

No Place for Truth
Or
Whatever Happened
to Evangelical Theology?

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Contents

Preface	xi
Introduction	1

PROLOGUE

I. A Delicious Paradise Lost	17
The Delicious Paradise	19
A Puritan Town Revisited	23
<i>The True Woman</i>	25
<i>A Quiet and Staid Revival</i>	30
<i>The True Woman about Town</i>	35
A Small Town in a Big World	46
Reaching Out to America	47
II. World Cliche Culture	53
Uneasy Rests the Spirit	53
<i>Decay and Renewal</i>	57
The New Civilization	68
<i>Modernization and Modernity</i>	72
<i>Secularization and Secularism</i>	79
<i>The Emperor's Lost Clothes</i>	84
<i>The Boiling of the Frog</i>	87

THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF FAITH

III. Things Fall Apart	95
Theology Disappears	97
<i>What Is Theology?</i>	97
<i>How Theology Is Disappearing</i>	106
<i>That Theology Is Disappearing</i>	110
A Tale of Two Worlds	115
<i>The Modernists' World</i>	115
<i>The Declining Years of Evangelicalism</i>	127
IV. Self-Piety	137
Modern Individuality	141
<i>The Protestant Reformation</i>	143
<i>The Heritage in America</i>	149
<i>I See, Therefore I Am</i>	161
<i>The Naked Public Square</i>	166
The Revised (Evangelical) Version	171
<i>The Symptoms</i>	171
<i>The Results</i>	177
V. The Rise of Everyperson	187
Who Is Everyperson?	189
The Middling Standard	193
Les Liaisons Dangereuses	198
Postcards from the Edge	204
Innocent Radicals	211
There They Go and I Am Their Leader	213
VI. The New Disablers	218
The New Mandarins	222
The New Knowledge	227
<i>The Ministry and the Market</i>	227
<i>The Ministry and the Guild</i>	238
Toward a New Order of Sacred Fools	245
<i>The Minister in Search of a Niche</i>	245

Contents

ix

<i>The Minister as Impermanent</i>	249
<i>The Minister as Theologian</i>	250
VII. The Habits of God	258
The Pagan Mind	264
The Biblical Mind	270
The Modern Mind	279
VIII. The Reform of Evangelicalism	283
Believers and Unbelievers	286
The Use of God	288
The Recovery of God	296
Selected Bibliography	302
Index	316



Preface

OF THE WRITING OF BOOKS, the sage said, there is no end, and there might have been no end in sight to the writing of this particular book had I not received considerable help from others. First and foremost, I wish to thank the Pew Charitable Trusts for an extraordinarily generous grant which enabled me to take off the necessary time to think about the disappearance of theology and to commit these thoughts to paper. This also required that I be loosed from my teaching responsibilities. Gordon-Conwell was most accommodating and cooperative. I am also grateful to all of those who filled in in my absence. They did this so well that I began to fear that the Seminary might decide to make my leave of absence permanent!

During this leave, I received a number of invitations to give lectures in various places. Some of these I felt that I had to decline, but I did accept several which I thought might enable me to get my own ideas clear on the disappearance of theology. I was correct. It was very helpful to receive responses to my ideas as I was going along. I therefore wish to thank the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville for the opportunity to lecture and debate on this subject in 1990; the Coalition for Christian Outreach, the Christian College Coalition, and the Christian Higher Education Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals for their invitation to address this theme and to engage in discussion on it in 1991; the Board of Wheaton College, who invited me to think with them about college education in the future, given the changes in the evangelical world that I sought to describe; the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia, for the kind invitation to speak to the clergy of the region on how modernity colors our

perception of the uniqueness of Christ; and to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for the honor of being asked to deliver the Kenneth Kantzer Lectures in 1991 on the theme of the disappearance of theology. And in the summer of 1992, after the manuscript had been completed and was lost to sight somewhere in the labyrinth of the publisher, I gave two addresses at Biola University and a series at the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute, Covenant Theological Seminary, on some of the themes in this book. It was, at that time, too late to make changes. The dice were in the air but had not yet landed on the table. I was, however, grateful for the interest in the issues I had raised.

In addition, I am indebted to a number of people who, at my request, read portions of this manuscript. I am grateful for their judicious comments. These include Thomas Askew, Stanley Gaede, T. David Gordon, Os Guinness, Nathan Hatch, James Hunter, Garth Rosell, Mark Noll, John Stott, Douglas Stuart, and Ken Swetland. Naturally, I alone am responsible for the book as it now stands. I am also grateful for the comments and critiques that were offered to portions of this manuscript at two conferences on “theology and modern consciousness” held at Rockport in 1990 and 1991. Finally, for the chapter on Wenham, I was given every assistance possible by the staff at Wenham Museum, for which I am grateful; I quote from materials under their care with permission.

Finally, I cannot but express my indebtedness to all of those who, over the years, have enriched my understanding by their faithful preaching of the Word of God, by their examples of principled living, and by their spiritual authenticity — those whose friendship has constantly provoked me into doing better myself. They have helped me to see that those who are most relevant to this world are those who are judged most irrelevant.



Introduction

I HESITATED BRIEFLY as I entered the large, inhospitable lecture hall to which my beginning class in theology had been assigned. My hesitation had little to do with the room, though that does leave something to be desired. Not only is the professor's desk remote from the students, who are banked away in ascending tiers to the point of dim visibility at the back, but the heating system often goes into reverse. From time to time in winter, the bonhomie is rudely broken, with little warning and less reason, by a merciless, icy blast as this rogue system suddenly begins to suck air in from the outside instead of warming and circulating it from within. Here, indeed, is a parable of modern existence: a machine that no one can tame, intended for the comforting of human life, working its wreckage on the best laid plans of the institution.

That, however, was not why I hesitated, for I had learned to protect myself against this temperamental monster by having an overcoat at hand when things got really bad. Nor was it the palpable quietness that I knew would suddenly overcome this class as I began my descent toward the front. Many of these students, if they were like their predecessors, would be scared stiff. First, there was my reputation to be considered: more alarming than Ivan the Terrible, I am told, especially at exam time. And second, there was the subject. Theology is so remote from anything that many had thought about, or considered important, that the first encounter was always quite puzzling and often threatening.

All of that was simply part of the situation, the "given," as they say. But I hesitated that day for another reason. I really had no great

certainty as to how I was going to circumvent their fear and make some connections with the curiosity that surely had to be lurking somewhere in each of these men and women. It was important that I do that early in the going.

But before I could attempt this tricky venture, there was the introduction to the course to be taken care of. Now, I had the great advantage of knowing one of the questions that would later appear on the student evaluation form — the consumers' report — which each would be asked to fill out at the end of the course: "Was the course adequately introduced?" And after the question there follow numbers from one to five, from superior to poor, for grading the professor. The problem is that I have never understood the question. Is it not enough that the catalog describes the content of the course? Or am I expected to read this to them? Elaborate on it? Give a potted version of what lies before them? Talk in vague but reassuring ways about life to give them time to get acclimated to me and to start feeling comfortable with the course of studies into which they were entering? My confusion on this point is amply attested by the low grades I always garner. After these student evaluations have passed before my eyes, heavy with their somber scoring, they go to the dean's office and then into some wretched file, a permanent and damning testimony to the fact that I have not yet learned how to introduce my courses well. And who knows when they will be dragged out and unleashed upon me with a pointed finger? He is the one who knows not how to introduce his courses adequately.

So, on this particular day, once the quietness had settled over the class, I quickly completed the opening rituals and got down to business. What better way to introduce the course and, at the same time, dispense a bit of paternal comfort than to deal head-on with their fears? I knew, I said, that some of them would be beginning a long walk into unknown territory and one that they might not be taking had the faculty in its wisdom not required it of them. Warming to my theme, I said that I understood the reluctance that they might be feeling, for theology has not always commended itself to people. Certainly, I conceded, theologians themselves have not always adorned the subject which they love and, in the modern period, off which they have lived. Theologians can be argumentative, though I doubted that they had a monopoly on that particular vice. Not only so, but sometimes they have been known to impose their ideas upon the Bible, though I added quickly that they are hardly different from many other scholars in this respect. For these and a number of other reasons upon which I touched

briefly, it might not seem to be a subject that would naturally hold their attention.

By now I could see I had made some connections. And it occurred to me how fortunate I was to have students who were so genuinely anxious to do the right thing, to give themselves to the matter at hand despite the reluctance that some undoubtedly experienced. And part of this reluctance no doubt arose from the minimal preparation that they had received prior to coming to seminary. Students who want to learn can find ways to surmount what they encounter at an undergraduate level, and many of these students had done that. But the innocents, those whose minds had been upon other matters in their collegiate years, were now discovering that they had been quietly defrauded. It is not impossible for a student in today's university to wend his or her way through all of the requirements, ending in a blaze of glory and relief in the graduation ceremonies, without having received an education. This happens even in the best universities. Somehow they manage to graduate students who have no mental connections with the past, little knowledge of its literature, less of its great thinkers, scant ability to think for themselves, and for whom the prospect of writing a research paper is a matter for great consternation. As I looked out on that class, I guessed that at least some of these victims of the educational system were present. Yet here they were, gamely exposing themselves to what must have seemed to them like grave peril. Their desire to be in seminary was a powerful compensation for — indeed, a counterforce to — the habits and disposition they had brought with them.

So I continued, now becoming more assertive. Let us not think, I said, that we really have a choice between having a theology and not having one. We all have our theologies, for we all have a way of putting things together in our own minds that, if we are Christian, has a shape that arises from our knowledge of God and his Word. We might not be conscious of the process. Indeed, we frequently are not. But at the very least we will organize our perceptions into some sort of pattern that seems to make sense to us. The question at issue, then, is not *whether* we will have a theology but whether it will be a good or bad one, whether we will become conscious of our thinking processes or not, and, more particularly, whether we will learn to bring all of our thoughts into obedience to Christ or not. The biblical authors had a theology in this sense, after all, and so too did Jesus. He explained himself in terms of biblical revelation, understood his life and work in relation to God, and viewed all of life from this perspective. He had a

worldview that originated in the purposes and character of his Father and that informed everything he said and did. Clearly I had precedent — important biblical precedent — for what I was about to attempt in this course. It was, I thought, a tour de force as introductions go.

I later discovered that my audience did not share my opinion. When the dreaded evaluation sheets were duly returned, they conveyed the same dismal judgment on my introduction, another marker on the path of bad beginnings. But at the moment it seemed to me that I had made a minor conquest. Before I could gather my belongings, a circle of students quickly accumulated around me. Is it not odd how inconsequential remarks have a way of sticking in the mind like burrs? That day, an obviously agitated student who had come forward told me how grateful he was for what I had said. It was as if I had been reading his mind. He told me that he was one of those I had described who felt petrified by the prospect of having to take this course. As a matter of fact, he said, he had had a mighty struggle with his conscience about it. Was it right to spend so much money on a course of study that was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church? He plainly intended no insult. As a matter of fact, this confession, which I rather think he had not intended to blurt out, had begun as a compliment. That was the day I decided that I had to write this book.

What I had intended to write then, however, was just a modest introduction for a small audience, perhaps entitled, without much originality, *A Little Encouragement for Young Theologians*. It was to be a little offering simply designed to get students launched into orbit. That was then. What I have written now is not only much larger than what I had originally envisioned but is also intended for a much broader audience. In the intervening years I have watched with growing disbelief as the evangelical Church has cheerfully plunged into astounding theological illiteracy. Many taking the plunge seem to imagine that they are simply following a path to success, but the effects of this great change in the evangelical soul are evident in every incoming class in the seminaries, in most publications, in the great majority of churches, and in most of their pastors. It is a change so large and so encompassing that those who dissent from what is happening are easily dismissed as individuals who cannot get along, who want to scruple over what is inconsequential, who are not loyal, and who are, in any case, quite irrelevant. Despite this, the changes that are now afoot are so pregnant with consequence that it becomes, for me, a matter of conscience to address them. Conscience, I have learned, is a hard taskmaster, and I

have not the slightest doubt that my attempt at doing this will appear quite ridiculous. I will look to some like the foolish dog that squats on the front lawn and, to everyone's displeasure, bays at the moon. But bay I must.

The change in the nature of this book from what I originally had in mind does not reflect simply a change of intention. It actually grows out of deepening convictions about the nature of theology, about its proper audience, and about the principles of its construction. Despite these origins, however, I say nothing in this book about its principles of construction and little about its nature; almost everything is directed to its audience, to addressing how the condition of the audience affects the very possibility of any theology being done at all and why this is so.

The question of the proper method of doing theology is, to be sure, a matter of large importance to which the scholarly community is giving considerable attention these days, and it is a bit risky to pass it all by so blithely. The premise of much of the work that is being done, though, seems quite wrongheaded to me. Much of it looks on theology as if it were a machine. The presumption is that, like the old family lawn mower, it should start with one or two good pulls, and if it does not, then a little tinkering will probably remedy the problem. To put the matter a little differently, the assumption is that if theology is in decline, which few doubt is the case, the reason is that it is not tapping its own sources of healing. Unfortunately, despite all of the tinkering that is going on with this ancient discipline, despite all of the new proposals about ways in which to remake it, and despite a mass of new correctives from a growing number of fields, the melancholy conclusion that now seems inescapable is that something is so seriously amiss that no amount of tinkering is going to suffice.

So I am striking out in a different direction in this book. I do so on the assumption that theology is a knowledge that belongs first and foremost to the people of God and that the proper and primary audience for theology is therefore the Church, not the learned guild. Whatever this guild might contribute to the life and construction of theology is to be gratefully received, but the university fraternity is not its primary auditor. I say this because theology is not simply a philosophical reflection about the nature of things but is rather the cogent articulation of the knowledge of God. Its substance is not drawn from mere human reflection, no matter how brilliant, but from the biblical Word by which it is nurtured and disciplined. And its purpose is not primarily to participate in the conversation of the learned but to

nurture the people of God. That is its nature and that is its purpose. It is here in the Church that the circle of knowing — the kind of knowing that has Christ as its object and his service as its end — is to be found. It is here, then, that the audience for theology is to be found. And so it is the community of faith that the theologian addresses fundamentally, because it is only by faith that the knowledge of God is first arrived at and only by faith that it is sustained.

Without question, theology that is constructed in this way has a powerful intellectual relevance to society and a legitimate place in discussions of our public square. Nevertheless, because the locus of the work is in the Church, the locus of our contemporary failure will almost inevitably be seen to lie there too. If the learned guild stands apart from its primary audience, it will have at most only a secondary significance in the apportioning of blame for what has gone wrong. And the truth is that adjustments in the doing of theology, even adjustments of large methodological magnitude, are not going to repair the damage that has been done, because the problem is less intellectual than spiritual. The reason that theology is disappearing has little to do with the technical skills of the fine-tuners and much to do with the state of the Church. So it is not with the technicians that I begin but with the Church. It not with the professionals in the learned guild that I start but with the whole people of God. And it is not to methodology that I look for a recovery of this fallen art but to a reformation in the way that Christian people go about their business of being Christian in the midst of the extraordinary changes that modernity has wrought in our world.

Already, then, it is plain that I am thinking of theology as taking place at the point where several different worlds intersect. First, there is the world of learning into which theology taps; second, there is the Church for whom theology is constructed; and, third, there are the intermediaries who, in the modern context, often become small worlds unto themselves but who must work within this matrix — the scholars who mediate the world of learning and the pastors who broker what results to the churches. What I shall argue in this book is that this intersection is now sundered and that these worlds are not only disengaging from one another but even breaking down within themselves. Many of the scholarly disciplines, such as Old and New Testament study, that once fed into theology now assail it in the interests of asserting their own independence; many of those whose task it is to broker the truth of God to the people of God in the churches have now redefined the pastoral task such that theology has become an

embarrassing encumbrance or a matter of which they have little knowledge; and many in the Church have now turned in upon themselves and substituted for the knowledge of God a search for the knowledge of self. There can be little doubt that if the capacity to think Christianly about this world is eroding in the churches, so too will the propriety of doing theology, both in the pulpit and in the academy. The propriety of this kind of knowledge will disintegrate as certainly as would the propriety of a novelist continuing to work when it was discovered that the culture in which he or she was living had gradually lost the ability to read.

Those who are conversant with the ways in which the modern world has been analyzed will recognize, even in this brief sketch, themes that are all too familiar. Whatever else one may say about modernization, one of its principal effects has been to break apart the unity of human understanding and disperse the multitude of interests and undertakings away from the center, in relation to which they have gathered their meaning, pushing them to the edges, where they have no easy relation to one another at all. It has done this by breaking down the central core so that there is nothing to which thought and life returns. It has eroded those ideas and convictions, that truth which, precisely because it arose in God and was mediated by him, stood as an unchanging sentinel amid changing circumstances. And it is this flight to the edges, this dispersion from the center, that has intruded on evangelical faith even as it has disordered the warp and woof of contemporary life. In the one it leaves a faith denuded of theology and in the other a life stripped of absolutes.

It is not difficult to trace out the path this cultural decay has taken, nor is there much disagreement about its passage when the matter is discussed in the abstract. After all, is there not wide agreement that the effect of secularization has been to marginalize God, to make what is absolute and transcendent irrelevant to the stuff of everyday life? Has it not supplanted interest in the supernatural with interest in the natural? Surely our everyday language betrays us in this matter. When we want to suggest that a statement is incontrovertible, we punctuate the assertion with the words "It's a fact!" — not "It's a truth!" Just give me the facts, and I'll make up my own mind about what constitutes the truth. And are we not consumed with what is changing in cultural and personal circumstance rather than with what is unchanging about life, the great universal truths about God, the world, and human nature? Have we not substituted the relative for the absolute, the Many for the One, diversity for unity, the human for the

divine, our own private religious experience for truth that was once also public and universal in its scope?

On these changes in the topography of our contemporary perception, there is little dispute. But the dynamic that accomplishes all of this is not seen so easily. For lying beneath these changes, and coursing through them, is a force that flings all of the components of life away from every center that we once had to a periphery that is often quite distant and even unknown. We thus lose our bearings, for we lose that truth, that divine order to which in mind and spirit we could always return, the divine order by which we understood our world, the order for which we looked in life's dark moments to re-establish our bearings. This has all broken apart. The many parts of life are scattered, its many interests and activities broken apart from one another. They have become small private worlds of special interest presided over by specialists of one sort or another. In other words, gone is the possibility that there can be in culture men and women of broad understanding who, standing at the center that God has given in his Word, can understand life's diversity in the light of its unity, can see its multiplicity in the light of the overarching themes that are common to all of it. This unity is lost. The diversity of cultures, religions, professions, and personal circumstances is triumphant. More than that, this diversity is all we have. And, as the center has collapsed, our psyches have become more and more strained, even fractured.

Those who see so plainly the effects of modernization do not, however, always see so well how this fragmentation has been loosed in the Church. Though largely unnoticed, the same dynamic is also at work here. In the Church, too, the center has been fractured, and the fragments of belief are scattered to the edges. Here, too, the person of understanding has been supplanted by the specialist.

As elsewhere in the Church, the effects of modernization are evident in what has incorrectly been identified as the evangelical movement. I say *incorrectly* because, however evangelical it may once have been, it never managed to become a movement. Movements must exhibit three characteristics: (1) there must be a commonly owned direction, (2) there must be a common basis on which that direction is owned, and (3) there must be an *esprit* that informs and motivates those who are thus joined in their common cause. What has been missing most obviously from evangelicalism is the direction, despite the best efforts by such leaders as Carl Henry in the earlier years of its current growth to provide one (see issues of *Christianity Today* from the late 1950s through the early 1970s). To be sure, there was the

semblance of common direction every time churches were rallied to the call of world evangelization, but that focus always proved too narrow to provide a lasting sense of a common direction in a culture now adrift from its moorings. Unity must be built on more than a shared desire to evangelize; it has to grow out of a broad cultural strategy, the implementation of a broad biblically worked-out view of the world. And that was never there.

As the sense of direction faded, so too did the *esprit*. Like the ancient Israelites in uncertain times, evangelicals took to their tents, each to his or her own. The enormous numerical growth of the past three decades spilled out in all directions, and the telltale signs of modernization were on every hand. Those who had marched gladly under the banner of evangelicalism and had affirmed the truths of historic Protestant orthodoxy now began to look sideways. As the theological center began to give way, there arose a multitude of evangelical amalgams with, among other things, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, special interests such as feminism, the pieties of the World Council of Churches, and radical politics. The most important thing that this potential movement needed — theological unity — grew ever thinner and more insubstantial. And as this common basis wore thin, whatever semblance of common direction there may have been dissipated with it, and the *esprit* then vanished like the morning mist.

As this fragmentation has progressed, both in culture and in Christian faith, and the center has given way, one might think that people would believe in less and less. But the reverse has happened. A culture for whom God is no longer present believes everything. Who would have imagined that as we became more and more technologically oriented, for example, millions of people would also become more and more devoted to astrology, directing their lives by what the planets were doing? Who would have expected that some of the most secularized cities, such as Los Angeles and Amsterdam, would become hosts to a growing array of bizarre cults, many of which reek of primitive superstition? Who would have thought that after two awful world wars and many subsequent conflicts, Western thought would still be indulging in the myth of inevitable progress with a devotion that makes most believers look like pikers? When we believe in nothing, we open the doors to believing anything. And the same is true within the precincts of Christian faith. As the body of common belief has shrunk and the importance of that belief has diminished within the evangelical world, there have arisen advocates for almost everything within the larger religious world. Who would have thought, for example, that *Christianity*

Today would carry a proposal for the remaking of evangelical faith that scuttled one of the cardinal beliefs of the Protestant Reformation — justification by faith?

And so I came to write this book both as a believer and as a disbeliever. I should say that immediately. Anyone who believes in God and accepts the transcendent character of biblical revelation, as I do, must reject belief in all of those myths that the modern world has fostered about itself. Indeed, I find on the one hand that I believe more than many other evangelicals and on the other hand that I believe a great deal less than most of them do — more in the center, less in the periphery; more in the importance of truth, and not at all in the fabric of modern life.

To assert my disbelief in much that the modern world holds so dear is, I know, an uncommonly pugnacious way to begin a book, but I intend no disrespect either for the reader or for the modern world. After all, I work for the one and must live with the other. The pugnacity is only in the appearance, not in the intention. The problem is that even the mildest assertion of Christian truth today sounds like a thunderclap because the well-polished civility of our religious talk has kept us from hearing much of this kind of thing. A person who enters the room by leaning on an infirm door may get a reputation for violence, John Kenneth Galbraith has said, but the condition of the door did have something to do with his precipitous entry. So it is here.

In saying that I am a staunch disbeliever in the modern world, I do not wish to appear immodest, as if I come flushed with the knowledge of a new discovery. In fact, I do not. In this connection, I well remember G. K. Chesterton's story about the restless yachtsman who set sail from England with the intention of arriving at an exotic South Sea island. After many days, he sighted land and, as soon as he could, beached his boat and ventured inland. Before him stood a dreadful pagan temple. Undaunted, he decided to claim it for England. He scaled its walls and bravely planted the Union Jack at its pinnacle. Only then did he realize that what he had scaled was the Brighton Pavilion on England's south coast! He thought that he had sailed in a straight line, but, because of an unfortunate miscalculation, he had actually traveled in a circle. He imagined that he was first in the land, but it turned out that he was the last.

I come to the subject of this book like this yachtsman, a late arrival, scaling what others have diligently built. The thought that the world takes refuge in myths and rationalizations should astonish only those who are disinclined to think of them as myths and ratio-

nalizations, those who want to hide beneath them and are dead set against being dislodged. Even those who have followed modern discussions about Western culture from afar know that I have said nothing that is new, even if it seems to have the appearance of being outrageous.

Yet I would be remiss if I failed to point out that while the angle from which I approach culture may be commonplace among some of its interpreters, it is not common among evangelicals. Evangelicals are antimodern only across a narrow front; I write from a position that is antimodern across the entire front. It is only where assumptions in culture directly and obviously contradict articles of faith that most evangelicals become aroused and rise up to battle “secular humanism”; aside from these specific matters, they tend to view culture as neutral and harmless. More than that, they often view culture as a partner amenable to being coopted in the cause of celebrating Christian truth. I cannot share that naivete; indeed, I consider it dangerous. Culture is laden with values, many of which work to rearrange the substance of faith, even when they are mediated to us through the benefits that the modern world also bestows upon us. Technology is a case in point. While it has greatly enhanced many of our capabilities and spread its largess across the entirety of our life, it also brings with it an almost inevitable naturalism and an ethic that equates what is efficient with what is good. Technology per se does not assault the gospel, but a technological society will find the gospel irrelevant. What can be said of technology can also be said of many other facets of culture that are similarly laden with values. It is the failure to see this and to see how, in consequence, evangelical faith is being transformed that is now greatly straining its connections to historic Protestant orthodoxy. It is precisely because I reject belief in the modern world that I am able to believe in the truth that this orthodoxy seeks to preserve. It is because many evangelicals believe in the innocence of modern culture and for that reason exploit it and are exploited by it that they are unable to believe in all of the truth that once characterized this Protestant orthodoxy. In the current typology, evangelicals are typically moderns in their orientation; this book is insistently antimodern.

This difference in orientation to modernity leads to a stark difference in faith. The stream of historic orthodoxy that once watered the evangelical soul is now dammed by a worldliness that many fail to recognize as worldliness because of the cultural innocence with which it presents itself. To be sure, this orthodoxy never was infallible, nor was it without its blemishes and foibles, but I am far from persuaded that the emancipation from its theological core that much of evangel-

icalism is effecting has resulted in greater biblical fidelity. In fact, the result is just the opposite. We now have less biblical fidelity, less interest in truth, less seriousness, less depth, and less capacity to speak the Word of God to our own generation in a way that offers an alternative to what it already thinks. The older orthodoxy was driven by a passion for truth, and that was why it could express itself only in theological terms. The newer evangelicalism is not driven by the same passion for truth, and that is why it is often empty of theological interest.

Let me explain how I am going to develop this case. My central purpose is to explore why it is that theology is disappearing. (This task is substantial enough in its own right that I will have to leave to another volume assessments about what can be done to reverse it.) It is already clear, however, that my approach in this book is going to be broad rather than narrow. It is not theology alone in which I am interested but theology that is driven by a passion for truth; and it is not evangelicalism alone in which I am interested but evangelicalism as the contemporary vehicle for articulating a historical Protestant orthodoxy. Why has this linkage between the past and the present broken down? Why has the passion for truth diminished? Why is it that contemporary evangelicals suppose their faith will survive intact without this passion and this theology?

I know that finding the answers to these questions may well be as complex as finding the causes of cancer. In both, there are many potentially plausible and fruitful lines of inquiry that do not seem to converge. Indeed, though they seem to be related, they often *diverge*. As in the search for a cure for cancer, so in the search for a cure for disintegrating theology and contemporary evangelicalism: there are many possible lines of inquiry, many possible solutions, but they do not always point back to the same root causes. I do not claim to have found these lines of inquiry in any complete or exhaustive way, but it has become clear to me that the disappearance of theology, in both Church and academy, is itself one of the fruits of modernization and that it has little to do with the way that theology is being constructed *per se*. Furthermore, the unraveling of the ties between contemporary evangelicalism and historic orthodoxy is not the result of a deliberate strategy but is rather one of the effects of modernity that evangelicals have unconsciously accepted.

The first two chapters of this book constitute a prologue in which I try to get at the essence of modernity so that we might more easily discern its intrusion into the mind of the Church and the minds of its scholars. I begin by reconstructing the life of a small New England

town, a town with which I have become quite familiar. As I have thought about its inner life, it has become obvious to me that about a century ago a divide was crossed, and those who live in the town today simply would not be able to recognize the town as it was then — and this not because of changes in the physical topography, the buildings and streets. Something much more profound is afoot than that. It is that, in this town as elsewhere, the entire social organization has changed and with it the very way that we are able to look at life and what we look for in life. After having documented these changes with respect to this small town, I move on to try to explain them in terms of the emergence of a new world culture that has intruded upon and enveloped this town over the past century or so, as it has every other town in America. What is this world culture like, and what does it do to the way in which we see our own world, how we think, what we want? More importantly, how has its intrusion into our psyches affected our capacity for truth, our desire to know God, and the ways in which we pursue these matters?

I begin the main part of the book with a chapter in which I lay out the problem, as I see it, in the inner life of the evangelical world. In this chapter, “Things Fall Apart,” I try to explain why the sense of truth is disappearing and what has happened to the ligaments that once held this world together. But this discussion dwells only on the dynamic of the fragmentation of evangelicalism. That itself does not provide the answer I am seeking; it simply states the problem. The explanation of this problem lies in the three chapters that follow. In two of these, I try to explain how the current expression of the American character has affected the ability of evangelicals to think in ways that are cogently biblical. In the last of these three chapters, I look at the way in which the pastorate has become professionalized, how the central function of the pastor has changed from that of truth broker to manager of the small enterprises we call churches. To the extent that this tendency has taken root, I have concluded that it is producing a new generation of pastoral disablers. At this point, I suggest a contrast between the contemporary evangelical world and the world in biblical times. This chapter, entitled “The Habits of God,” is followed by a concluding chapter in which I present a plea for a new kind of evangelical, one who is much more like the old kind used to be.

I think back now to that introductory lecture in my beginning class in theology and the student who wondered about how right it was to spend a lot of money on a course in theology given that it was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church. Such a

concern would have been incomprehensible to most generations of Christians that have preceded us. What has happened in our world that can explain a transformation so large, so deep, in the evangelical soul? The place where we will begin trying to find the answer is in a quaint New England town that you might even have seen yourself. It is called Wenham, and it is situated in Massachusetts.