

## **Beware Of Philosophy: A Warning To Biblical Scholars**

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The exhortation of the apostle Paul to “beware of philosophy” (Col 2:8) is as urgent today as it was in the first century, if not more so. And this is not only true for Christians who call themselves philosophers but for those who do not, especially for biblical exegetes.

### **I. Philosophies Of Which To Beware And Why**

Although the context of Col 2:8 probably has reference to a proto-gnostic type of philosophy at Colosse that had a disastrous mix of legalism, asceticism, and mysticism with Christianity, the implications of Paul’s exhortation to “beware of philosophy” are appropriately applied to other alien systems of thought that have invaded Christianity down through the centuries since then.

There are many current philosophies of which we should beware. But first I will touch on some of the more damaging ideologies in the past few centuries. Among them few have been more destructive than naturalism, both of the metaphysical and methodological varieties.

**1. Naturalism.** Naturalism is the philosophy that denies that there are supernatural interventions in the world. It is at the root of modern negative biblical criticism which began in earnest with the publication of Benedict Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1670.

Spinoza argued that “nothing then, comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws, nay, everything agrees with them and follows from them, for ... she keeps a fixed and immutable order.” In fact, “a miracle, whether in contravention to, or beyond, nature, is a mere absurdity.” The noted Dutch-Jewish pantheist was nothing short of dogmatic about the impossibility of miracles. He emphatically proclaimed, “We may, then, be absolutely certain that every event which is truly described in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws.” His

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naturalistic rationalism led him to conclude that since “there are many passages in the Pentateuch which Moses could not have written, it follows that the belief that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is ungrounded and even irrational.” Rather, Spinoza insisted that it was written by the same person, who wrote the rest of the Old Testament—Ezra the scribe.

Spinoza also rejected the resurrection accounts in the Gospels. Concerning Christianity, he said that “the Apostles who came after Christ, preached it to all men

as a universal religion *solely* in virtue of Christ's Passion." There was no resurrection. Since orthodox Christianity has held from earliest times, both from Scripture (1 Cor 15:1–14) and creeds, that apart from the truth of the resurrection of Christ, Christianity would be a false religion without hope, it follows that Spinoza's view is diametrically opposed to orthodoxy.

Indeed, Spinoza categorically denied all miracles in the Bible. He commends "anyone who seeks for the true causes of miracles and strives to understand natural phenomena as an intelligent being ... " Not only did he conclude that "every event ... in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws," but that Scripture itself "makes the general assertion in several passages that nature's course is *fixed and unchangeable*." In short, miracles are impossible.

Finally, Spinoza contended that the fact that prophets did not speak from supernatural "revelation" and "the modes of expression and discourse adopted by the Apostles in the Epistles, shows very clearly that the latter were not written by revelation and Divine command, but *merely by the natural powers* and judgment of the authors."

Spinoza's naturalism led directly to the first modern systematic negative criticism of the Bible. It has had a devastating effect on biblical interpretation. His work was the inspiration for Richard Simon who became known as the "Father of Modern Biblical Criticism." Adopting Spinoza's naturalism is a clear and evident example of failing to heed the apostle's warning to "beware of philosophy."

The Scottish skeptic David Hume (1711–1776) carried on Spinoza's antisupernaturalism, albeit in a way less objectionable to the modern view of scientific law. In Book Ten of his famous *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), he launched his attack on miracles. In Hume's own words,

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the reasoning goes like this: (1) "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature." (2) "Firm and unalterable experience has established these laws [of nature]." (3) "A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence." (4) Therefore, "the proof against miracles ... is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." In summary, wrote Hume, "There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event. Otherwise the event would not merit that appellation." So "nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature."

The results of Hume's philosophical naturalism have been disastrous for Christianity. His friend James Hutton (1726–1797) applied Hume's antisupernaturalism to geology, inaugurating nearly two centuries of naturalism in science. Not long after Hume, David Strauss (1808–1874) wrote the first desupernaturalized version of the life of Christ. As they say, the rest is history. Or better, the rest is the destruction of history—particularly miraculous history recorded in Scripture.

Another consequence of antisupernaturalism has been the denial of predictive

prophecy. Two Isaiahs were invented and Daniel was post-dated after the amazing events of history they had predicted. In this way a purely naturalistic explanation could be provided. In all of this there are evident the naturalistic consequences of not harkening to the injunction to “beware of philosophy.” For if there is a supernatural God who knows the future, then there is no reason he cannot predict it in advance. Hence dating Daniel after the events of world history which he forecast or positing another Isaiah because otherwise Cyrus is mentioned by name a century and a half before he was born are based at root on a rejection of the supernatural. From this it is clear that the rise and spread of negative higher criticism is fundamentally a philosophical, not a factual question. Indeed, the factual evidence has moved in the direction of conservative views for nearly a century, as has been demonstrated in the increasingly conservative views of the famous archaeologist and paleographer, William F. Albright. As the evidence came in, Albright, unlike so many, was willing to give up his philosophical presuppositions for historic facts. Thus, he moved increasingly in a more conservative direction.

More recently, using the same antisupernatural presupposition inherited from Spinoza and Hume, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) turned Gospel history into religious mythology. Why? Because, in his words, he believed it would be both senseless and impossible not to recognize the Gospels as myth. “It would be senseless, because there is nothing specifically Christian in the mythical view of the world as such. It is simply the cosmology of a pre-scientific age.” Further, “it would be impossible, because no man can adopt a view of the world by his own volition—it is already determined for him by

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his place in history.” The reason for this, says Bultmann, is that “all our thinking today is shaped for good or ill by modern science.” So “a blind acceptance of the New Testament mythology would be irrational... . It would involve a sacrifice of the intellect... . It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life.”

With unlimited confidence in modernity, Bultmann pronounced the biblical picture of miracles as impossible for modern man. For “man’s knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is hardly anyone who does.” Therefore, the only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine... .” This means that “the resurrection of Jesus is just as difficult, it means an event whereby a supernatural power is released... . To the biologists such language is meaningless” and “such a notion [the idealist] finds intolerable.”

While evangelicals have not bought into the metaphysical naturalism of Spinoza or Hume, they have been bedeviled with its offspring, methodological naturalism, both in science (by way of theistic evolution) and in biblical criticism. Here naturalism has been imbibed largely through methodologies such as redaction criticism which assumes a

gradual literary development of the text. In this connection, it is refreshing to read the insightful work of the noted former Bultmannian Bible critic, Eta Linnemann, who in her newly published work in German, with the forthcoming English title of *Higher Criticism in the Dock*, lays bare the clay feet of negative higher criticism.

**2. Agnosticism.** The great German thinker, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) claimed to have been awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by David Hume, not to skepticism but to agnosticism. In his weighty *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and his less heralded but highly influential *Religion Within the Limits of Mere Reason* (1793) he argued that God is unknowable (even by revelation) and that the nature of religion is moral. He insisted that our mind and senses are so structured that we cannot know reality in itself (the noumenal realm) but only what appears to us (the phenomena). Thus, science is possible because it speaks of the observable world. But metaphysics is not possible.

Further, Kant bifurcated the observable realm of fact and the realm of value. This dichotomy has been disastrous for biblical studies. It leads to a denial of the importance, if not the existence, of the factual and historical record in Scripture and a stress on the moral and religious dimensions that have dominated liberal theology since his time.

The problem, then, with the liberalism that springs from Kant is not factual but philosophical. It is not exegetical but ideological. It imports an alien metaphysics and methodology into biblical studies. Kant himself concluded

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that the Christian religion should operate without a belief in miracles, declaring that “If a moral religion (which consists not in dogmas and rites but in the heart’s disposition to fulfill all human duties as divine commands) is to be established, all *miracles* which history connects with its inauguration must themselves in the end render superfluous the belief in miracles in general.” Considering the immense influence of Kant on the modern world, we see once more the importance of our thesis to “beware of philosophy.”

**3. Evolutionism.** Many thinkers labor under the illusion that evolution is an empirical science when in fact it is a philosophy. Macro-evolution is a philosophy whose naturalistic tenets were spelled out by the man Charles Darwin referred to as “our great philosopher,” Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Spencer came upon his philosophy while meditating on the waves in a pond one Sunday morning—something that no doubt would not have happened had he been in church meditating on the Word of God!

Many evolutionists were not content to hypothesize that life has evolved from simple to complex. They applied the same naturalistic method to society and religion, claiming they had evolved as well. This gave rise to the still persistent myth that religious belief evolved from magic to polytheism to henotheism to monotheism. This view has dominated the landscape since James Frazer wrote *The Golden Bough* in 1890, even

though the discovery of monotheistic creation *ex nihilo* in the Ebla Tablets should have put it to rest, since they are much earlier than Frazer's sources.

Even Charles Darwin himself proposed in his *The Descent of Man* (1871) that "The same high mental faculties ... led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism... ." Based on his naturalistic presupposition he wrote in his autobiography, "I had gradually come by this time to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world, with its Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attribution to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian." In brief, Darwin concluded that "Everything in nature is the result of fixed laws." He added, "By further reflection that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in miracles by which Christianity is supported,—that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become,—that the men of that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree

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almost incomprehensible by us,—that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events,—that they differ in many important details, far too important as it seemed to me to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitnesses;—by such reflections as these ... I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation."

The result of the philosophy of evolutionism has been catastrophic for biblical and theological studies. The historicity and scientific accuracy of the Genesis record has been denied. The doctrine of creation has been discarded with serious moral consequences on our dignity and society. Hitler, for example, applied the Darwinian view to society with horrendous human consequences, arguing that "If nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with the stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being may thus be rendered futile." He then went on to say that "[s]uch a preservation goes hand-in-hand with the inexorable law that it is the strongest and the best who must triumph and that they have the right to endure." With that he slaughtered some estimated 12 million human beings which he considered to be inferior breeds. Indeed, the evolution text used in the state of Tennessee at issue in the John Scopes trial was racist, referring to the Caucasian race as "the highest type of all."

The damage done by Darwinism in the theological realm has been equally undesirable. Of course, some scholars have gallantly but futilely attempted to reconcile evolution and Scripture, including James Orr and A. A. Strong, only to do violence to the historical-grammatical method and to unwittingly undermine both human dignity and theological orthodoxy. They failed to heed the warning of Charles Hodge in his 1878 work titled *What is Darwinism?*, in which Hodge correctly answered: "It is atheism. This does not mean, as said before, that Mr. Darwin himself and all who adopt

his views are atheists; but it means that his theory is atheistic; that the exclusion of design from nature is ... tantamount to atheism.” After all, if there is no design, then there is no need for a Designer. And if things were not created, then there was no Creator. Once again, grave theological pain could have been avoided by taking seriously the biblical exhortation to “beware of philosophy.”

**4. Progressivism.** Much of modern biblical scholarship was sucked into the philosophy of historicism in the wake of the developmental pantheism of Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831). In his massive work *The Phenomenol-*

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*ogy of Spirit* (1807) and his later *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1817) Hegel spelled out his historical progressivism in what became known through the misinterpretation of Johann Fichte (1762–1814) as a dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Nonetheless, Hegel did affirm that history is the unfolding of Absolute Spirit in a developmental dialectic.

The results of this so-called “Hegelianism” for biblical scholarship were disastrous. F. C. Baur’s (1792–1860) Tübingen School contended that the Gospel of John must be viewed as second-century synthesis of the earlier thesis-antithesis conflict of Peter and Paul. This conclusion was arrived at with almost total disregard for the internal and external evidence for an earlier first century date for John. The so-called “exegetical” conclusions, however massive and scholarly, were largely determined by a prevailing philosophy. Once again, the biblical exegete should have heeded the warning to “beware of philosophy.”

**5. Existentialism.** The father of modern existentialism was not a twentieth-century French atheist but a Danish Christian named Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) who could have signed a statement subscribing to the historic fundamentals of the faith. He wrote: “On the whole, the doctrine as it is taught [in the church] is entirely sound.” Nonetheless, few have done more from within the evangelical fold methodologically to undermine historic orthodoxy than Kierkegaard. Indeed, it was his philosophical son, Karl Barth, who gave rise to neo-orthodoxy. Kierkegaard concluded that even if we assume that the defenders of Christianity “have succeeded in proving about the Bible everything that any learned theologian in his happiest moment has ever wished to prove about the Bible,” namely, “that these books and no others belong in the canon; they are authentic; they are integral; their authors are trustworthy—one may well say, that it is as if every letter were inspired.” Kierkegaard asked: “Has anyone who previously did not have faith been brought a single step nearer to its acquisition? No, not a single step.”

Then Kierkegaard posed the opposite, namely, “that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about the Scriptures, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility—what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means. Has the believer been harmed? By no means, not in the least.”

At the minimum, Kierkegaard's bifurcation of fact and value is axiologically misplaced. In fact, it has been biblically disastrous, as Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann demonstrate—or whatever other “Bs” may be buzzing around unorthodox circles. We need only mention the Kierkegaardian inspired beliefs that: 1) Religious truth is located in personal encounter (subjectivity);

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2) Propositional truth is not essential to the Faith; 3) Higher criticism is not harmful to real Christianity; 4) God is “wholly other” and essentially unknowable, even through biblical revelation. These give further significance to the Pauline warning to “beware of philosophy.”

**6. Phenomenology.** Following the methodology of his mentor Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) set forth the groundwork for the contention that the true meaning of terms is found in etymology. In his works *Being and Time* (1927) and especially *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953) Heidegger set forth not only the basis for the so-called “New Hermeneutic” of Ott, Ebeling, Fuchs, Bultmann, and Gadamer but also the foundation for the widely and often naively used Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Among the troubling hidden premises in this massive work are the contentions that: 1) The origin of a term is the key to its meaning; 2) This meaning is non-conceptual and mystical; 3) Language is symbolic, not descriptive. Even the liberal James Barr exposed Kittel's Heideggerian presupposition in his *Semantics of Biblical Language*. Considering the extensive and often philosophically uncritical use of Kittel even by evangelical scholars, one cannot help but be reminded of Paul's exhortation to “beware of philosophy”—in this case the philosophy of phenomenology.

**7. Conventionalism.** Few philosophies have penetrated contemporary linguistic studies and biblical interpretation more than that of conventionalism. With roots in Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), this philosophy of meaning denies that there are any objective or absolute forms of meaning. In short, all meaning is relative. If so, then all truth is relative, since all true statements must be meaningful. But if all truth is relative, then there are no absolute truths in the Bible no matter how well one exegetes it. But since this truth claim is itself both self-defeating and incompatible with evangelical theology, then we must beware of the philosophy of conventionalism.

It suffices here simply to note that, like other non-Christian views, the central contention of conventionalism is self-defeating. For the assertion that no meaning is absolute is given as an objective statement about meaning. And the assertion that all truth is relative is offered as absolute truth. Notwithstanding, it is not uncommon to hear evangelical exegetes speak of the cultural relativity of linguistic expressions. Indeed, much of modern translation is based on this mistaken premise.

We hasten to say that this is not to deny that most symbols are culturally relative. With the exception of terms like natural signs and onomatopoeic words, the use of a

particular word is culturally relative. But the meaning expressed by words used in sentences is no more culturally relative than math and morals are culturally relative, for they too are expressed in different terms in different cultures.

Furthermore, contrary to the deconstructionist's claim, logic is not dependent on language. Rather, language is dependent on logic. For the very claim that logic is dependent on language is itself dependent on logical coherence

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to make any sense. Here again, the biblical exegete must “beware of philosophy.” Those not trained in the self-defeating claims of the linguistic relativists are an easy prey of their subtlety.

**8. Processism.** When the history of the twentieth century is written, Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) will probably emerge as one of the two or three most important philosophers of the century. His works include *Religion in the Making* (1926) and *Process and Reality* (1929). His process view of God and reality has had a disastrous effect on theology in general and, more recently, evangelical theology in particular. And, tragically, in the name of proper biblical exegesis many evangelical theologians have forsaken the absolutely omniscient and unchanging God of historic orthodoxy for a God who not only changes his mind but who does not even know for sure what will happen in the future.

While wrongly chastising other evangelicals who cling to the unchanging God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who claimed “I am the Lord and I change not” (Mal 3:6) and who, according to Isaiah, “sees the end from the beginning” (Isa 46:10), they confess buying into the processism of Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John Cobb. One of the leaders of this movement, Clark Pinnock, correctly positioned his neotheistic view “Between Classical and Process Theism.” Indeed, one of their process mentors confessed that, since God does not know the future with certainty, he “has to wait with bated breath” to see how things will turn out! Few things are a more vivid example of the need to heed the Pauline injunction to “beware of philosophy.”

**9. Platonic Allegorism.** Time does not permit comment on numerous other philosophies that have misled otherwise good evangelicals to overthrow doctrines once for all committed to the saints. I could speak of the platonic allegorism that has been in the church since Origen which, in the mutated form of Jewish Midrash, led one of our own members to defect from our ranks, claiming that whole sections of the Gospel of Matthew are not historical. For Robert Gundry insisted that the story of the Wise Men visiting Jesus is not based in fact but was created by Matthew with no basis in fact! When asked in *JETS* dialogue how he would vote on the membership of Mary Baker Eddy in ETS, if she agreed with our statement on inerrancy, even though she used an allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, Gundry replied with shocking candor: “I would vote yes... .” Fortunately, the ETS scholars voted “No” on his membership.

**10. Ockhamistic Nominalism.** One does not have time to trace the influences of nominalistic skepticism in evangelical circles. One can only speak from personal experience of a nominalist who was retained on the faculty of a conservative institution in spite of the fact that this entails the denial of the orthodox beliefs that God had one nature, Christ had two natures (one divine and one human), and that the basic laws of thought (such as the law of non-contradiction) are not arbitrary. The errors of nominalism have been adequately exposed in the excellent doctoral work of one of our own members, J. P. Moreland, in his book, *Universals, Qualities, and Quality Instances*. Nonetheless, the fact that some evangelicals have bought into this alien view reveals the need to “beware of philosophy.”

**11. Aristotelianism.** Lest I be accused of not being aware of the errors of Aristotle who denied the infinity, personality, and worshipability of God, the temporality of the world, and the immortality of the soul, I would simply point out that Thomas Aquinas, known for his use of Aristotelian concepts, rejected all these errors of Aristotle. In short, the Aristotle he used had to repent, be baptized, and catechized before he was serviceable to the Christian faith.

On the other hand, those like Jack Rogers of Fuller Seminary who deny the inerrancy of Scripture, wrongly claiming that scholastic evangelicalism created the doctrine of inerrancy, are misdirected and ill-informed. But here again it was because of the work of a philosophically aware evangelical, Dr. John Woodbridge, that Rogers’ views were refuted without a substantial response.

Contrary to Rogers’ thesis, St. Augustine, hardly an Aristotelian, clearly embraced inerrancy eight hundred years before scholasticism, declaring that: “If we are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, The author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.” The truth is that Aristotle and his distant pupil Aquinas have been a great service to evangelicals who are, as Paul exhorted us, “set in defense of the Gospel” (Phil 1:17). For Aristotle believed in the correspondence view of truth, the fundamental laws of logic, and the historical-grammatical hermeneutic—all of which are essential to the preservation of evangelical theology.

**12. Anthropological Monism.** One New Testament scholar from a noted evangelical school wrongly attributed to the New Testament a “basically monistic anthropology.” Before his institution was fully aware of the devastating consequences of this philosophy on his exegesis, he had denied the

physical resurrection of believers, the essential materiality of the resurrection body of Christ, and pronounced Christ’s Ascension a “parable” or “visual symbol.” On the first point he wrote: “the believer’s resurrection body will come from heaven, not the grave,” and, “Certainly, dead persons are raised, not impersonal corpses.” Because

of his admitted monistic anthropology he was forced to acknowledge (in order to avoid a temporary annihilationism between death and resurrection) that believers received their permanent, albeit spiritual resurrection body at the moment of death while their physical bodies remained rotting forever in the grave, noting that “[b]odily resurrection [at the moment of death] is the prerequisite for the resumption of true life after the intervention of death.” He even went so far as to say that the resurrection body of Christ possessed “essential immateriality” and was “nonfleshly.” In his own words, he declared: “[I]t will be neither fleshly nor fleshy.” Both, of course, deny the essential and continuous materiality of the incarnate Christ both before and after the resurrection which has been part of orthodox Christianity from New Testament times (cf. Luke 24:39; Acts 2:31; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). I speak of Murray Harris, former Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who under continued criticism from without and pressure from within expressed regret for calling Christ’s resurrection body “immaterial.”

A whole decade of pain could have been avoided had Harris not wrongly attributed to the New Testament a “monistic anthropology.” Once more we see the value of Paul’s exhortation to “beware of philosophy.”

**13. Historical Criticism.** Other evangelical scholars who have bought into some of the philosophical presuppositions of negative higher criticism have been exposed in an excellent new work by Robert Thomas and David Farnell titled *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*. Citing Scot McKnight, they speak of George Ladd’s acknowledgement that form criticism “has thrown considerable light on the nature of the gospels and the traditions they employ,” adding, “Evangelical scholars should be willing to accept this light.”

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They note also that “Robert Stein is another evangelical who reflects significant agreement with historical-critical assumptions. Like other form critics, he accepts the Four-Source Hypothesis, basing interpretive conclusions on this.” Stein even asserted that “if the inauthenticity of a saying [of Jesus] should be demonstrated this should not be taken to mean that this saying lacks authority.” Indeed, Stein argues that the exception clause in Matt 5:31–32 “is an interpretive comment added by Matthew.”

Then there is Robert Guelich, who in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount confesses, “This commentary offers a *critical* exegesis in that it makes use of the literary and historical critical tools including text, source, form, tradition, redaction, and structural criticism.” Following this method, Guelich cast serious doubt on the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels in general and in John in particular, who he believed put his own theological expressions in Jesus’ mouth.

Thomas and Farnell also cite David Catchpole claiming that “The gospel tradition itself compels us to engage in tradition-historical inquiry,” adding, “We can hardly avoid attributing to the later post-Easter stage both the redaction of material, and, on occasion, its creation.”

There seems to be little awareness among these evangelical scholars of the danger of adopting philosophical methods, however modified by their evangelical beliefs which lead logically—and sometimes actually, as Catchpole admits—to the Gospel writers “creating” material, rather than reporting it. Any method that undermines what the Gospels teach us about the words and deeds of Jesus thereby undermines orthodox Christianity.

Thomas and Farnell have done a great service to the evangelical community in exposing the drift of evangelical New Testament scholars in this dangerous direction. Former New Testament negative critic, Eta Linnemann, wrote of their efforts: “with outstanding knowledge concerning historical critical theology right down to the finest details, the authors are well equipped to detect historical critical thinking wherever it sprouts, even where nobody would expect it—in the midst of evangelical theology by writers supposedly faithful to the Bible.” Of course, that is the point we have been making, namely, no matter how evangelical one may be by background or training, if he does not “beware of philosophy,” he may fall prey to its subtle influences on his theology.

## II. How To Beware Of Philosophy: Intellectual And Spiritual Advice

I turn now to the final section of this discussion: “How to Beware of Philosophy.” My advice here is divided into two parts: intellectual and spiritual. First, some intellectual cautions to evangelical exegetes.

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**1. Avoid the Desire to Become a Famous Scholar.** There seems to be an almost irresistible temptation among many scholars, particularly younger ones, to “make a name for themselves.” In biblical terms this is the sin of pride of which Holy Scripture warns us. Pride distorts our vision of the truth because it is the presumption to knowledge born of ignorance. It is humbling to remind ourselves that the apostle Paul explicitly exhorts us that though “I understand all mysteries and all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2). Scholarship should be used to build Christ’s spiritual kingdom, not to build an academic kingdom for one’s self.

St. Augustine surely identified the root problem when he wrote: “And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For pride is the beginning of sin.” St. Paul agreed when he warned against putting novices in positions of leadership (1 Tim 3:6). And the apostle John warned against the “pride of life” as one of our three basic sins (1 John 2:16).

**2. Avoid the Temptation to Be Unique.** My second piece of advice is closely associated with the first. It is this: Avoid the desire to be unique. The temptation to this form of pride seems to be endemic to the higher academic process. For by its very nature a doctoral dissertation is usually supposed to be an original contribution to knowledge. But if the scholar is to make a discovery that no one else has ever made, then it is an almost irresistible temptation to congratulate oneself for being the

originator of this new truth. Little wonder the apostle warned us that “knowledge puffs up” but “love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1). The Scripture alerts us to the fact that the occupation of intellectuals on the modern academy is little different than that of those on the ancient Mars Hill who “spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear *some new thing*” (Acts 17:21, emphasis added).

**3. Do Not Dance on the Edges.** My next bit of advice for evangelical exegetes is to avoid dancing on the edges. Do not see how far the borders of evangelicalism can be stretched to accommodate the latest scholarly fad. Do not flirt with the latest critical methodology. Some of our own ETS members have been caught in this trap. It would appear that Grant Osborne temporarily fell prey to this temptation when he claimed that Matthew expanded on Jesus’ supposedly original statement to baptize in his (Jesus’) name, turning it into the Trinitarian formula recorded in Matt 28:18–20. Other biblical scholars, like J. Ramsey Michaels, went over the line of orthodoxy and declared that in some cases the Gospel writers created, not merely reported, the sayings of Jesus.

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The story is told of a king who lived on a narrow, winding mountain road edged by a steep cliff. When interviewing potential chauffeurs he was careful to ask how close they could get to the edge without falling over. The first driver claimed he could get within a foot with no problem. The second driver boasted of having the ability to drive within a few inches without endangering the king’s life. The last candidate said he would drive as far away from the edge as he possibly could. Which one do you think the king hired? The last one, of course. And his royal choice is good advice for biblical exegetes who seem to relish dancing on the edge of evangelical scholarship.

My next suggestion is this:

**4. Steer Right to Go Straight.** According to aeronautic experts, when a propeller-driven airplane takes off it naturally veers left unless it is steered right. Based on my observations of evangelical institutions and leaders over the past half century, it appears to me that the same principle applies. The only way to keep on the straight orthodox path is to keep turning to the right. Churches, schools, and even evangelical scholarship will naturally go left, unless they are deliberately turned to the right. The prevailing winds of doctrine blow against us. And if we are to resist them we must have a firm grip on the wheel of the Good Ship Evangelicalism and steer it to the right.

**5. Do Not Trade Orthodoxy for Academic Respectability.** One of the top leaders of a large Protestant denomination was once asked how his denomination drifted to the left. His analysis of the situation was brief but penetrating. He noted that they wanted accreditation for their schools. In order to attain this they needed academic respectability for their teachers. Thus, they sent them to some of the best graduate schools in the world. When they returned from these unorthodox institutions they brought with them academic respectability. Sadly, he added: “We achieved scholarly recognition. But we sacrificed our orthodoxy for academic

respectability.” But this is a trade that no evangelical should ever make. As evangelical scholars we must learn to bear, if necessary, the offense of being called “fundamentalists,” “obscurantists,” and theologically “dinosauric,” along with the offense of the Gospel. In this regard, one cannot help but admire our colleague and brother Thomas Oden who proudly calls himself a “paleo-orthodox.” Or the conviction and courage of Eta Linnemann who literally trashed her own works upon being converted to Christ and urged her students to do the same.

We must reject the temptation to believe “New is true.” It is far more likely that “Old is gold.” For truth stands the test of time, while recent error has not been around long enough to be tried in the balance and be found wanting.

**6. Reject any Methodology Inconsistent with the Bible or Good Reason.** Unfortunately, most evangelical biblical exegetes have not digested Etienne Gilson’s insightful volume, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*. In it he demonstrates how one philosophy after another led those who embrace the wrong method into undesirable and even disastrous cul-de-sacs. The lesson for biblical exegetes is the same: Adopt a false methodology and it will lead logically to a wrong theology. *How* we do our exegesis will lead to *what* results

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we obtain from it. Exegetical methods are to their results what meat grinders are to meat: Bologna in, bologna out—not matter how finely it is ground. Biblical and theological methods are not metaphysically neutral. To believe so is to be a candidate for the Colossian warning: “Beware of philosophy.”

I turn now to some spiritual advice for biblical exegetes. First and foremost,

**1. Always Choose Lordship Over Scholarship.** One of our society’s noted members, the late Professor J. Barton Payne, told of a conversation he had with a negative Bible critic who denies the creation of Adam and Eve, the Noahic Flood, Jonah in the Great Fish, one Isaiah, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and other orthodox beliefs. When Professor Payne pointed out that Jesus had personally affirmed all of these in the Gospels, his liberal friend shockingly replied: “Well, I know more about the Bible than Jesus did”! This is a clear example of putting scholarship over Lordship. If Jesus was the Son of God (which the New Testament confirms he was), then whatever he affirmed about the Old Testament is absolutely true. Indeed, Jesus claimed divine authority for his teaching (Matt 28:18–20). Since every true evangelical believes this, there should be no hesitation whenever there is a conflict to choose ancient Lordship over modern scholarship.

Several years ago, I wrote the author of a commentary on Jonah from a good evangelical school who had declared in it that it was not necessary to take Jonah literally. After pointing out that Jesus took it literally in Matt 12:40–42, I asked him if it was necessary for us as believers in Christ to believe what Jesus taught. Surprisingly, he had apparently not considered this, and the statement was subsequently retracted.

**2. Do Not Allow Morality to Determine Methodology.** One of our respected members, Henry Krabbendam, said it boldly and bluntly when he pointed out that when one departs from the faith by adopting a wrong methodology it is usually one of two reasons: “First, it is possible that an apostate methodology arises from an apostate heart. Second, it is possible that an apostate methodology to a greater or lesser extent has slipped into the thinking of a man who is otherwise committed to Christ.” Whatever the case, in the words of the apostle Paul, those who fall prey have failed to “destroy arguments and every proud obstacle against the knowledge of God and bring every thought captive to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Herein stands the great challenge of the Christian scholar: not only to live Christocentrically but to think Christocentrically—a task that is forcefully set forth in the excellent work by J. P. Moreland titled *Love Your God with All Your Mind*.

**3. Do Not Allow Sincerity to be a Test of Orthodoxy.** In spite of this radical departure from orthodoxy noted earlier, Benedict Spinoza, the grandfather of modern negative biblical criticism, insisted on his biblical fidelity, declaring, “I am certified of this much: I have said nothing unworthy of Scripture or God’s Word, and I have made no assertions which I could not prove by the most plain arguments to be true. I can, therefore, rest assured

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that I have advanced nothing which is impious or even savours of impiety.” This reminds one of Fuller Seminary’s defense for keeping Paul Jewett on their faculty after he denied the inerrancy of the Bible by claiming that the apostle Paul was wrong in what he affirmed in 1 Cor 11:3. After examining Jewett’s views carefully for an extended period of time, they decided to retain him on the faculty because he sincerely believed his view was orthodox and because he had faithfully taught at Fuller for many years. Since when did sincerity and longevity become the test for orthodoxy!

### III. Conclusion

In the final analysis, preserving orthodoxy is not a purely intellectual matter. It is spiritual warfare. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). The enemy of our soul wants also to deceive our minds. He desires to destroy good teaching which leads to good living. By undermining our orthodoxy he can weaken our “orthopraxy.” So we need to take on the whole armor of God in order to withstand the wiles of the Wicked One. It is noteworthy that this armor includes among other things the wide belt of *truth* which holds the rest of the armor together (Eph 6:10–18).

In brief, my conclusion is this: **We cannot properly beware of philosophy unless we be aware of philosophy.** To use a medical analogy, the person most likely to catch a disease is the one who does not understand it and thus takes no precautions against it. After all, doctors do not wear gloves and masks to hide

warts and moles. One of the most serious problems for evangelical exegetes is that many are not philosophically sophisticated. They are not trained to snoop out alien presuppositions lurking beneath the surface of their discipline. In short, many evangelical exegetes have not taken time to be aware of philosophy and, hence, do not know how to fulfill Paul's admonition to "beware of philosophy."

It is of more than passing interest to note the conservative influence of philosophically trained, committed evangelical schools. In addition to names already mentioned, I list among them the members of our own Evangelical Philosophical Society, including David Beck, Frank Beckwith, David Clark, Winfried Corduan, Douglas Geivett, and Gary Habermas. William Craig deserves special mention, since he did master's and doctoral work not only in philosophy but also in New Testament and theological studies. Younger schol-

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ars like these, with their orthodox theological commitment and philosophical sophistication, are in a position to avoid the theological errors into which philosophically untrained biblical scholars too often fall.

Error, even serious error, is a very subtle thing. The reason for this was fingered by Irenaeus when he noted that "Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced ... more true than truth itself." Thus we need to be alert both spiritually and philosophically to avoid it.

Speaking of being philosophically informed, the immortal words of Plato are applicable to biblical exegetes as well. In Book V of the *Republic* Plato wrote, "Unless ... either philosophers become kings in our state or those who we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence, ... there can be no cessation of troubles ... for our states, nor I fancy for the human race either." Applying this thought to the topic at hand, I would urge that: 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.