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## How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Evangelistic Practice in Light of the Concept of Worldview

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**HOW SHOULD WE THEN WITNESS? A PLEA FOR REEXAMINING  
EVANGELICAL EVANGELISTIC PRACTICE IN LIGHT OF THE  
CONCEPT OF WORLDVIEW<sup>1</sup>**

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Adam W. Greenway

**abstract**

This article's purpose is to explore the issue of evangelistic renewal within evangelicalism. Discussions concerning the decline of evangelism are ubiquitous, and many evangelicals have called for greater attention to discipleship and follow up as the prescription to this acknowledged malady. This essay argues that the more critical need is to intentionally factor the concept of worldview into the development of contemporary evangelistic strategies and methods to more effectively reach postmodern persons.

The article commences with an exploration and definition of the concept of worldview itself. Of particular focus here is how worldview interplays with theology and praxis. A brief examination of prototypical evangelical evangelistic approaches and literature follows. Critical to this discussion is the assumed or implicit worldviews of both the evangelist and the recipient which may underlie acceptance or rejection. An articulation of a biblical model for worldview-based evangelism is the penultimate task. Some final thoughts regarding the titular question, "How should we then witness?" conclude the essay.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is a revised and condensed version of my paper by the same name originally presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, DC, 16 November 2006.

From the sympathetic admirer's vantage point, a landscape survey of Christianity's largest non-Catholic denomination yields some fairly impressive sights. The group's official website carries the following vigorous introduction:

Since its organization in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has grown to more than 16 million members who worship in more than 42,000 churches in the United States. Southern Baptists sponsor about 5,000 home missionaries serving the United States, Canada, Guam and the Caribbean, as well as sponsoring more than 5,000 foreign missionaries in 153 nations of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Most notably, over the course of the last three decades, the SBC has seen its seminaries purged of pernicious liberalism and neoorthodoxy, its denominational agencies restructured and streamlined, its confession of faith updated and clarified, and its elected and appointed leadership resting firmly in the hands of inerrantist "resurgent conservatives."<sup>3</sup> On the surface, one would seemingly surmise that all is well in this evangelical Zion.

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### rainer research reveals . . .

Yet with respect to perhaps its most important barometer of health—evangelistic effectiveness—the Southern Baptist Convention may be much more anemic than has been previously acknowledged. Prolific church growth researcher Thom S. Rainer painstakingly explored this issue in an essay<sup>4</sup> that received fairly wide circulation among evangelicals.<sup>5</sup> His central thesis was that "the conservative

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<sup>2</sup> "About the Southern Baptist Convention" [on-line]; accessed 11 January 2011; available from <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> The term "conservative resurgence" (or "fundamentalist takeover," depending upon one's point of view) refers to the concerted effort in the Southern Baptist Convention, led by Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, and Adrian Rogers, to elect Convention presidents who via their appointive powers would effectively redirect the SBC and its entities away from a moderate-to-liberal path and toward a solidly conservative one. While outside the scope and purpose of this essay to extensively detail this movement, for the most comprehensive historical treatment currently in print see Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Thom S. Rainer, "A Resurgence Not Yet Realized: Evangelistic Effectiveness in the Southern Baptist Convention Since 1979," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (Spring 2005): 54–69. At the time of publication, Rainer served as Dean of The Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He currently is President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, and recently released a revised and updated edition of this article entitled "A Resurgence Not Yet Fulfilled: Evangelistic Effectiveness in the Southern Baptist Convention Since 1979," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 29–49. In 2010, the Great Commission Research Network awarded him their highest honor, the Donald A. McGavran Award for Outstanding Leadership in Church Growth.

<sup>5</sup> A simple online search revealed several Christian media outlets, including Baptist Press, Associated Baptist Press, Religion News Service, and numerous state Baptist papers, had carried excerpts from or editorials referencing Rainer's original essay.

**Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Ev**  
resurgence that began in 1979 in the Southern Baptist Convention has *not* resulted in a greater evangelistic effectiveness in the denomination.”<sup>6</sup> Rainer quickly added the corollary that “without the resurgence, the evangelistic effectiveness of the denomination would be much worse.”<sup>7</sup> However, the stark reality of the situation is nonetheless grim: “To use a medical metaphor, the resurgence slowed the bleeding of lost effectiveness, but the patient is still not well. Despite great expectations of an evangelistic harvest, the Southern Baptist Convention is in no better condition evangelistically than it was in 1979.”<sup>8</sup> Even worse, “. . . the Southern Baptist Convention is reaching no more people today than it did in 1950.”<sup>9</sup> While Rainer did recount a brief glimmer of hope from 1994 to 1999 with “the longest uptrend in baptisms since 1950 . . . the growth trend did not continue. With the advent of the new millennium, baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention have declined for four consecutive years.”<sup>10</sup>

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In attempting to discern the reasons underlying the evangelistic malaise plaguing the SBC, Rainer offered six hypotheses: lessening of American gospel receptivity, increasing socioeconomic affluence, unevangelistic denominational leaders, inadequate recognition of churches with conversion growth, unregenerate church members, and the reality of a few churches accounting for the majority of baptisms.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing that “evangelistic effectiveness is ultimately an issue of each local congregation,”<sup>12</sup> Rainer concluded his incisive essay with five proposals for evangelistic renewal within the Southern Baptist Convention:

1. Seminaries should strive to become thoroughly evangelistic.
2. Recognize effective evangelistic churches in the Southern Baptist Convention.
3. Conduct more research on less evangelistic churches.
4. Focus evangelistic training resources on pastors.
5. Encourage pastors and other local church leaders to lead their churches to a time of corporate confession and repentance for their lack of evangelistic zeal.<sup>13</sup>

While highly appreciative of Rainer’s research and heartily affirmative of each of Rainer’s recommendations, this article’s purpose is to argue for a sixth proposal to help bring about increased evangelistic effectiveness. The focus here is not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 55, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 57. Rainer continued, “In 1950 Southern Baptist churches baptized 376,085 persons. In 2003 the total baptisms were 377,357, a difference of only one-third of one percent.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 61–64.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 64–68.

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merely upon Southern Baptist Convention congregations, but the entire evangelical  
church spectrum, as Rainer's research methodology could undoubtedly yield  
similar results elsewhere. Simply stated, that additional recommendation is:

6. Bring the concept of worldview to bear upon the practice of both personal  
and local church evangelism, particularly in terms of strategy and resource  
development.

This proposal arises not from the conviction that Rainer has somehow missed  
an otherwise obvious antidote to the SBC's evangelistic malady and thus offers  
only a partial prescription for health. No single "silver bullet" exists that upon  
implementation would transform the SBC, or for that matter any evangelical body,  
from apathy, atrophy, and lethargy, to vibrancy, vitality, and zeal concerning  
evangelism and missions.<sup>14</sup> Much work remains to fully accomplish a true Great  
Commission resurgence so desperately needed within American Christianity, and  
Rainer deserves praise for not simply identifying the problem, but for offering  
tangible solutions. Yet it seems that something more may be needed—indeed, a  
more fundamental reorientation of mindset and methodology that better  
integrates worldview with witness. With the aforementioned in mind, examining  
the concept of worldview itself is of first importance.

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### **understanding worldview**

Philologically, "worldview" is an English translation of the German word  
*Weltanschauung*, literally, "world perception."<sup>15</sup> Coined by Immanuel Kant in  
1790, *Weltanschauung* first appeared in English as "world-view" in 1858.<sup>16</sup> Though  
its roots lay in German idealism, the term "worldview" came into prominence  
amongst Christian thinkers via the work of Scottish Presbyterian notable James  
Orr, and was later built upon by the contributions of Dutch Reformed theologians  
Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd.<sup>17</sup> Until fairly recently, however,  
surprisingly little work had been done by evangelicals in attempting to define a

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<sup>14</sup> One might respond to this assertion that true revival and spiritual awakening would indeed bring about precisely the kind of evangelistic and missional renewal both Rainer and this writer are desirous of and thereby be that "silver bullet." While such a point is well taken, revival and awakening, when understood biblically, always originate with a sovereign work of God and cannot be seen as a human strategy or innovation. True revival is for regenerated humanity to receive, not to create or attempt to produce. The focus of both this essay and Rainer's is upon that which the Southern Baptist Convention, and broader evangelicalism by extension, can and should do to bring about greater evangelistic effectiveness. Thus, the rationale behind "no single 'silver bullet' exists" concerns human conceptualization and initiative, not divine capacity or power.

<sup>15</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–29; see also Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 24.

Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Eschatology: A Precise Understanding of the Term “Worldview.” Fortunately, that situation has begun to change.

In his deceptively small work *Worldviews in Conflict*, the late Ronald Nash offered a straightforward definition of worldview. “In its simplest terms, a worldview is a set of beliefs about the most important issues in life,” adding that, “. . . these beliefs must cohere in some way and form a system. A fancy term that can be useful here is *conceptual scheme*, by which I mean a pattern or arrangement of concepts (ideas). A worldview, then, is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.”<sup>18</sup> Norman Geisler argues that “a *worldview* is analogous to an intellectual lens through which people view reality and that the color of the lens is a strong determining factor that contributes to what they believe about the world.”<sup>19</sup> James Sire expands on both Nash’s and Geisler’s understandings with his self-described “succinct definition”:

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A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>20</sup>

Sire proceeds to list seven questions that he argues when answered entail the constituent parts of a person’s worldview:

1. *What is the prime reality—the really real?*
2. *What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?*
3. *What is a human being?*
4. *What happens to a person at death?*
5. *Why is it possible to know anything at all?*
6. *How do we know what is right and wrong?*
7. *What is the meaning of human history?*<sup>21</sup>

To the person tempted to ask if most human beings really ever engage in such mental speculation as outlined above, Sire forthrightly remarks, “The fact is that we cannot avoid assuming some answers to such questions. We will adopt either one stance or another. Refusing to adopt an explicit worldview will turn out itself

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 16, emphasis original.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions about the Christian Faith* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2001), 55, emphasis original.

<sup>20</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17, emphasis original.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21, emphasis original.

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 [2022], Art. 7 to be a worldview, or at least a philosophical position. In short, we are caught. So long as we live, we will live either the examined or the unexamined life.”<sup>22</sup> He proceeds to elucidate and critique nine possible worldviews: Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, New Age philosophy, and postmodernism, ultimately arguing for the superiority of the Christian theistic worldview.<sup>23</sup>

In a similar vein, Geisler argues that there are seven major worldviews, and that “with one exception, pantheism/polytheism, no one can consistently believe in more than one worldview, because the central premises are mutually exclusive.”<sup>24</sup>

Those seven worldviews as articulated by Geisler are listed below:

1. Theism: an infinite, personal God exists beyond and in the universe.
2. Deism: God is beyond the universe, but not in it.
3. Atheism: No God exists beyond or in the universe.
4. Pantheism: God is the All/Universe.
5. Panentheism: God is in the universe, as a mind is in a body.
6. Finite Godism: A finite God exists beyond and in the universe.
7. Polytheism: Many gods exist beyond the world and in it.<sup>25</sup>

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Nash turned his discussion in a slightly different direction, arguing that “the major competition to the Christian worldview in the part of the world normally thought of as Christendom is a system that often goes by the name of naturalism.”<sup>26</sup> According to Nash, “A naturalist, then, is someone who believes (or who would believe if he or she were consistent) the following propositions: (1) Only nature exists. . . . (2) Nature has always existed. . . . (3) Nature is characterized by total uniformity. . . . (4) Nature is a deterministic system. . . . (5) Nature is a materialistic system. . . . [and] (6) Nature is a self-explanatory system.”<sup>27</sup> James Parker III more bluntly describes naturalism as “the view that nature is ultimately ruled not by God but by the unthinking and uncaring forces of nature.”<sup>28</sup> One needs only to consider the pervasiveness of Darwinian evolutionary theory to recognize how potent naturalism is in contemporary society.<sup>29</sup>

While it is debatable precisely how many worldviews exist, the key question at this juncture is what precisely then does the Christian worldview look like? Naugle

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 242–50.

<sup>24</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 786.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 116.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–20.

<sup>28</sup> James Parker III, “Afterword,” in *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies*, ed. William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 275.

<sup>29</sup> See William A. Dembski, ed., *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), for an incisive exposé on Darwinism’s thoroughly naturalistic intellectual moorings.

understanding of worldview:

1. The objective existence of the trinitarian God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose word, wisdom, and law define and govern all aspects of created existence.
2. Human beings as God's image and likeness are anchored and integrated in the heart as the subjective sphere of consciousness which is decisive for shaping a vision of life and fulfilling the function typically ascribed to the notion of *Weltanschauung*.
3. The catastrophic effects of sin on the human heart and mind, resulting in the fabrication of idolatrous belief systems in place of God and the engagement of the human race in cosmic spiritual warfare in which the truth about reality and the meaning of life is at stake.
4. The gracious inbreaking of the kingdom of God into human history in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who atones for sin, defeats the principalities and powers, and enables those who believe in him to obtain a knowledge of the true God and a proper understanding of the world as his creation.<sup>30</sup>

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To the question regarding how worldviews are formed, Naugle responds, "From a Christian perspective, there is a source that is not subordinate to either nature or nurture, and in fact can overcome the impact of both if they have been detrimental in shaping the person's life. . . . From a biblical perspective, therefore, the formation of a Christian worldview is ultimately a function of God's grace and redemption."<sup>31</sup>

### **nashville, we have a problem . . .**

So what does all this discussion concerning worldview have to do with evangelism? Consider for a moment the present state of American culture at-large via a recent book cover:

"The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world," leading religious scholar Diana Eck writes in this eye-opening guide to the religious realities of America today. The Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated the quotas linking immigration to national origins. Since then, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, and new varieties of Jews and Catholics

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<sup>30</sup> Naugle, *Worldview*, 259–89, emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.



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have arrived from every part of the globe, radically altering the religious  
landscape of the United States. Members of the world's religions live not just  
on the other side of the world but in our neighborhoods; Hindu children go to  
school with Jewish children; Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs work side-by-side  
with Protestants and Catholics.

This new religious diversity is now a Main Street phenomenon, yet many  
Americans remain unaware of the profound change taking place at every level  
of our society, from local school boards to Congress, and in small-town  
Nebraska as well as New York City. Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and  
Buddhist temples, and meditation centers can be found in virtually every major  
American metropolitan area. There are Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in  
Salt Lake City, Utah; Toledo, Ohio; and Jackson, Mississippi. Buddhism has  
become an American religion, as communities widely separated in Asia are  
now neighbors in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Chicago. Eck discovers Muslims  
worshiping in a U-Haul dealership in Pawtucket, Rhode Island; a gymnasium  
in Oklahoma City; and a former mattress showroom in Northridge, California.  
Hindu temples are housed in a warehouse in Queens, a former YMCA in New  
Jersey, and a former Methodist church in Minneapolis.<sup>32</sup>

Harry Lee Poe offers a concise encapsulation of the dilemma the church thus  
faces:

For centuries, Christianity has enjoyed most favored religion status in the  
Western world. People agreed about the basic worldview of Christianity even if  
they did not accept its faith commitments. Even the person who did not believe  
in God had the Christian understanding of God in mind when rejecting God.  
All of that is now rapidly changing. It has not completely changed, but it is  
changing as a new paganism becomes the worldview of people in the United  
States. In this situation Christians are hard-pressed to know what to do.<sup>33</sup>

Put simply, the evangelistic strategies designed and utilized by many churches  
and individuals within the realm of evangelicalism are ill-suited, if not utterly  
doomed to failure, given the realities of twenty-first century American culture. Yet  
these methodologies continue to be used and promulgated as if the problem lay  
somewhere other than the strategy itself. By way of illustration, consider for a  
moment two stalwart components of the twentieth century evangelistic church's  
arsenal—gospel tracts and witness training programs.

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<sup>32</sup> Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), inside cover flap and back cover. Eck is professor of comparative religion at Harvard University.

<sup>33</sup> Harry Lee Poe, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 14.

## Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Ev the gospel in a booklet

The name Billy Graham is synonymous with contemporary American evangelism. According to his ministry's website, "[Billy] Graham has preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—nearly 215 million people in more than 185 countries and territories—through various meetings, including Mission World and Global Mission. Hundreds of millions more have been reached through television, video, film, and webcasts."<sup>34</sup>

One of the things for which Graham is best known is his popular tract *Steps to Peace with God*,<sup>35</sup> first published in the early 1950s and revised several times since then.<sup>36</sup> The tract outlines four steps to personal salvation:

1. God's Purpose—Peace and Life

God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life—abundant and eternal.

2. The Problem—Our Separation

God created us in His own image to have an abundant life. He did not make us as robots to automatically love and obey Him. God gave us a will and a freedom of choice. We chose to disobey God and go our own willful way. We still make this choice today. This results in separation from God.

3. God's Bridge—The Cross

Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the grave. He paid the penalty for our sin and bridged the gap between God and people.

4. Our Response—Receive Christ

We must trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and receive Him by personal invitation.<sup>37</sup>

While readily conceding that many persons have received Christ as Lord and Savior through the sharing of this tract, one question immediately comes to mind in light of the above presentation. What about the person to whom the tract is given who responds, "Oh, I don't believe in God, thank you"? How about the Hindu neighbors that, according to Eck, may live around the corner—will the tract even gain a reading with them?<sup>38</sup> The answer to such a rhetorical question is obviously "no," but why?

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<sup>34</sup> "Billy Graham: Profile" [on-line]; accessed 11 January 2011; available from [http://www.billygraham.org/biographies\\_show.asp?p=1&d=1](http://www.billygraham.org/biographies_show.asp?p=1&d=1); Internet.

<sup>35</sup> Billy Graham, *Steps to Peace with God* (Garland, TX: American Tract Society, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Paul Harrison Chitwood, "The Sinner's Prayer: An Historical and Theological Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 56. He notes that "the exact date of its first publication seems to be unknown."

<sup>37</sup> Graham, *Steps to Peace with God*. Each point is followed by several Scriptures.

<sup>38</sup> Perhaps an even more probing question to ask at this point is, "Would the average evangelical Christian even be willing to take the time to share a tract with such a neighbor?"

Graham's tract is written *from* a Christian theistic worldview. This fact should surprise no one given Graham's explicit evangelical commitments expressed consistently throughout his now seven decades in Christian ministry. Equally important to notice is that *Steps to Peace with God* is written *for* a Christian theistic worldview. Put another way, those for whom the tract was seemingly designed are persons who consciously or subconsciously hold to a worldview that, among other things, is open to or accepts a personal Creator God and biblical authority. Conversely, the person whose worldview lacks or excludes such notions will find Graham's tract, and by extension the vast majority of Christian tracts circulating today,<sup>39</sup> incoherent and irrelevant.

### **soul-winning made easy**

In a similar fashion, local church witness training programs became a staple of evangelistic evangelicalism in the latter twentieth century, particularly with the success of the late D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*.<sup>40</sup> Nearly all witness training programs follow the same basic outline—introductory conversation, diagnostic question, outlined gospel presentation, and call for response or sinner's prayer. The key element in each approach is the diagnostic question, for it serves to transition the conversation from secular matters to spiritual ones. For example, in *Evangelism Explosion*, there are two diagnostic questions, "Do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in heaven?" and "If God were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into My heaven?' what would you say?" This approach is designed to segue naturally into a gospel presentation with the evangelizer sharing, "*Did you know that the Bible tells . . . How You Can Know For Sure that you have eternal life and will go to be with God in heaven?*"<sup>41</sup>

But what happens when a sincere believer shares the diagnostic questions above with an unregenerate person, and the response goes something like, "Look, frankly, I don't believe in God or heaven, thank you"? The taken-back evangelizer

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<sup>39</sup> Another popular example is Bill Bright's ubiquitous booklet, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, which according to his memorial website (<http://billbright.ccci.org/staff/>), "has been printed in some 200 languages and distributed to more than 2.5 billion people, making it the most widely disseminated religious booklet in history." The laws are: (1) God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. (2) Man is sinful and separated from God, thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life. (3) Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. (4) We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives. Like *Steps to Peace with God*, *The Four Spiritual Laws* is obviously written both *from* and *for* the Christian theistic worldview, and thus is subject to the same problems raised above.

<sup>40</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2002). The official website claims more than 5.2 million professions of faith were made in 2008 alone as a result of this program. See "Annual Results" [online]; accessed 11 January 2011; available from [http://www.eeinternational.org/pages/page.asp?page\\_id=24033](http://www.eeinternational.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=24033); Internet.

<sup>41</sup> The entire *Evangelism Explosion* gospel presentation is available in a flash format online at <http://KnowForSure.org>, from which the quoted materials are taken from, including original emphases.

**Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Ev** might attempt to still share that “the Bible tells how you can know for sure,” but for the person who disavows belief in both divine persons and places, this statement is nothing but nonsensical drivel. The encounter is effectively over before it even began.

What is the problem? In a nutshell, *Evangelism Explosion*, like the aforementioned *Steps to Peace with God* tract, is written not only *from* a Christian theistic worldview, but *for* such a worldview. Thus, the presentation is incoherent, and thereby irrelevant, to the person whose noetic structure is not consonant with the worldview of Christian theism. Again in fairness, *Evangelism Explosion* is not alone in this dilemma.<sup>42</sup>

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Besides arising from and being directed toward those embracing the Christian theistic worldview, there is perhaps one other point to be made about gospel tracts and witness training programs. Both are in a sense “scripts,” or formulaic memorizations used to communicate truths. One need only to read through training manuals or tracts to see the use of such script-like language—“Say these words,” “Pray this prayer,” “Follow these steps.” Such approaches are reflective of two inherently American values brought to bear upon the evangelistic task—organization and efficiency.

Bill Bright explicitly affirms such when recalling an experience in 1958 that laid the groundwork for his ministry approach via Campus Crusade for Christ:

One of our speakers for staff training that summer was a Christian layman who was an outstanding sales consultant, a man who had taught thousands of salesmen how to sell. One of the main points of one of his addresses was that to be a successful salesman a man must have a pitch . . . He compared the witnessing Christian to the secular salesman. To be effective in our ministry for Christ, we must have, in his words, “a spiritual pitch.”<sup>43</sup>

Taking this advice to heart, Bright wrote down his usual presentation of the gospel, entitling it “God’s Plan for Your Life,” and asked each member of his staff

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<sup>42</sup> A more recent example is the FAITH Sunday School Evangelism Strategy, developed and popularized by former Southern Baptist Convention president Bobby Welch and published by the SBC’s resource provider, LifeWay. Its diagnostic question, called the “key question,” is, “In your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven?” According to the training literature, there are four possible answers: Faith (“indicating an understanding and personal acceptance that eternity and heaven can only be experienced by trusting Jesus as Savior”), works (“if they live a good life by doing good things, or at least avoiding serious offenses, then they will be rewarded with heaven”), unclear (“does not readily indicate his or her spiritual condition—for example ‘I love God’ or ‘I believe in God’”), and no opinion (“may indicate a lack of interest or an inability to express one’s thoughts”). But what happens if a person gives the same response to the FAITH key question that was given to the *Evangelism Explosion* diagnostic questions, “Look, frankly, I don’t believe in God or heaven, thank you”? It seems that such an answer cannot be equated with any of the four responses given in the FAITH training literature, demonstrating the assumed Christian theistic worldview underlying the FAITH evangelism strategy, and thus the inability to deal with persons who do not fit neatly into such noetic categories.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Bright, *Come Help Change the World* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, 1985), 25.

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to memorize this twenty-minute approach. Yet Bright soon realized that even this approach was not efficient enough:

Though we had found the 20-minute presentation of God's Plan to be extremely effective,<sup>44</sup> we realized that we needed a much shorter version of the gospel in order to communicate quickly, clearly and simply to those whose hearts were already prepared to receive Christ. I prepared a condensed outline of God's Plan, complete with Scripture verses and diagrams and asked the staff to memorize it.<sup>45</sup>

This condensed booklet became *The Four Spiritual Laws*, the "success" of which has been mentioned earlier.<sup>46</sup>

While efficiency and organization may have been the underlying motivations behind gospel tracts and witnessing training programs, it is clearly evident that worldview concerns were not. Remarkably, the assumption seems to be that both the evangelizer and the evangelized work from identical noetic structures and thus all unregenerate persons fit nicely into precisely defined categories. In the America of yesteryear, such an assumption perhaps once was valid, but as Eck lucidly demonstrates, such homogeneity is rapidly vanishing, even within the so-called "Bible belt." Perhaps Bob Dylan summarized the present dilemma best when he crooned over forty years ago, "The times they are a-changing."<sup>47</sup>

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### recommendations for evangelistic renewal

No essayists worth their salt identify problems and offer only criticism without simultaneously providing potential solutions. This article's central thesis has been that the implications of the concept of worldview need to be brought to bear upon the work and practice of evangelical evangelization. The opening illustrations and previous discussion have served to illustrate the problematic present conditions. What follows are suggestions, by no means exhaustive, on how this proposal for evangelistic renewal can be practically implemented.

(1) *Move away from an unhealthy reliance upon "script" approaches, and focus instead on presenting the entire content of the gospel itself.* While largely promoted for the sake of efficiency, the entire "gospel as script" approach has undoubtedly led to problematic methodologies and spurious conversions, as Elliff's earlier

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<sup>44</sup> He commented elsewhere, "Because of this one type of presentation alone, our ministry was multiplied a hundredfold during the next year." See *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> See footnote 38.

<sup>47</sup> Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changing" [on-line]; accessed 11 January 2011; available from <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/the-times-they-are-a-changin>; Internet.

Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical Evangelical statistical analysis demonstrates. One need only to think of that hallmark of the modern evangelical church and evangelistic crusade, the “altar call” or “invitation system,” an approach born out a desire for efficiency that has led many to embrace a sort of “decisional regeneration,” equating the walking of an aisle with personal salvation.<sup>48</sup> Even the “sinner’s prayer” can be suspect, as the emphasis is most often placed upon instructing unregenerate persons how to “accept Jesus into your heart”—verbiage found nowhere in the New Testament, ironically. As Paul Chitwood noted in his dissertation on this subject, “The sinner once was instructed to phrase the question, ‘Will you accept me?’ The sinner is now instructed to make the statement, ‘I will accept Thee.’”<sup>49</sup> One must wonder what is being accepted at times when less than complete gospel presentations are given and sinner’s prayers prayed.<sup>50</sup> Nothing short of a recovery of the whole gospel is needed.

While outside of the scope of this essay to give a comprehensive treatment of the *kerygma*, a proposal from Poe is worth mentioning. In his work *The Gospel and Its Meaning: A Theology for Evangelism and Church Growth*,<sup>51</sup> Poe listed nine basic elements:

1. *The Creator God*—Salvation came as a work of the Creator who has the right to all creation and who exercises authority over all creation.
2. *The fulfillment*—Jesus came to fulfill Scripture rather than to abolish the faith of Israel, and stands in continuity with all God had spoken by the prophets as the culmination point of Israel’s relations with the God of Creation.
3. *Son of God/Son of David*—Jesus stood uniquely related to God and humanity, which suited him alone to be the Savior, as demonstrated by his teaching and demonstrations of power.
4. *Death for sins*—The death of Christ came as the plan of God for salvation from sin, rather than as an unfortunate mishap.
5. *Resurrection*—God raised Christ from the dead as a demonstration of his Lordship and victory over sin and death, revealing his power to save.

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<sup>48</sup> For an extended treatment of the invitation system and its peccadilloes, see David Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), and Iain H. Murray, *The Invitation System* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967). The most thorough defense of the modern altar call is contained in R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), with the high points of his argument found in his chapter “The Public Invitation and Calvinism,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical and Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 233–51.

<sup>49</sup> Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> As Poe correctly notes, repentance and faith are the two biblically requisite responses to the gospel message to effect conversion. In contrast, the “sinner’s prayer” contained in Bill Bright’s *The Four Spiritual Laws*, “Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be,” lacks any explicit reference to repentance.

<sup>51</sup> Harry L. Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning: A Theology for Evangelism and Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

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6. *Exaltation*—Christ reigns at the right hand of God, providing immediate access to God for all who abide in him.
  7. *Gift of the Holy Spirit*—Christ sends the Holy Spirit to live within all who have faith in him.
  8. *Return for judgment*—Christ will return to bring this age to an end, judge the nations, and complete redemption.
  9. *Response*—The good news always expected the decisive response of repentance and faith.<sup>52</sup>

The problem with “script” approaches is that in the name of “efficiency,” the presentation will be devoid of essential gospel elements. To put it another way, it is impossible to encompass all nine of Poe’s elements in only four “spiritual laws.” Moreover, a “script” approach arises from the apparent conviction that each and every lost person can be dealt with in nearly identical fashion. In contrast, as one Christian writer reminds believers:

How differently did Jesus Christ deal with sinners. He did not have any instant salvation process. He did not speak to people with a stereotyped presentation. He dealt with every individual on a personal basis. Never in the New Testament do we find Christ dealing with any two persons in the same manner. It is enlightening to compare how differently He dealt with Nicodemus in John 3, and then with the woman at the well in John 4.<sup>53</sup>

Instead of trying to reproduce actors who simply memorize a few lines from a prepared “script,” evangelicalism needs pastors and leaders who will rediscover and recapture a passion for the biblical gospel of grace.<sup>54</sup> A revitalization of such will enable Christ’s church to be best equipped by those called to this vital work of ministry (Eph 4:11–13).

(2) *Recognize the value of apologetics for evangelism, and prioritize the equipping of believers to not only present the gospel, but also defend their faith.*<sup>55</sup> The recognition of the limited value of “script” approaches in light of an ever-increasing heterogeneous culture necessitates not only a recovery of the full evangelical gospel itself, but also the incorporation of apologetics in evangelism. Apologist and philosopher Ted Cabal rightly asserts, “*The most important aspect of*

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 45–46.

<sup>53</sup> James E. Adams, “Decisional Regeneration” [article on-line]; accessed 10 January 2011; available from <http://www.gracesermons.com/hisbygrace/decision.html>; Internet.

<sup>54</sup> A helpful resource for evangelistic training along these lines is Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> This point I extensively argued in “When *Evangelion* Met *Apologia*: An Examination of the Mind’s Role in Conversion and the Value of Apologetics in Evangelism,” *Great Commission Research Journal* 2 (2010): 62–75.

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*apologetics is its service as a necessary element in evangelism.*<sup>56</sup> As the concept of  
worldview is incorporated into evangelization strategies and practice, issues  
concerning the nature and existence of God, the deity of Jesus, the inerrancy of  
Scripture, the historicity of the resurrection, and a plethora of others will  
inevitably arise as evangelizers from the realm of Christian theism engage lost  
persons with quite different noetic structures. Believers must be equipped to  
constructively respond to such persons in gospel encounters, without feeling the  
need to resort to threats of damnation.<sup>57</sup>

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Cabal does raise an appropriate caution, “Too often apologetics is confused  
with what may be called ‘stock’ apologetics. Stock apologetic methods focus on a  
‘one size fits all’ approach. Little attention is paid to the unbeliever’s questions or  
concerns, often leading the apologist/evangelist to answer questions no one is  
asking.”<sup>58</sup> He continues, “. . . just as personal evangelism is best practiced as  
‘personal,’ so also should apologetics be personally applied in one-on-one  
encounters.”<sup>59</sup> Like “script” evangelism, “stock” apologetics is of limited value in a  
pluralistic world where not even the cultural ethos of the “Bible belt” has been  
unaffected. Nonetheless, apologetics has an important role to play in effective  
evangelical evangelism.

(3) *Reform local church witnessing training programs by moving away from  
emphases on rote memorization of “scripts” and toward a comprehensive disciple-  
making approach, including intensive instruction in worldview, theology, apologetics,  
and evangelism.* Building upon the first two suggestions, this proposal envisions  
nothing less than a renewed ecclesiology. Rather than being content with the  
holding of weekly classes where a handful of church members attempt to  
memorize a “script” approach to use during a time of “visitation,” evangelical  
pastors and ministers should transition to a more comprehensive training format.  
Such an approach would lead toward a more balanced integration of evangelism  
into the total life of the church, rather than confining evangelization to a weekly  
outreach activity, if that. It is along these lines that seminary dean and church  
consultant Chuck Lawless argues for a fivefold evaluative criteria concerning  
church evangelistic health:

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<sup>56</sup> Ted Cabal, “The Great Commission and Apologetics,” in *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God’s  
Mandate for the Local Church*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer (Louisville: Pinnacle Publishers, 2005), 184,  
emphasis original.

<sup>57</sup> In mind here is the “you just need to believe the Bible, or you’re going to hell!” response to queries during a gospel  
encounter. While in no way discounting the scriptural reality of fiery perdition for the reprobate, in reality such a statement  
does little to overcome barriers to the gospel and will most likely terminate the conversation. The end result becomes not  
only rejection of the gospel, but increased hostility toward believers.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



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1. Are we teaching our members theologically? Are we challenging them to know God and who they are in Christ? Is their foundation solid?
  2. Do our members know the purposes of the church? Are we training them to fulfill those purposes individually and corporately?
  3. Do our members show their Christian faith in all areas of their lives—in their personal walk, in their home, in the church, and in their workplace? Are we teaching them to live out their faith in all of these areas?
  4. Are our members committed to reaching the world for Christ?
  5. In general, *are we producing disciples through evangelism that results in baptisms and teaching that leads to obedience?*<sup>60</sup>

Cultivating a covenant community that could affirmatively answer each of Lawless's questions argues for a rethinking of traditional local church approaches to evangelism. If Rainer and Elliff are correct, much of what has historically been done is not working anyway.

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## conclusion

In the first book he ever published, Rainer prophetically framed the issues with which evangelical evangelism now wrestles. Over twenty years ago he opined:

Will the evangelistic task for the twenty-first century be significantly different from that of the first two thousand years of Christianity? The answer is both “yes” and “no.” Some constants in evangelism are evident. People are still lost and condemned if they do not embrace in faith Jesus Christ (John 3:18). The message of the gospel never changes: Jesus Christ is, and always will be, the only way, truth, and life (John 14:6). And the Savior to whom we give our lives remains the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Yet while the need for Jesus, the message of the gospel, and the person of Christ never change, the means and methodology of communicating the gospel must change to meet the needs of every generation. And every new era will have unique problems and opportunities that must be addressed by the same generation of Christians.<sup>61</sup>

In this new era, Southern Baptists in particular and evangelicals in general must recognize the seriousness of the situation in which they find themselves. Old assumptions and tactics will increasingly be rendered obsolete and ineffective by persons whose worldviews do not correspond to “script” assumptions. Yet the

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<sup>60</sup> Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 49, emphasis mine.

<sup>61</sup> Thom S. Rainer, ed., *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century: The Critical Issues* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1989), xi.

**Greenway: How Should We Then Witness? A Plea for Reexamining Evangelical** opportunity to recapture and reemphasize the complete gospel message, which is still “God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16), remains.<sup>62</sup> How should we then witness? As twenty-first century believers committed to a first-century message, may we *go*, with total confidence in God, the total content of the gospel, and total commitment to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), and *tell* all that the Lord has done (Mark 5:19).

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<sup>62</sup> Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).