual." Notice that he made his reply apart from scriptural considerations. His was a practical concern. Well over a third of these leaders either did not respond to the question or said "no" or "maybe." Previously, the *Christianity Today* - Gallup Poll found that 19% of evangelicals did not hold that "Homosexuality is wrong." (Sept 19, 1980, p. 27) It is not clear from the data furnished that 19% of evangelicals thought that homosexuality is *right*, though, there being other alternatives to "right" and "wrong" -- but maybe not for evangelicals. In the same poll, 15% of evangelicals said they favored "allowing homo-

sexuals to teach in public schools." (PRRC *Emerging Trends*, Sept 1980, p. 2) But what do you think *Christianity Today* did editorially with this, their own finding? Not surprisingly, it contradicted its own survey discovery in stating (p. 10) that "all Christians can agree [that] homosexual practice" is an example of "the moral decline in our society," even though it is admitted by the editors that "The Bible isn't always explicitly clear on how its principles are to be understood and applied to every specific issue." The editors also admitted that "'All evangelicals' agree on very few things" so I wrote to them saying that we in EC agree with them on what they dubbed "the most important" things and suggested that we all leave it at that for all of us to encourage each other in Christian discipleship instead of keeping up destructive attacks. (letter to *Christianity Today*, Sept 22, 1980) Two years later, the editors restated their previous point: "Evangelicals have a very large core of common commitment that has grown out of their solid allegiance to Christ's lordship," and yet the editorial immediately goes on: "Divergences abound." Evidently, as of now, the viewpoint of Evangelicals Concerned on homosexuality is *too divergent, too deviant, for Christianity Today*. When a Pentecostal graduate of Fuller Seminary now teaching Old Testament at Union Seminary in New York speaks about evangelicals and liberals relating to one another it is worth our attention. So it is with special interest we hear Gerald Sheppard say that even "So-called 'liberals' may well be surprised to find more companions among the evangelicals than they dared imagine, and these same evangelicals will be amazed to find so many confessional counterparts outside their particular social idiom." (op. cit., p. 83) As a former student at Bob Jones University, Dallas Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary, and as a former employee of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and the American Baptist Church (though a Presbyterian), and as one who has worked on the staff of an ecumenical campus ministry and as a graduate of the Graduate School of Religion of The University of Southern California, I agree with Sheppard. What he has observed has been my experience too.

Well, I was saying much earlier that our world clear-

ly needs to hear the Evangel, the Gospel, the Good News. That that is what *evangelical* is all about. We're about the Good News, the Gospel. You've heard of *Godspel*, the Broadway musical. "Godspel" is the Old English rendering for "good story," which became "Gospel" in Middle English, and earlier, it was the translation of Late Latin *evangelium* which derives from the New Testament Greek: *εὐαγγέλιον*. The New Testament term means "good message" or "good news." So, as evangelicals, we are the People of the Good News. This New Testament word appears some 60 times in the writings of Paul as well as in what are conventionally called "the Gospels" of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and it appears in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament. Here is where we really get to why we call ourselves "evangelicals." We're People of the Good News. Here we get to what the Scottish Bible teacher, William Barclay, called "the very heart and centre of the Christian faith" (*A New Testament Wordbook*, p. 41) and Dutch biblical scholar Herman N. Ridderbos called the "essential nature of the New Testament." (*When The Time Had Fully Come*, p. 91)

But what in the world is the Good News? This Good News, writes Trueblood, "is that God exists, and is, in all eternity, what we see in Jesus Christ." (op. cit., p. 79) The Good News is God's more than adequate response to the mess we've all made of ourselves and our world. And we know darn well we've made a mess of things. We all know that. The doctrine of sin is, as Trueblood says, "the most empirical ... of all Christian doctrines." (p. 63)

In his novel, *Creation*, Gore Vidal is his cynical self as he takes us through the 5th century B.C. world that tried to right its wrong through Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, and Taoism as well as through greed, sex, and violence. It is narrated by a man who sees that the world is in such a mess that he finally concludes: "Wherever one goes on this earth, all things are spoiled by men." But as Trueblood reminds us, "to stress the reality of sin, without the divine initiative, is to surrender to despair." (*Idem.*) That despair is the very cynicism which is Vidal's signature since all he sees as the "Gospel" is, as he puts it, "the single greatest disaster that ever happened to the West." (quot-

ed in *Saturday Review*, May 1982, p. 25) What Vidal and so many other victims of the sinfully religious machinations of Christendom and all other egotisms have failed to see is that, as Samuel Moffett, the missionary, said: "the real Good News is not what we, in our benevolence do for others [or, we might add, what we in our violence do to others] but what God has done for us all in Christ." (quoted in the *Presbyterian Communique*, Spring 1982, p. 15) It is into this world of despair and cynicism, where all things indeed are spoiled by human beings who have turned away from God and into themselves, making gods of themselves, that Jesus Christ has been revealed, proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News, of his Kingdom come.

But the euaggelion is in the *Old Testament* as well as in the *New Testament*. In the 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the *Old Testament*, the *Septuagint*, there are foretastes of usage which comes to full flower in the *New Testament*. In *Psalms* 40:10 and 96:2, euaggelion translates the proclamation of the Lord's righteousness and the new song of salvation. In *Isaiah* 40:9, in that portion made so familiar to us by Handel's *Messiah*, -- "good tidings to Zion ... good tidings to Jerusalem" -- it more specifically translates the future coming of the Lord's anointed One, the *Messiah* or the *Christ*. (cf. also *Isa* 52:7)

The Gospel is a *particular* message of Good News, interlinked inseparably with the messenger, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ *is* the Good News. He comes into a world filled with conflicting messages and conflicted messengers who so often see Jesus Christ and his Good News as *bad news*.

When Bob Dylan changed *his* message from the activist advocacy of the '60s and the despair of the '70s to the decrying of that in favor of serving the *Lord Jesus Christ* (for as Dylan said, "You Gotta Serve Somebody!") many Dylan fans who never objected to "message" songs throughout the '60s suddenly reversed themselves when it changed, along with the "Somebody" of the message. Now they say Dylan has become too "preachy." But when was this prophet of the protest era not "preaching" about something or somebody? The *something*, the *Somebody*, though, there's the rub. The smugly resistant reviews of his 3 "Christian" albums in, e.g. *Trouser Press* mag-

azine (Nov 1979, p. 37) complain that "his vision tends to dwell on negative and sensational aspects" now. But when did it not, and with even less positive counter balance? When a *Newsweek* music critic whined about what was called Dylan's new "evangelical pieties" (Dec 17, 1979), a perceptive reader wrote: "It seems ironic that George Harrison could sing about Krishna, and that Seals and Crofts could sing the glories of the Bahai faith, to standing-room-only crowds: but let Bob Dylan get up and sing about Jesus, and people walk out on him." (*Newsweek*, Jan 14, 1980, p. 8) One prays that the offense is truly "the offense of the cross" about which Paul spoke and not the offensiveness of the hatred shown by Christendom and Fundamentalism toward all sorts of this world's poor and needy and otherwise oppressed people.

Artists like Dylan who are known to be Christian -- even at times singing in Billy Graham rallies like B. J. Thomas and Cliff Richard do -- are viciously criticized by some church people for singing so-called "secular" music, the "devil's music." Church members seem no different from the non-Christians when it comes to the "straying" of their idols. For example, Dylan's tribute to Lenny Bruce on his latest post-conversion album, *Shot of Love*, has some people in a dither because they don't understand that, as Thieliicke once put it: "A salty pagan, full of the juices of life, is a hundred times dearer to God, and also far more attractive to men, than a scribe who knows his Bible ... in whom none of this results in repentance, action, and above all, death of the self. A terrible curse hangs over the know-it-all who does nothing." (quoted in *Leadership*, Winter 1981) Rock star Cliff Richard says that his conversion to Christ has broadened him instead of narrowing him. (*Contemporary Christian Music*, Aug 1980, p. 31) Remember that Eugenia Price said the same thing about her own Christian experience in her book, *The Wider Place*. Richard says we "must be let loose from the apron strings that the evangelical world tends to wrap around our throats." Is that graphic enough? He testifies: "Jesus has liberated me; he enslaved me to Him, which gives me total freedom to do everything in His strength."

All of this is part of what that particular Good News

is all about. God loves us even in our sinfulness, our wrong-headedness, our stupidly childish pride. Even in our disappointments and tragedies, God is God, at work in love in us and in our world.

Going back to the biblical accounts, Matthew, you know, tells us that Jesus "went round all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, announcing the Good News of the Kingdom, and curing every kind of ailment and disease. The sight of the people moved him to pity," Matthew recalls. "They were like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless; and he said to his disciples, 'The crop is heavy, but labourers are scarce; you must therefore beg the owner to send labourers to harvest his crop.'" (9:35-38 NEB) From the very beginning, the Good News has gone out to the poor and harassed. But it does *not* go out in any kind of political, military, or economic liberation movement as some had expected in Jesus' day and as some "liberationists" expect in our own day. The message of the Good News and the messenger of the Good News, Jesus Christ, are one. (Matt 5:1f; Lk 11:20)

Mark very clearly sees Jesus as both the content and the author of this Good News. Mark speaks of the Gospel when he tells us that Jesus called the people to him, as well as his disciples, and said to them: "Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he [or she] must take up his [or her] cross, and come with me." (Such a follower must "give up all rights to" self, as Phillips renders it.) Jesus said that "Whoever cares for his or her own safety is lost; but if a man [or woman] will let self be lost for my sake and for the Gospel, that person is safe. What does a person gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his or her true self? What can a person give to buy that self back?" (Mark 8:34-37). You can see from this that Mark does not present the Gospel as simply an objective report *about* Jesus' views, much less as an objective report *about* Jesus, but as a proclamation in which he is subjectively involved and one which requires response of the most personal kind. Speaking of that response, David H. C. Read has said: "The one and only condition for receiving [God's saving power] is that we acknowledge our need and say yes to the liber-

ating news. There are a thousand ways of saying yes, but in essence it means the conscious yielding of all that we know of ourselves to all that we have come to know of Christ." (op. cit., p. 84)

The narrative by Luke also tells of Jesus "journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God." (8:1 NEB) Luke mentions some of those who followed Jesus: "The Twelve and a number of women who had been set free from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, known as Mary of Magdala, from whom seven devils had come out, Joanna, the wife of Chuza a steward of Herod's, Susanna, and many others. These women provided for them out of their own resources." (Luke 8:1-3) These were some of those who "left self behind" to follow Jesus, *for his sake and for the Gospel*.

Paul identifies himself as the servant of Jesus Christ, apostle by God's call and set apart *for the service of the Gospel*. (Rom 1:1) To Paul, the Gospel was the Good News that God had already acted in Christ for the salvation of the world. He says that the Good News is God's intrinsic power for the restoration of all that has gone wrong in us and in our world in all our lostness. The Good News is of a new wholeness for everyone already somehow accomplished in the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and offered to everyone who trusts not in self or on feelings or in systems of belief, but relies on God to be God, and who with an attitude of openness toward God, leaves it to God in Christ to right our wrong. In Jesus Christ is the Yes to every promise of God and it is up to us to respond with our own "yes," our "Amen" or "So let it be." (cf. II Cor 1:20)

The Evangel, the Gospel, the Good News is this: God loves us and somehow, in Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. (cf. II Cor 5:19) Somehow, in Jesus Christ, God was reconciling me to himself. Somehow, in Jesus Christ, God was reconciling you to himself. Somehow, in Jesus Christ, God was reconciling that person next to you to himself. And somehow, in Jesus Christ, God was reconciling Jerry Falwell to himself. If we don't believe that we cannot know that we ourselves have been reconciled.

Our pride, the sin and estrangement for which the Gospel is remedy, has a continuing tendency to cause us to reject the Gospel and to contrive our own selfish remedies or even to try to deny our need of any remedy. The consequent wrath we thereby create only confounds our situation.

Paul very strongly rebukes those who preach a humanly devised, contrary and so-called "gospel" or solution which the Apostle describes as damnable and which, he says, is no doubt preached to curry favor with certain people. (Gal 1:6-10) But as Berkouwer writes: "The Gospel is the laying bare of all make-believe and lies." (*Studies in Dogmatics: Sin*, p. 239) No wonder there are always those who want to hear "another gospel" than the one proclaimed in Jesus Christ. And there are always those who are ready to accommodate them with either the liberals' watered-down versions or the conservatives' petrified versions. In his day, Paul warned that some would come extolling a "different Jesus" from the Jesus he proclaimed in the Gospel (II Cor 11:4) and there are those today who "baptize" their political, sexual, and economic or social agenda with appeals to a fictionalized Jesus as Zen Guru, Marxist guerrilla, capitalist entrepreneur, Victorian auntie, star-spangled patriot, or gay liberationist. Paul cautions that in proclaiming the Good News, in which he takes pride, we do not commend ourselves (Rom 1:16; II Cor 10:18). We dare not preach nationalistic pride, ecclesiastical pride, Fundamentalist pride, evangelicalistic pride, or gay pride as a sorry substitute for pride in the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ, in which and in whom Paul was "not ashamed." (Rom 1:16)

Gay activist, Brandon Judell, writing in the gay *New York Native* (July 5-18, 1982) asks "if our promiscuity is killing us?" If so, he asks, "What would we have left?" Noting several deaths by suicide and the so-called "gay diseases," he says he ponders it all and comes up with nothing but rage. "I want to believe in something. A religion. A sexual position. A person. A myth. I feel empty. ... Is there hope? If so, what are we hoping for? What is gay Utopia? ... On Gay Pride Day what are we going to be proud of?" In the face of such pain, we evangelicals dare not keep silence!

Just how much mileage does anyone in the U.S. elitist Left seriously expect to get anymore from a Marxist-Leninist line that, as Solzhenitsyn tells us, nobody in the U.S.S.R. really believes anymore? But how much really can we hope for from the new Susan Sontag? How much hope can still be squeezed out of a counter-productive nuclear arms race? Is there anyone anymore, outside of Beverly Hills and Manhattan, who still looks to psychoanalysis to solve the deep problems of human estrangement? Do Californians still put faith in Esalen, hot tubs and cold massages? Is the free-market economy really going to bring prosperity to the world? Is it really going to feed the starving masses? Is "hot sex" really what homosexuality is all about? Is "Possibility Thinking" what the world has been waiting for? Are headline scrutinizing know-it-all prophecy conferences what people are hurting for today? Is our real problem only that we need to be taught how to "pull our own strings" more effectively or how to learn to "be our own best friend?" Will forced prayers in public school bring about a sincere turning to God? Will the defeat or passage of the ERA and gay rights laws really make any difference? What can the theologically confused really expect from a popular modern theologian who speaks of "Christ, however we may understand that reality" and from American seminaries when, according to the Association of Theological Schools, the center has fallen out of non-evangelical theological education and enrollment there is dwindling? What assistance can homosexuals expect from a notoriously loose and liberal National Council of Churches theology when the NCC suddenly appeals to concerns for the "historical position and doctrinal practices of the" member communions after a predominantly gay male and lesbian denomination is found knocking for entrance at its front door? What can any of us reasonably expect from a so-called "gospel" which tries to "christianize" a basically Right-wing materialism and privatizes the Gospel to the exclusion of its social implications? No more than any of us can reasonably expect from a so-called "gospel" which tries to be what *Time* magazine calls "little more than the Americans for Democratic Action at prayer." (Nov 16, 1981, p. 63)

Is there salvation in holier-than-thou? No more than in wealthier-than-thou, more successful-than-thou, bigger-than-thou, more Bible-believing-than-thou, more American-than-thou, more pro-Israel-than-thou, more pro-family-than-thou. No more than in more up-to-date-than-thou, more relevant-than-thou, more scientific-than-thou, more feminist-than-thou, more simple-lifestyle-than-thou, more concerned-for-the-poor-than-thou, more liberationist-than-thou. No more than in gayer-than-thou, more lesbian-than-thou, more macho-than-thou, more hung-than-thou, hotter-than-thou, more proud-to-be-a-politically-correct-lesbian-or-gay-male-than-thou.

When will we learn that the Gospel of Christ stands over against all merely human and sinfully contrived attempts at righting our wrong turnings with all their tragically tangled consequences? Listen to what church historian John Boswell has to say: "when Christians have insisted on a positive Christian theology regardless of popular morality, they have transformed the world. ... When they have allowed themselves to be greatly influenced by popular morals and sentiment, their attitudes have been transformed by the world around them." ("A Crucial Juncture," *Integrity Forum*, Michaelmas, 1980, p. 4) Or hear Peter Berger saying: "Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue' but by proclamation." (quoted in Bloesch, op. cit., p. 12)

Is the Gospel going to be what we proclaim to form the basis of our total agenda and bring about a radical regeneration in the hearts of men and women in our world or are we going to capitulate to the flabby "gospels" of gay pride and to the inflated arrogance of the broader *self-righteous* and *self-actualized* society? Are these evangelicals concerned with the proclamation of the Evangel or are we concerned with ourselves and with picayune parochialisms that are no different from the "gay pride" movement? "Gay is great, gay is good, let us thank it for our food!" Amen? Are our book tables indistinguishable from those of any gay pride conference? Are our speakers indistinguishable from those at any gay pride conference? Are our workshops and seminars indistinguishable from those at any gay pride conference? Is what governs our lives any different from what governs other gay communities? If not,

we have nothing more with which to address concern than do Fundamentalists and liberal religionists with their own different brands of secularism.

F. F. Bruce counsels that "The faithfulness of Christian people to the essential gospel of redeeming grace, intelligently believed and clearly proclaimed" will decide Christianity's influence upon the secular thought of the next decade. "If Christianity is thought to say the same sort of thing, albeit in a religious idiom, as, say, the United Nations says in a nonreligious idiom, its influence on secular thought will be imperceptible." (*Christianity Today* interview, Oct 10, 1980, p. 18) Thieliicke makes the same point most poignantly: "When theology says only what the world can say to itself, it says nothing. The feet of those who will remove it are already at the door." (*The Evangelical Faith*, Vol II, p. 99)

What is it that the world *cannot* say to itself? What is it that the world *will not* say to itself? What is it we never did dream up to say to ourselves? It is the Gospel, the Good News, the Evangel: *that somehow, God was in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to himself.* It is what we who are People of the Good News must continue to focus upon, to refresh ourselves in with humility and thanksgiving and cross-bearing, and it is what we who are People of the Good News must proclaim to the whole world, beginning in our own closets, and into the Castro, and on down Christopher Street, and to the most remote corner of our land where gay brothers and lesbian sisters huddle without hope beyond their own ever-demoralizing short-sightedness. Without the Good News, the Gospel, the Evangel, we have no dignity, we have no integrity, there *is* no affirmation.

In closing, let's remember that, as has been mentioned, Christ does have other sheepfolds as well as ours where this same Gospel has been and continues to be food for his lambs. Here is a hymn that many 20th century evangelicals would be surprised to learn was composed in the 16th century by a contemporary of John Calvin, a fellow alumnus of the University of Paris, but not an ecclesiastical cohort. Nevertheless, a brother in Christ: Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary to the Far East, penned these words of evangel:

My God, I love thee -- not because
I hope for heaven thereby,
Nor yet because who love thee not
Are lost eternally.

Thou, O my Jesus, thou didst me
Upon the cross embrace;
For me didst bear the nails and spear,
And manifold disgrace.

And griefs and torments numberless,
And sweat and agony,
And death itself -- and all for me,
Who was thine enemy.

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
Should I not love thee well?
Not for the sake of winning heaven
Or of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught;
Not seeking a reward;
But as thyself hast loved me,
O ever-loving Lord.

E'en so I love thee, and will love,
And in thy praise will sing;
Because thou art my loving God
And my eternal King.

