



Pastor and author Paul Smith is the brother of the late Calvary Chapel founder Chuck Smith (1927–2013) and has been involved in ministry since 1951. Both his firsthand witness and personal investigation into significant turning points in evangelicalism qualify him to analyze the doctrinal erosion in mainstream Christianity. In this book he touches on a number of reasons why aberrant movements and unbiblical methodologies such as “emergent” postmodernism and the “purpose-driven” church-growth strategies were able to take shape and spread so rapidly beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century. He rightly traces

New Evangelicalism: The New World Order

by Paul Smith

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the root of this departure from orthodoxy to the abandonment of biblical inerrancy.

Judging a book by its cover, one may expect another sensationalized meandering into “new world order” conspiracy theories. While Smith does utilize an underlying eschatological hermeneutic, which, though quite popular today, is not consistent with the historic Protestant interpretation of prophecy, Smith’s main concern is the departure from the belief that Scripture is infallible, inerrant, and sufficient (1 Tim. 3:16). Most interesting are his brief but thorough historical sketches of Princeton, Westminster, and Fuller Seminaries, as well as the early twentieth-century rise of what became known as “fundamentalism.” Using such case studies, Smith is able to show that once belief in the Bible as the infallible

and inerrant Word of God was replaced with the Kierkegaardian “two-story” epistemology and Barthian notions of “partly inspired” Scripture, descent into post-modernism and irrationalism was the next logical step.

It is clear that Smith takes a firm stand on the historicity of Scripture, particularly with regard to the foundational account of Creation as recorded in Genesis. He writes, “The sacred Bible of the Christian faith is the accurate, historical revelation of God, describing His work in creation and redemption” (p. 26). He also makes the important point that vague statements about *infallibility* minus the key component of *inerrancy* open the door to modernist notions of “non-revelatory Scripture”:

The advantages of settling the issue for infallibility only—without inerrancy—suffers from three serious

difficulties. First, the Bible does not appear to be aware of any such distinction between theological and non-theological truth. The second difficulty proceeds from the first. The New Testament affirms that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, the second Person of the Trinity. If Jesus was mistaken about the historicity of Adam and Eve, or if he believed incorrectly that Jonah was swallowed and preserved in the stomach of a great fish, or the flood destroyed the entire human race except the eight passengers on the ark, then it follows that God was mistaken. (p. 41)

Smith devotes a large portion of the book to the history of Fuller Seminary, which was established by fundamentalist scholars who took a strong stand on the doctrine of inerrancy at a time when theological liberalism and modernism was on the rise. He documents how in the space of only two generations inerrancy was abandoned at Fuller, which gave rise to modernism, compromise, accommodation, and all of the rotten fruit that comes with it. Daniel Fuller, the son of the seminary's founder, was largely responsible for putting Fuller on this slippery slope. He believed it was a "colossal error" to insist that "the Bible is without error in whole or in part" (p. 93). While studying under Karl Barth in Switzerland, Daniel became convinced that the Bible "was composed of revelational and non-revelational material" (Cooke, 2011, p. 46).

Another valuable feature of Smith's book is his investigation into files concerning Fuller Seminary, which were "restricted from research until January

15, 2008" (p. 67). These include letters and documents that shed some light on the internal struggles over inerrancy during Fuller's slide into neo-orthodoxy. For example, Smith includes a transcript of a speech given by then-student Wayne Grudem before the faculty in which he said, "Not one of my courses here has strengthened my confidence in the Bible. ... I have not had one professor who teaches biblical inerrancy as a possible option. ... I want a seminary to make me a minister of God's Word, not its critic. I have no choice but to leave" (p. 74).

Overall, Smith's book is an interesting, informative, and captivating read. Two criticisms must be pointed out regarding his analysis, however. First, his eschatology plays too big of a role in his understanding of the unfolding historical degeneration of evangelicalism. For instance, while dispensationalism happened to be indispensable to many early "fundamentalists," such an eschatological and prophetic backdrop does not enhance the doctrine of inerrancy, nor does it illuminate the factors contributing to the breach with orthodoxy. Unfortunately, Smith at times gives the impression that a departure from dispensationalism is necessarily a move to the left. But as Smith himself is aware (p. 88), Reformed theologians J. Gresham Machen and Gordon Clark were unquestionably two of the twentieth century's foremost defenders of inerrancy and inspiration, neither of whom could be classified as dispensationalists.

Second, Smith has an idealized and unrealistic view of Calvary Chapel as an

antidote to the erosion of evangelicalism. While it is true that founder Chuck Smith generally took a strong stand on the sufficiency of Scripture, the Calvary Chapel movement has hardly been immune to the influx of "purpose-driven" techniques, "emergent" mystical elements, and other practices that undermine the sufficiency and authority of Scripture (p. 8; Bobgan, 2014; Oakland, 2011; Schimmel, 2012).

Paul Smith's book is recommended mainly because it provides a concise and important history of twentieth-century evangelicalism and the erosion of biblical inerrancy. He does a fine job of connecting the dots between various influential leaders who have contributed to the departure from inerrancy and the rise of existentialism, relativism, and the anthropocentric "social gospel." He strongly advocates a return to belief in the historicity of the biblical narrative as foundational to sound theology and worship of the Creator.

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