

Toward the Theological Distinctives of Evangelicalism: Integrating Explicit and Implicit  
Theology in the Quest for an Evangelical Identity

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## Introduction

Many have attempted to trace the contours of Evangelicalism and provide a comprehensive summary of its history and distinctives, especially of the American and British varieties. Yet defining Evangelicalism remains challenging, in my estimation, due to both its historical and sociological diversity. After all, Evangelicals trace their history and development through the following: (1) the Protestant Reformation, (2) the convergence of Moravians, Anabaptists, Puritanism, and Pietism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, (3) the Great Awakenings, (4) the missionary movements of the last two hundred years, and (5) the liberal versus fundamentalist controversies.<sup>1</sup> With these historical, cultural, and ecclesiological influences, it's understandably difficult, if not impossible, to provide a monolithic definition of Evangelicalism.

Though no monolithic definition of Evangelicalism exists, we can analyze and evaluate the definitions and theological distinctives from a number of popular academic proposals. In this paper, I intend to primarily consider the ideas of Bebbington, McGrath, and Olson.<sup>2</sup> After analyzing the different ways in which these scholars define Evangelicalism, I will evaluate and expand upon their ideas in order to explore Evangelicalism's theological distinctives. This, in

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 20-45; Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 19-36; W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 296-352; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 76-99; Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 9-27; Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John D. Woodbridge; Frank A. James III, eds., *Church History Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 403-416.

<sup>2</sup> The recent publication of Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) raises many good questions regarding the evangelical identity. Worthen suggests that in order to explain Evangelicalism, "the logical place to start is to ask [evangelicals] what they believe" (p. 4), though she also suggests that "history—rather than theology or politics—is the most useful tool for pinning down today's evangelicals" (ibid.). Though *Apostles of Reason* is a helpful critical assessment, it is concerned more with historical and sociological issues related to a narrow form of Evangelicalism found in the United States, as the author notes (p. 5).

turn, will allow me to conclude with an observation on how Evangelicals are shaped by both explicit and implicit theological distinctions.

### **Explaining the Evangelical Phenomenon**

Perhaps the most popular and widely accepted explanation of Evangelicalism can be found in the Bebbington Quadrilateral. David Bebbington writes that “it is... preferable to identify adherents of the [Evangelical] movement by certain hallmarks”<sup>3</sup> and argues that the distinctives of Evangelicalism are as follows: (1) *Conversionism*;<sup>4</sup> (2) *Activism*;<sup>5</sup> (3) *Biblicism*;<sup>6</sup> and (4) *Crucicentrism*.<sup>7</sup>

Another definition comes via Alister McGrath. While McGrath notes that it is “notoriously difficult to give a precise definition of evangelicalism,”<sup>8</sup> he suggests that after considering Evangelicalism’s rich history and surveying global Evangelicals, there are “six controlling convictions”<sup>9</sup> for Evangelicals and adds to the Bebbington Quadrilateral (1) the Lordship of the Holy Spirit<sup>10</sup> and (2) the importance of Christian community.<sup>11</sup>

Though Bebbington’s hallmarks and McGrath’s characteristics are helpful in considering Evangelicalism, critics have pointed out that they, especially Bebbington, overlook other crucial

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<sup>3</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2; cf. Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 13ff.

<sup>4</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, 5-10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12; cf. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 55-84; Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), 32-69; Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 215-235.

<sup>6</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-17.

<sup>8</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. Note that McGrath draws heavily upon J.I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity* (Oxford: Oxford House, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-67.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-80.

elements of Evangelical identity.<sup>12</sup> Olson writes that his addition to the Bebbington Quadrilateral is “respect for historic Christian orthodoxy.”<sup>13</sup>

So what are we to make of these different approaches toward defining Evangelicalism? If we take each of the unique suggestions from Bebbington, McGrath, and Olson, we walk away with *seven* characteristics of Evangelicalism. We can summarize these characteristics as follows: (1) conversionism, (2) activism, (3) biblical authority, (4) Christocentrism,<sup>14</sup> (5) the Lordship of the Holy Spirit, (6) commitment to Christian community, and (7) respect for historic orthodoxy.

While these characteristics may appear to be simply historical-rooted definitions of Evangelicalism, it must be stated that each of these hallmarks are, at the very least, implicit *theological* statements.

### **The Theological Distinctives of Evangelicalism**

(1) *Conversionism*. Evangelicals believe strongly in Jesus’ words, “you must be born again” (John 3:7). Conversionism is a *theological* distinctive because it relates specifically to soteriology. It assumes that there is a necessity for gospel proclamation, which is why Bebbington notes that evangelical “preachers urged their hearers to turn away from their sins in repentance and to Christ in faith.”<sup>15</sup> In contrast to other Christian traditions, Evangelicals have historically emphasized that human beings have inherited a sin nature<sup>16</sup> and must place faith in

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<sup>12</sup> John G. Stackhouse also lists “transdenominationalism” as a distinguishing characteristic of Evangelicalism in Andrew Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 124-128. For the purposes of this paper, I choose to overlook this distinction because it is not as theologically rooted as those I am including (cf. Olson’s criticism of “transdenominationalism in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 157–158).

<sup>13</sup> Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 176.

<sup>14</sup> I’m combining Bebbington’s crucicentrism and McGrath’s emphasis on the majesty of Jesus Christ because they clearly overlap.

<sup>15</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 494-504; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 423–434.

Christ and his work on the cross for salvation.<sup>17</sup> The Reformation cry of *sola fide* ("by faith alone") is considered by Evangelicals to be a faithful witness to the teachings of the New Testament (e.g., John 3:16; Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8; etc.).<sup>18</sup>

While Evangelicals are united in their theological commitment to conversionism, there is a fair amount of soteriological diversity within Evangelicalism, as Calvinists and Arminians have been in the ranks since the sixteenth century. Though the debate over God's sovereignty in salvation continues, another debate related to conversionism is the issue of religious pluralism (i.e., must all human beings place faith in Christ for salvation?). Evangelicals have quite recently begun to explore this issue more fully,<sup>19</sup> though the majority of Evangelicals still maintain a commitment to the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, largely due to the influence of global Evangelicalism.<sup>20</sup>

(2) *Activism*. Bebbington demonstrates that Evangelicals take seriously the *evangel* and have historically been committed to its proclamation. This means that Evangelicals participate in both domestic and international missions work. Yet Evangelical activism has not stopped at missions; Evangelicals are active in social reform often as a further expression of missiological methodology. In fact, Bebbington states that "activism often spilled over beyond simple gospel work."<sup>21</sup>

Activism is a *theological* distinctive because it is deeply rooted in the *Missio Dei*. Over and against the radical inclusivism found within certain streams of theological liberalism,

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<sup>17</sup> A helpful challenge to the popular idea of gospel and salvation can be found in Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). McKnight demonstrates that attached to conversion must be a commitment to discipleship.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2005), 642ff.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); furthermore, the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hutchinson and Wolfe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*, 270-274.

<sup>21</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

Evangelicals assert that the Church has been given the task of both proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> The intramural debate on activism essentially comes down to the *priorities* of gospel proclamation and gospel demonstration, with some juxtaposing the Great Commission with social justice<sup>23</sup> and others delineating between the two.<sup>24</sup> Though Evangelicals often share similar praxis, these debates further suggest that activism is a *theological* distinctive due to the simple fact that the debates are biblical and theological in nature!

(3) *Biblical Authority*. In contrast with other Christian traditions, Evangelicals have long asserted that Holy Scripture functions as the *final* authority for life and doctrine.<sup>25</sup> McGrath writes that the “commitment to the total priority and authority of Scripture has become an integral element of the evangelical tradition.”<sup>26</sup> This commitment is traced back to the Reformation, especially to Luther’s ‘captivity to the Word of God’ as expressed at the Diet of Worms.<sup>27</sup> Later Reformers (e.g., Calvin) followed this same commitment to the authority of Scripture.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 130-143.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? The Answer That Changed My Life and Might Just Change the World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009); James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Most Evangelicals embrace *Sola Scriptura* over and against *Solo Scriptura*. This is to say that Evangelicals view Scripture as the final authority and other sources of revelation are subordinate, be they tradition, reason, or experience. Evangelicals *do* believe other authorities exist; they just are situated under Scripture.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 151-157.

<sup>28</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 88-93.

To be fair, the term “biblicism” in theological circles has come to be associated with a fundamentalist hermeneutic.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is more helpful to discuss how Evangelicals have a high view of Scripture in that they believe the Bible is their final authority. To this regard, few Evangelicals disagree. Interestingly, differences within Evangelicalism over the nature of Scripture are somewhat contextualized nationalistically. Brian Stanley argues that in Britain the argument has been over the nature of *inspiration* whereas in the United States the argument has been over *inerrancy*.<sup>30</sup> Despite these differences, it’s quite clear that Evangelicals have a high view for Holy Scripture.

(4) *Christocentrism*. John Stott wrote that Jesus is “the centre of history... the focus of Scripture... the heart of mission.”<sup>31</sup> Christianity has *always* been centered on Jesus. The missionary and scholar Stephen Charles Neill stated:

The old saying “Christianity is Christ” is almost exactly true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls.<sup>32</sup>

The great neo-orthodox Protestant theologian Karl Barth<sup>33</sup> believed that Jesus was the center of theology and Kimlyn J. Bender states that “for Barth, to consider and formulate a Christian doctrine in isolation from the revelation given in Christ results in an abstract doctrine

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<sup>29</sup> Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 104-111; Michael F. Bird, “Inerrancy is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 3, Location 2448-2914; Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> John Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 15-16.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted in McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> I include Karl Barth in this paper well aware that some suggest that he is *not* an Evangelical. However, this rejection is largely due to the influence of Cornelius Van Til and, in my estimation, is not a sustainable argument; cf. Gavin Ortlund, “Wholly Other or Wholly Given Over: What Van Til Missed in his Criticism of Barth,” *Presbyterian* 35.1 (2009): 35-52.

that has lost its moorings and can be regarded only as speculative.”<sup>34</sup> Barth’s Christological emphasis is an excellent example of how Evangelicals value the “majesty of Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Since this Christological emphasis, which is inherently theological, is shared by many Christian traditions, what of the Evangelical approach is unique? For Bebbington, the unique contribution is found in the *focus* on the atoning work of Christ because “to make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism.”<sup>36</sup>

Recently, atonement theories have taken center stage for Evangelical theologians.<sup>37</sup> While John Stott’s classic work on substitutionary atonement<sup>38</sup> still remains influential, Evangelicals have also begun to explore other theories in the hopes of embracing a well-rounded global and missional understanding of what Scripture teaches concerning Christ’s work on the cross.<sup>39</sup> Make no mistake, Evangelicals are passionate about Jesus and his cross.

(5) *The Lordship of the Holy Spirit*. McGrath has written that “the Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time.”<sup>40</sup> This may be true of other Christian traditions but it cannot be said of Evangelicalism. Evangelicals have *always* had a high regard for the Holy Spirit. In fact, McGrath has also stated that “Evangelicals give an important place to the Holy Spirit, seeing that Spirit as the one who brings spiritual understanding and rebirth, who seals our knowledge of our salvation, and who works to conform us to Christ.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kimlyn J. Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 3.

<sup>35</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 60.

<sup>36</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, eds., *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, Second Edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Fifth Edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 227.

<sup>41</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 63.



With the rapid growth and influence of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement,<sup>42</sup> Evangelicals have continued to develop a significantly more robust pneumatology, especially within the past thirty years.<sup>43</sup> This is largely due to criticisms by Continuationists.<sup>44</sup> While not all Evangelicals have embraced Continuationism, they *have* continued to embrace a Trinitarian theology that views the Spirit as more than an effectual means of salvation.<sup>45</sup>

This tends to be the *theological distinction* of Evangelical pneumatology. While Evangelicals understand that the Spirit is involved in initiatory soteriological issues, they do not relegate the Spirit to *only* being involved in salvation.<sup>46</sup> In addition to the Spirit's role in individual and corporate spiritual formation,<sup>47</sup> the Spirit is active in Evangelical ecclesiology, which leads us to the next theological distinction.<sup>48</sup>

(6) *Commitment to Christian community.* Bursting forth from and lying under the hallmarks provided by Bebbington, McGrath, etc. are deeply ecclesiological distinctives. Yet when we talk about Evangelicalism and ecclesiology, we enter into an arena that has long been

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<sup>42</sup> Allan H. Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 247-257.

<sup>43</sup> It must be stated that I view the majority of Pentecostals/Charismatics as within the large umbrella of Evangelicalism; cf. Bryon D. Klaus, "Why I Am an Evangelical and a Pentecostal," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity*, ed. Anthony L. Chute (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 151-175.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., see Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984, 2012); Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); Jon Mark Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles*, Revised & Expanded Edition (Tulsa: Word & Spirit Press, 2011). Responses to these criticisms, and evidence for pneumatological development with Evangelical scholarship, can be found in James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today*, Second Edition (London: SCM Press, 2010); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 373-393.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., see Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005). *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?* is fascinating because it is written primarily by Cessationists who sought to explore and embrace "pneumatic Christianity."

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 846-895.

<sup>48</sup> Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 209-258. It is worth mentioning that spiritual formation is related to ecclesiological issues (cf. Fee, *ibid.*).

troubling to scholars. In fact, Simon Chan writes that ecclesiology is “one of the least developed areas of Protestant thought, especially among evangelicals,”<sup>49</sup> though D. G. Hart acknowledges that “evangelical ecclesiology, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.”<sup>50</sup>

When we consider the history of Evangelicals, we observe that they have traditionally placed a high value on *gathering together* “for the tasks of evangelism, spiritual nourishment, teaching, and discipling.”<sup>51</sup> Evangelical ecclesiology<sup>52</sup> certainly has many facets of diversity (e.g., Baptist and Presbyterian polities), yet “it is ultimately a reflection of its distinctive belief that the church is the body which gathers where the gospel is truly preached.”<sup>53</sup> Evangelicals love the church.

(7) *Respect for historic orthodoxy.* Olson states that he “cannot conceive of genuine evangelical faith in a total doctrinal vacuum or in a context of radical rejection of the hard-won doctrinal orthodoxy of the early church fathers and sixteenth-century Reformers.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, Evangelicals have a “deferential respect for historic Christian orthodoxy.”<sup>55</sup> Though some may question how Evangelicals remains committed to the authority of Scripture as well as having a respect for the Great Tradition, Olson clarifies that “deference to traditional, basic

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<sup>49</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 103; cf. Chan, *Liturgical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 35-39.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *The Community of the Word* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>51</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 73. Note that Evangelicals originally intended to work together, though “transdenominationalism” has not always been carried out in practice; cf. Roger E. Olson, “A Postconservative Evangelical Response,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 157–158. For a short summary of the history of Evangelical denominations, see David S. Dockery, “Denominationalism: Historical Developments, Contemporary Challenges, and Global Opportunities,” in *Why We Belong*, ed. Chute, 209-231.

<sup>52</sup> For an excellent Evangelical ecclesiology, see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 20012).

<sup>53</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 176.

<sup>55</sup> Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 60.

Christian orthodoxy” is always done “within a higher commitment to the authority of God’s Word.”<sup>56</sup>

In evaluating Olson’s characteristic, one must acknowledge that there is, like all other characteristics, diversity here. Harold O. J. Brown wrote that Evangelicalism “refuses to be liberal, but it is not theological enough to be orthodox.”<sup>57</sup> This has certainly changed within the past thirty years as Evangelicalism has developed and become more theologically informed, though anti-intellectualism still has its roots with certain members.<sup>58</sup>

### **Affirming the Implicit Evangelical Distinctive**

Thus far we’ve seen explicit and historically articulated summaries of Evangelical distinctives. Yet I want to argue, for a moment, that Evangelical theological distinctives should not be considered apart from one *implicit* concept, namely the priesthood of all believers.<sup>59</sup> Though few scholars list the priesthood of all believers as a distinctive of Evangelicalism,<sup>60</sup> it goes assumed in the movement as part of its ecclesiological ethos in both theology *and* praxis. After all, as John Wesley stated, “the Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote the Bible, but continually inspires those who read it with earnest prayer.”<sup>61</sup> While other traditions have been known for *discouraging* non-clergy from reading Scripture and participating in the work of ministry, Evangelicalism has spread because it has placed the *evangel* at its heart and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>57</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 428.

<sup>58</sup> Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, Kindle Electronic Edition: Introduction, Location 168-230.

<sup>59</sup> Though the lack of academic study on the subject is startling, for helpful works see Cyril Easterwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present* (London: Epworth Press, 1960); Alex T. M. Cheung, “The Priest as the Redeemed Man: A Biblical-Theological Study of the Priesthood,” *JETS* 29/3 (1986): 265-275; Robert A. Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-First Century: Living Faithfully as the Whole People of God in a Postmodern Context* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Scholars tend to see the priesthood of all believers as part of the historical heritage via Luther and the Protestant Reformation, cf. Hutchinson and Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*, 30; it is listed as a historical identifying marker of early evangelicals by Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> As quoted in McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 55.

soul in the hands of *all* of its members. Bird states that “the gospel is the glue between doctrine, experience, mission, and practice”<sup>62</sup> and Evangelicals have applied that glue to all who self-identify with the movement, giving everyone a chance to participate in the *Missio Dei*.

Thus, the theological distinctives of Evangelicalism are identifiably explicit while being surrounded and supported by an implicit framework. Without the priesthood of all believers, the Evangelical tradition would never have spread as rapidly or as globally as it has.<sup>63</sup>

While Evangelicals haven’t always clearly defined their theological convictions, perhaps one of the reasons *why* is due to the fact that their distinctives are often *implicit* and *assumed*. In other words, Evangelicals have not always used language to describe their underlying theological convictions and corresponding distinctives because their views are simply implied by their praxis and assumed in their defining hallmarks. To these hallmarks we must add the priesthood of all believers.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Why an Evangelical Theology, Location 298.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 215-235.

<sup>64</sup> Space does not permit us to discuss the differences in how Evangelicals understand the priesthood of all believers, though it should be mentioned that differences exist. E.g., Luther stressed the priesthood of *baptized* believers, though many Evangelicals would reject Luther’s more sacramental perspective.

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Theological Distinctives of the Lausanne Covenant. The Lausanne Movement is simultaneously an evangelical movement as well as a profoundly ecumenical one. As part of the ecumenical movement, Lausanne stands in the tradition of the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches, but Lausanne has flourished, in part, because it is a movement rather than an organization per se. One of the most important theological distinctives which arises out of placing missions within the larger work of God's mission in the world is the recognition that the advance of the church is ultimately not a logistical or institutional task, but is rooted in a cosmic spiritual conflict which must be faced by prayer and the recognition of the nature of spiritual warfare.