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FOREWORDS

BY SEMINARY PRESIDENTS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK



*The following Prominent Seminary Presidents of evangelical schools,
though differing on some areas of theology, are a united voice in
agreement with the central theses in. . .*

The Jesus Quest: The Danger from Within



FOREWORD

Dr. Joseph M. Holden

President, Veritas Evangelical Seminary

Among the more recent generation of evangelical Bible scholars, as well as with some high profile philosophers and apologists, there exists a powerful but unnecessary draw towards favoring historical skepticism over the biblical narrative. Though this attraction offers the promise of academic respectability, the appearance of “balance,” and entry into the prestigious “scholars club” with peers of like kind, it simultaneously chisels away the bedrock of Scripture from which Christian doctrine and the portrait of Christ flow. The casualty to such a compromise has always been 1) the inerrancy of Scripture, 2) confidence in the Gospel account of the life and ministry of Christ, and eventually 3) the community of believers!

Since creation, and throughout the history of the church, the unending assaults on Scripture have come in many forms. In the Garden, the serpent cast doubt on God’s word with a hiss, “hath God said?” (Gen 3:1–2); the Gnostics of the second century rejected the vast majority of the inspired account of Jesus and developed their own false canon and distorted life of Christ, labeling those who dissent “unenlightened.” In addition, Francis Bacon’s inductivism in his *Novum Organum* (1620) limited the realm of truth (fact) to the empirical world. Moreover, Hobbes’ materialism in *Leviathan* (1651) limited reality to that which is corporeal. Furthermore, Spinoza’s anti-supernaturalism in his *Theologico-Politico Tractatus* (1677) limited what is possible to the natural world. What is more, David Hume’s radical skepticism in the *Enquiry* (1748) promoted doubt and uncertainty, and Immanuel Kant’s agnosticism in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) effectively resulted in relativism and a perceived chasm between the knowable (observable/phenomena) and unknowable (unobservable/noumena) realms. By the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) offered the world a naturalistic mechanism (Natural Selection) to account for the evolution of simple life into more complex life. The application of macro-evolution to other disciplines such as religion has led to the belief that society, morals, and religion, have evolved over time and that the Genesis creation narrative is myth. All these served as the fertile soil for the growth of higher criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the rise of existential

encounter offered by Neo-orthodoxy under Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann in the twentieth century.

Collectively, these offerings contributed to forming an armada of cherished notions among Bible scholars that serve as the embarkation point for their quest. These ideas have as their flagship the radical separation between science and religion, fact (historical) and value (moral/faith), and by extension the unassailable dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Without the acceptance of this unnecessary dichotomy, the search for the “historical” Jesus all but vanishes.

Some (who are referred to as neo-evangelicals), acquiescing to one or more of these inimical ideas, or yielding to the critical theories and historical-critical methodologies of those who have been snared by them, have felt the need to offer a blended methodology and/or a “new” historiography which is a half-way-house between the methods and conclusions of negative historical criticism and evangelical scholarship. One particular way this is accomplished is by evaluating the extra-biblical literature with its genre. This genre is said to be of the kind that allows for the author’s flexible use (i.e. license) of legend, myth, embellishment, and poetic effects. The neo-evangelical sees the Gospel narratives as possessing the same (or similar) kind of genre, which allows for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to use legend and myth for communicating their theological purposes. The conclusions of such an approach yields the difficult task of discovering where history stops and legend begins. Another way to employ the “new blend” is to apply elements of the restrictive historical-critical criteria to the Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, to discover the authentic historical kernel, unfortunately, leaving much of the narrative outside historical veracity. The fruit of this aberrant mixture often yields conclusions more in line with the negative critics than with the inspired narrative.

We would expect this kind of negative approach to Scripture to be common outside the church. But unfortunately, the alarming number of evangelical scholars adopting this “new blend” or endorsing its aberrant conclusions as being *consistent* with (ICBI) full inerrancy appears to be swelling at an alarming rate. Evangelicals who seriously disagree with the neo-evangelical approach, or vigorously challenge such a position in print, are quickly labeled “unscholarly” or “uninformed,” some are even tabbed as insensitive “theological bullies.”

In *The Jesus Quest*, Drs. Geisler and Farnell, along with their competent array of contributing scholars, draw a line in the sand by offering a masterful treatment of the alarming skeptical trend permeating evangelical scholarship and its graduate institutions. This work is a timely and sobering wake-up call to evangelical faculties everywhere as well as to Bible college and evangelical seminary presidents and academic deans who are responsible for overseeing them!

FOREWORD

Dr. Richard D. Land,
President Southern Evangelical Seminary

Dr. Geisler and Dr. Farnell are to be commended for producing and collecting these important essays addressing a real and growing threat from *within* evangelical scholarship to the complete veracity and authority of the Word of God.

Dr. Geisler, philosopher, theologian, and apologist, and Dr. Farnell, New Testament scholar, are uniquely prepared by academic training, scholarly pursuit, and interest to identify the nature of these threats by the “new” evangelicals and their dangerous flirtation with erroneous philosophies, higher criticism, and faulty hermeneutical methodologies.

These “new” evangelicals have forced the evangelical world to once again ever more carefully define what once were clearly defined words and concepts, which were then undermined and redefined downward by a new generation putting question marks at the end of Holy Scripture’s truth declarations. In an earlier time, Christians who believed in the complete, divine inspiration of Scripture then had to add “full,” “verbal,” and “plenary” inspiration of Scripture to separate and define their original view and to differentiate themselves from those who would redefine the original, orthodox view of biblical inspiration.

Now, in recent years conservative evangelicals have had to delineate the critically important differences between the traditional, “unlimited” inerrancy view of the total truthfulness of Holy Scripture and the more recent “limited” inerrancy views (Geisler and Roach, chapter 4).

The Jesus Quest’s subtitle “The Danger from Within” emphasized that very serious threats to the total truthfulness of Scripture have risen within the confines of “evangelical” scholarship. In raising the alarm in *The Jesus Quest*, Geisler and Farnell have taken on the role of biblical prophets, the “watchmen on the wall” who when they saw danger or peril, sounded the alarm. Geisler and Farnell, having discerned the threat from within the walls of evangelicalism, have sounded a clarion call of warning.

Thankfully, they have done far, far more. They have not only diagnosed the threat, but they have also shown how dangerous such threat have been to true biblical orthodoxy in the past and, most importantly, how to combat and defeat these threats intellectually and spiritually. Far too often, such books diagnose the disease or malady, but provide little or no positive prescription or treatment to cure the sickness and return the Body of Christ to full health. *The Jesus Quest* not only says, “Here is the threat,” but also declares, “Here are the answers.”

I would urge every evangelical Christian to read *The Jesus Quest*. As a current seminary president, I am going to do everything within my power to see that every potential or current seminary student and every potential or current seminary professor within my circle of influence will read *The Jesus Quest*.

Finally, even excellent books like *The Jesus Quest* have particularly valuable nuggets, and I will close by commending Dr. Geisler’s chapter “The Philosophical

Roots of Modern Biblical Criticism” as the most valuable nugget in this volume. Dr. Geisler gives invaluable advice to evangelical scholars. Among other things, he urges them to “avoid the desire to become a famous scholar,” reminding them that “scholarship should be used to build Christ’s spiritual kingdom, not to build an academic kingdom for one’s self.”

Geisler also advises them not to “trade orthodoxy for academic respectability.” He challenges evangelical scholars “not only to live Christocentrically but to **“think Christocentrically.”**”

He then explains that **“we cannot properly beware of philosophy unless we be aware of philosophy.”** Geisler then emphasized what is at stake in these controversies: “Unless either philosophers become biblical exegetes in our schools or those who we now call biblical exegetes take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, biblical exegesis and philosophical intelligence, there can be no cessation of theological troubles for our schools, nor I fancy for the Christian Church either.” Amen!

FOREWORD

Dr. John F. MacArthur, Jr.

President, The Master's College and Seminary

Attempts to discredit the Bible have come in relentless waves since the dawn of the church. The early gnostic heresies that plagued Christianity for centuries represented nothing less than a full-scale assault against the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The attacks commenced almost as soon as the church was born. The first stirrings of incipient gnosticism were troubling the waters even before the New Testament canon was complete. That fact is clear, because the error that is described and refuted in 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7 was *docetism*, a classic core tenet of early gnostic thought. The apostle Paul was likewise responding to a gnostic-style notion of enlightenment in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Paul was stepping on gnostic toes yet again when he pointed out that “the world through its wisdom did not come to know God” (1 Corinthians 1:21), and that those who profess to be wise are simply fools (Romans 1:22).

Gnostics claimed to be privy to secret knowledge that would unlock the true meaning of Scripture. (*Gnosis*, of course, is the Greek word for knowledge.) Not that there was any real agreement among these supposedly enlightened teachers regarding what the great secret was or who had actually achieved the pinnacle of understanding. Various gnostic sects were hopelessly fragmented and contentious, competing with one another for followers—fomenting discord and disunity everywhere they went.

But collectively they agreed on this much: they insisted that Scripture alone is unreliable and insufficient; that true spiritual enlightenment entails a high level of philosophical sophistication; and that the Bible therefore cannot be taken at face value or understood correctly by anyone not fully initiated into the hidden *gnosis*. They derided simple, childlike faith. They cast doubt on the accuracy of Scripture. They denied the incarnation. They retold practically every New Testament story—often writing their own fanciful, spurious, alternative “gospels” with false messiahs as their heroes. Each gnostic sect urged people to embrace whatever unique philosophy or *gnosis* they offered and use that as a lens through which to interpret Scripture.

For centuries, these gnostic cults rose and declined, one after another, in an undulating flood of confusion and doubt. Each surge sought (but failed) to erode the church's confidence in the Word of God, depose the Christ of Scripture from His rightful place as Lord of all, and elevate worldly wisdom above divine revelation. In one way or another, all of them encouraged people to put their faith in human knowledge—or (more specifically) in the gnostic teacher. According to them, only the most unenlightened, dull-witted, or spiritually naïve would believe that Scripture is sufficient, true, and trustworthy.

Religious modernism, quasi-evangelical postmodernism, theological liberalism, so-called “red-letter Christianity,” and other currently trending flavors of

academic skepticism are all expressions of the same gnostic spirit. They all subvert and cast doubt on the authority, accuracy, and sufficiency of Scripture. They portray simple, childlike trust in Christ and belief in His word as ignorant, unsophisticated, unscholarly, or unenlightened.

The tides of worldly wisdom still come as they always have—in relentless waves, battering the bedrock tenets of Christian belief. They cannot demolish that foundation, because there is no power in hell that can wrest the church from the rock on which Christ has built it (Matthew 16:18). His kingdom cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). “Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever” (Psalm 125:1).

Nevertheless, there are (and always have been) certain people in the visible church whose “faith” is something short of settled conviction. They profess faith in Christ and claim to know God, but they are Christians in name only. Such people do fall away—inevitably, and with disastrous effect. They reject simple faith, or they tolerate a defiled conscience, refusing repentance. They make “shipwreck of their faith” (Titus 1:19), and invariably subvert the faith of others as well (2 Timothy 2:18). The influence of such apostasy will frequently inundate earthly institutions, causing formerly sound parachurch organizations, publishers, schools, congregations, or whole denominations to abandon the faith of their fathers and turn against the truth of Scripture. This pattern repeats itself with a remarkable (almost predictable) pattern of regularity.

A tsunami of neo-orthodox doctrine blended with academic cynicism threatened to sweep through practically every leading evangelical seminary some thirty-five or forty years ago. Key figures in some of the best-known ministerial training schools abandoned a high view of Scripture in a misguided quest for academic stature. The trend spread quickly, eroding evangelical conviction among faculty and students alike. The influence of alumni trained in these institutions was seeping into evangelical churches. Uncertainty and confusion (under the guise of intellectual sophistication) were spreading like poison where the authority and accuracy of the Bible had formerly been deemed unquestionable. Harold Lindsell’s landmark 1976 book, *The Battle for the Bible*, exposed and documented the drift.

Soon it seemed the entire evangelical community was caught up in a wide-ranging, far-reaching debate about the inerrancy of Scripture. The tide began to turn with the founding of The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1978. That group, under the leadership of men like James Montgomery Boice, Jay Grimstead, Norman Geisler, and other key Christian leaders, sponsored the publication of books, journal articles, and white papers in defense of the Bible’s authority and integrity—and in fairly short order, it seemed to stem the immediate tide of skepticism.

That, however, was by no means the end of the matter. The evangelical movement never fully regained the ground it had already forfeited to neo-orthodoxy. Once the work of ICBI was finished, many evangelicals, weary of the battle, quietly turned away from the issue, allowing Scripture to take a back seat to pragmatic philosophies of ministry. The megachurch movement soon captured the evangelical spotlight, touting seeker-sensitive strategies, public-opinion polls, entertainment—virtually

any kind of gimmickry that might draw a crowd. Sermons were ruthlessly shortened and dumbed down. Doctrine was generally neglected. All these trends fostered a low view of Scripture. The hard-fought victory of ICBI proved to be short-lived and of precious little lasting consequence.

Now a new surge of old-style academic skepticism is rolling in again. It has been building for several years. It is epitomized by the growing influence of the so-called “Quest for the Historical Jesus”—a quasi-scholarly attempt to redefine and reimagine Jesus in a way that deliberately holds the biblical record of His life and ministry in high suspicion. In other words, the fundamental presupposition of this movement is that extrabiblical sources (starting with the modern historians’ own prejudices and speculations) are a better source for understanding the real Jesus than the Gospel records are. Documentaries on the History Channel and cover stories in the leading news magazines every Christmas and Easter reflect the profound influence this movement has had on the consciousness, opinions, and values of secular society.

Those are merely signs of a coming storm, and it looks to be a tempest of massive proportions. The men who have written the essays in this volume see the heaving swells on the horizon and are braced for the onslaught. Each of them is uniquely qualified to speak with considerable authority regarding these issues—but together they confess that Scripture is the supreme and only infallible authority. I’m grateful for their insights and the clarity and conviction with which they write. They have given us an invaluable volume.

I’m especially grateful for the work of Norm Geisler and David Farnell, who compiled and edited this volume. I was privileged to stand shoulder to shoulder with Dr. Geisler in the days when ICBI was coordinating the battle for the Bible. I’m glad to know he has lost none of his passion for defending biblical authority. It is an area where he truly excels. One of my favorite resources, a book I return to again and again, is *A General Introduction to the Bible*, the classic work Dr. Geisler co-authored with Bill Nix (another contributor to this volume).

Dr. Farnell is my colleague and a valuable member of The Master’s Seminary faculty. His skill as a teacher and his commitment to the Scriptures can be seen on every page of this fine book. My hope is that these essays will help rally a new generation of young evangelicals to stand together in a sober-minded, steadfast, earnest defense of biblical inerrancy and true biblical scholarship.

Tolle lege.

FOREWORD

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

A Foreword to *The Jesus Quest*

Questioning the word of God is nothing new; doubting divine revelation is as old as Adam. In the Garden of Eden, God's first man to receive his divine word turned from it under the serpent's cunning temptation, "Did God really say. . .?" By the time of the writing of the New Testament, gnostic heresies were waging war against the authority and sufficiency of God's written revelation: all agreed that the Bible was insufficient for true spiritual enlightenment and required philosophical supplementation. Jesus Christ, God's "second Adam," who himself is the Word of God, was rejected in his own day and all throughout these "last days."

But a high view of Scripture as the revealed, reliable, and sufficient word of God has also endured from the birth of the church. In affirming that the Bible, as a whole and in its parts, contains nothing but God-breathed truth, evangelicals have simply affirmed what the church universal has affirmed for well over a millennium: *when the Bible speaks, God speaks*. Based on this affirmation, Bible-believing inerrantists from multiple denominations and schools across America assembled in 1978 at the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy to defend the authority and integrity of the Scriptures. This group adopted the Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) and Hermeneutics (1982). Inerrancy has been a core affirmation of evangelical Christianity as a movement, as evidenced by the Chicago Statements and the Evangelical Theological Society's tenet on the nature of the Bible: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."

Nevertheless, the inerrancy of Scripture has not been universally accepted by all who would call themselves evangelical and who would function within the evangelical movement. In fact, the doctrine has seen many challenges in recent years. Embodied in the "quest for the historical Jesus" movement, a skepticism has returned that attempts to redefine and rethink Jesus in a way that denies the biblical record by placing primary importance upon extrabiblical documents and legends. Most recently, some have warned that an affirmation of Scripture's inerrancy would lead to intellectual disaster for the evangelical movement. Still others complain that the concept is bothersome at best and inherently divisive at worst.

If we do not confess that the whole Bible is totally true and trustworthy, then we have set ourselves upon a project of determining which texts of the Bible reflect God's perfection, if any. We will use human criteria of judgment to decide which texts bear divine authority and which texts can be trusted. We will decide, one way or another, which texts we believe to be God speaking to us.

But if we affirm the inerrancy of Scripture without hesitation or reservation, then we must read it accordingly. Ways of reading Scripture that are at odds with its inerrant nature must be honestly assessed and relentlessly eschewed.

That is why I am thankful for *The Jesus Quest*. In this book, Geisler and Farnell examine the particular historical and philosophical approaches being used in the recent speculations of man set over the eternal self-revelation of God. Key to understanding the Bible and its presentation of Jesus as the Christ is a proper hermeneutical humility that submits to God's Word by taking him at his word in Scripture. To this end, Geisler and Farnell argue convincingly for the reliability of the New Testament books, its writers, and the God who inspired them. Along the way, they helpfully canvas the hermeneutical controversies within evangelicalism, criticize the skepticism of biblical criticism, and deconstruct the deconstructionist attempts to reframe the Scriptures. I appreciate and commend their spirit, scholarship, and sensitivity to the needs of the church as it lives "by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

FOREWORD

Dr. L. Paige Patterson

President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Comparing the biblical prophets to contemporary preachers and professors has presented me with my keenest disappointment. The former spoke boldly and confidently; the latter with the lisp of compromise. The prophets spoke with a certainty about the musings of the God of Abraham. The latter showed the effects of a desire to be “academically recognized or politically kosher.” The offspring of the prophets, men like C.H. Spurgeon, appealed to the souls of men and saw many come to Christ. Many of the current compromised evangelicals do little for the church and the common man and accomplish mostly the crippling of the evangelical students who read their books and study with them. By their fruits you shall know them.

The Jesus Quest: The Danger from Within by Norm Geisler and David Farnell faces the strange spectacle of evangelical compromise and asserts in the face of this slippage the historical doctrine of the full trustworthiness and, yes, inerrancy of God’s Word. Tracing the history of the sad debacle of evangelical compromise through such historical events as the Downgrade Controversy and the searches for the historical Jesus, the various authors frame precisely the impact of such disintegration and proceed to state a fresh and compelling case for historic belief.

Surrounded by the Vienna Boys Choir of light-voiced quasi-evangelicals, I appreciate the booming bass tones of the genuine, uncompromised voices of these contemporary prophets of God. *The Jesus Quest* will do nothing for the popularity of these contributors, but it may well do wonders for the church of the living God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The contributors to *The Jesus Quest The Danger from Within* would like to acknowledge especially the many courageous men and women of the *International Council of Biblical Inerrancy* who assembled in Chicago some 35 years ago and forged the watershed documents of the *Chicago Statements* on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) and Hermeneutics (1982). Many of these have gone to be with the Lord since the original signing of these declarations. Yet, they have left for us a marvelous, sustaining testimony to the need for faithfulness to God's Word and inerrancy as the "watershed" issue for our time.

Since the signing of the Chicago Statements, troubling signs have once again been appearing in recent years among many neo-evangelicals who either did not fight the battles for the inerrancy of Scripture as did the Council or who do not remember the troubling times that caused their development. The nature and definition of inerrancy are now being challenged and/or changed. *History is being forgotten* among many neo-evangelicals, resulting in the need for once again sounding the alarm for *Defending Inerrancy*.¹ Among many neo-evangelicals today, academic prestige and fads in scholarship now hold as watchwords instead of faithfulness of God's inerrant Word. Our prayer is the Lord will raise up a new generation of evangelicals with the spiritual fervency of the *International Council* to uphold the inerrancy of God's Word: Isaiah 40:8—"The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever" (Isa 40:8 NAU).

¹ Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy, Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

