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Pastor-Theologians**

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Abstract: Something remarkable transpired in the mid-twentieth century. Just as the First Great Awakening reset the ecclesiastical paradigm along gospel-demarcated lines in the 1700s, and just as the Second Great Awakening redrew the Protestant map through the explosion of upstart groups like the Baptists and Methodists, so the Third Great Awakening of the neo-evangelical years fundamentally recalibrated and repositioned evangelicalism for unprecedented expansion and activity.

Many individuals contributed to this galaxy-formation. Upon close reflection, however, Harold Ockenga—with Billy Graham and Carl Henry—formed the three horsemen of the Neo-Evangelical Resurgence. It is the purpose of this article to first explore Ockenga’s significance for the current day, as the twenty-first century church’s experience mirrors that of the neo-evangelicals some 60–70 years ago. Ockenga offers us an example of a richly theological pastorate, and a pulpit that majored in doctrine over storytelling and sentimentality.

In what follows, we shall see that, in a doctrinally-deficient era like ours, Ockenga offers the rising generations of pastors a faithful model to which to aspire and, God allowing, assume. This model we call the *pastor-theologian*. After showing what the pastor-theologian is and is to be, we offer five considerations for the rising generation of shepherds of God’s flock, considerations that together urge the church to invest in the doctrinal formation, personal courage, and theistic confidence of its pastors.

Key Words: Harold Ockenga, pastor theologian, shepherding, pastoral theology, doctrinal formation

Introduction

Nobody really knows it, but the neo-evangelical movement that sparked in the 1940s was a revival. It was so much so, in fact, that you could argue it was akin to a Third Great Awakening. This statement might make historians shift in their seats. Really?

Was the effort helmed by evangelist Billy Graham, pastor Harold John Ockenga of Boston's Park Street Church and theologian Carl Henry of Fuller Theological Seminary (and later *Christianity Today*) that consequential?¹ Surely the neo-evangelicals made some noise and founded some institutions, but does the fruit of their labors constitute something so spiritually resplendent as an "awakening"? Evangelicals, after all, judiciously conserve their usage of this term; they can be miserly with their historical assessments, and might balk at rendering the postwar evangelical renaissance a third epoch of Christian growth and health.

But though counter-arguments do come to mind, one can make a reasonable case that something truly unique took place in this era.² The preaching of Billy Graham led to many conversions, and Bible-loving congregations grew precipitously³; the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals, CT, and Fuller Seminary established a new institutional identity for biblically-conservative Protestants⁴; a sprawling, thriving network of parachurch ministries, colleges and universities, and new media sprung up *ex nihilo*, many of which still exist and even grow in the current day.⁵ All of America experienced a postwar religious boom, as is well-chronicled,⁶ but this does not obscure the reality that evangelicals made massive gains in this

1. For the definitive take on Ockenga, see Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); also Owen Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind: An Intellectual History of the Neo-Evangelical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015); for more on Henry, see Bob E. Patterson, *Carl F. H. Henry, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Dallas: Word, 1984); Matthew J. Hall and Owen Strachan, *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

2. The definitive survey of the movement is Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997). For more on the evangelical left as it developed out of neo-evangelicalism, consult David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

3. Grant Wacker, dean of Graham historians, offers one statistical overview of the effect of Graham's globe-spanning preaching. According to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, beginning with 1937 and continuing to the end of the evangelist's public ministry, attendance at crusades totaled 82,774,083, with inquirers coming in at 4,563,436. Though Graham's theology and evangelistic practices are widely-debated, no man in history has preached to more people; no man in history has seen more people respond with interest to his message. See Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2014), 260.

4. See Arthur Matthews, *Standing Up, Standing Together: The Emergence of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Carol Stream, Ill.: National Association of Evangelicals, 1992); Stephen Board, "Moving the World with Magazines: A Survey of Evangelical Periodicals," in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 171–95; George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

5. Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge devote a chapter in their helpful book on revivals to the neo-evangelical boom, and conclude as follows about it: "the revivals of the late 1940s and early 1950s carved out space for a vibrant, diverse evangelical movement that survives today." See Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Strengthen and Stir* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 175.

6. See Robert Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

period, gains that swell in importance when compared to the challenging first four decades of the twentieth-century.⁷ It was almost as if the Lord let the light dim in the prewar years in order to prepare his church for something remarkable in the postwar years.

Something remarkable did indeed this way come in the mid-twentieth century. Just as the First Great Awakening reset the ecclesiastical paradigm along gospel-demarcated lines in the 1700s, and just as the Second Great Awakening redrew the Protestant map through the explosion of upstart groups like the Baptists and Methodists, so the Third Great Awakening of the neo-evangelical years fundamentally recalibrated and repositioned evangelicalism for unprecedented expansion and activity.⁸ Neo-evangelicalism would not make good on all its aims, of course; the movement ultimately faltered. But this should not—must not—obscure the truth that evangelical prospects looked quite different after the 1970s, to cite one chronological benchmark, than they did before them.⁹

Many individuals contributed to this galaxy-formation. Upon close reflection, however, three rise to the fore. With Billy Graham, Ockenga and Henry formed the three horsemen of the Neo-Evangelical Resurgence. Unlike Graham, Ockenga and Henry have received relatively little academic and ecclesial treatment. It is the purpose of this article to explore Ockenga's significance for the current day, as the twenty-first century church's experience mirrors that of the neo-evangelicals some 60–70 years ago.¹⁰

In the pixels that follow, we shall see that, in a doctrinally-deficient era like ours, Ockenga offers the rising generations of pastors a faithful model to which to aspire and, God allowing, assume. This matters, for it appears we are in the midst of our own awakening or revival—though how this whole work of God wears, and what trajectory it ultimately takes, we cannot know.

The Pastor as Theologian: Harold Ockenga's Model

Harold John Ockenga did everything full-tilt. He could not merely study at Taylor University; he had to preach and sing as part of a men's group. He could not only

7. Garth Rosell terms the neo-evangelical enterprise a "surprising work of God," using the familiar phrase of awakener Jonathan Edwards, and considers the movement an "evangelical awakening." See Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 14–16.

8. For an authoritative overview of the First Great Awakening, see Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2007); for the same on the Second Great Awakening, see Nathan O. Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*. (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1989).

9. *Newsweek* famously declared 1976 the "Year of the Evangelicals," as one benchmark. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals," *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976.

10. Compare the remarks by Ockenga in his inaugural message at Fuller Seminary, entitled "The Challenge to the Christian Culture of the West." See Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind*, 115–19.

complete a PhD at Pittsburgh; he had to preach up a storm in a growing church (one whose sagging membership rolls he purposefully pruned).¹¹ He could not simply lead famous Park Street Church; he had to begin an in-house Bible school, a new evangelical clearinghouse, and a network of rising academic stars.¹²

But what most stood out about Ockenga was this: he was a pastor who preached the Word. He loved the Bible, and he loved to preach the Bible. He memorized his sermons, and then went into the pulpit and delivered them flawlessly.¹³ He prayed for hours for spiritual power to flood his ministry, and then declaimed his messages as if the Holy Spirit genuinely backed him. Ockenga did not hold back theologically; reading his sermons today, one senses they could double as a classroom lecture in an ambitious MDiv elective. Ockenga was a homiletical force of nature.

Ockenga did not grow up in the Reformed tradition. He did not have deep spiritual roots in Dutch Calvinism or Princetonian theology. But he gravitated to the stout stuff from a young age. J. Gresham Machen's culture-defying stand caught his eye in the 1920s, and Ockenga yearned to study under Machen and men like him.¹⁴ So he did, matriculating first at Princeton and later at Westminster Theological Seminary. Ockenga had caught a hunger for rock-ribbed doctrine, as extant sermons from this period and later ones show. But Ockenga did not merely want to treasure up sound doctrine in his heart. He realized that the truth would burn a hole in your pocket if you stowed it away. He yearned to preach it, and so he did, first in Pittsburgh, later in Boston, and everywhere he could.

We get a flavor of the Ockengan pulpit in the following, a summary of Christ's role as intercessor for his people:

Christ ascended to the place of intercession, for He ever lives to make intercession for us. There He entered upon His eternal priesthood as advocate and divine helper. That was the beginning of His mediatorial kingdom as priest-king over His people and in that intercession He guarantees the security of His people through His own prayers. What He said to Peter may be said to us, "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail." Thank God for the

11. The first biography of Ockenga is still an interesting source of material for Ockenga's years in Pittsburgh—Harold Lindsell, *Park Street Prophet: A Life of Harold John Ockenga* (Wheaton, Ill.: Van Kampen, 1951). The time at Point Breeze Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh went swimmingly in more ways than one. The Sunday school grew to more than four hundred people; the church added a sixty-voice choir; it also retired the mortgage even as the greatest economic depression in American history unfolded.

12. For more on Ockenga's ministry at Park Street, consult Garth M. Rosell, *Boston's Historic Park Street Church: The Story of an Evangelical Landmark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 53–54; Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885–1950* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).

13. See Randall Frame, "Modern Evangelicalism Mourns the Loss of One of Its Founding Fathers," *Christianity Today*, March 15, 1985, 36.

14. Machen grew so close to Ockenga that he called him "Ocky." The historical record is silent on whether Ockenga called his mentor "Machy." See Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind*, 47.

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prayers of our great Intercessor. The place of triumph was the place of power. From there He exercises sovereignty. In His resurrection form He said, “All authority in heaven and earth is given to me.” He has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, above all principalities and powers and every name that is named.¹⁵

Ockenga was a skilled diplomat; he took pains not to rule non-Reformed Christians out of the bounds of fellowship, as seen in his construction of the NAE. But neither did he hold back in his sermons from declaring the deep things of God. In the quotation above, he identifies Christ as the divine “priest-king” and vouches for the “security of His people through His own prayers.” Christ “exercises sovereignty” and possesses all authority, according to Ockenga. The pulpiteer’s strong, declarative sentences speak to the authoritative nature of the biblical preacher. The pulpit depends on and exists for the forthright exposition of the truth. The doctrines of the Word of God do not bring chaos into the church; they take the broken, the needy, and the damned, and turn them into living emblems of the glory of God.

At Park Street, Ockenga took on the mantle of no less a theologian than Jonathan Edwards. At one point, he delivered a sermon entitled “Jonathan Edwards and New England or the Apologetic of Protestantism.” His texts for the message were John 3:16 and Romans 9:16. His remarks on the nature of Reformed doctrine left no doubt about where he stood: “Whatever we may think of Calvinism, it has produced more rugged, upright, courageous characters than any other system.”¹⁶ A careful survey of “the history of New England and think of its intellectual lights and its leading characters of which we Americans are justly proud” showed the fruits of “three centuries of Calvinism, of strict adherence to the Bible teaching concerning the nature of man, the sovereignty of God and the need of a true regeneration in life.” While Ockenga never lost his love for Methodism, the denomination in which he was reared, he clearly let his doctrinal flag fly.

How different was this preaching than the style which rose to popularity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ockenga’s sermons share much in common with the old Puritan style of preaching, grounded as they were in searching theological reflection and keen spiritual interest. The Ockengan homily was textual, packed with testable assertions, and polished to a high sheen. Though this form of exposition has found a sizeable (and growing) audience in our day, Ockenga’s peers and forebears did not share his enthusiasm for such a pulpit performance, which would have sounded staid and stuffy and over-intellectual to many churchgoers of this era. Nathan Hatch has nicely characterized the dominant model of the 19th—and by extension the 20th—century:

15. “Our Evangelical Faith,” accessible at <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=10723>.

16. Strachan, *Awakening*, 67–68.

Passionate about ferreting out converts in every hamlet and crossroads, they sought to bind them together in local and regional communities. They continued to refashion the sermon as a popular medium, inviting even the most unlearned and inexperienced to respond to a call to preach. These initiates were charged to proclaim the gospel anywhere and every day of the week—even to the limit of their physical endurance. The resulting creation, the colloquial sermon, employed daring pulpit storytelling, no-holds-barred appeals, overt humor, strident attack, graphic application, and intimate personal experience.¹⁷

An unlearned ministry—in many cases intentionally—yielded a heartfelt, spiritually effective, but by no means richly theological pulpit. As Hatch argues, the sermon was “refashion[ed]” in the Second Great Awakening. Warm-hearted evangelicals can look back at this historical moment and give thanks to God for the evangelistic impulse of so many preachers back then; clearly, the gospel burst its formal bonds in the wild and woolly years in question, leading to widespread evangelism and an explosion of conversions.

Even as we give thanks for this gospel outbreak, we note the transformation of the sermon, the pastorate, and to some extent, the congregation itself. In many places, the sermon was no longer a textual exposition; the pastorate was no longer a fundamentally theological office, at least not intentionally so; the local congregation was no longer a place geared at the feeding of Christ’s little lambs, but an evangelistic waystation.¹⁸ The historical record bears out this characterization; one need only read the messages of a figure like Billy Sunday, as one prime example, to see that emotional storytelling aimed at on-the-spot decisions had won the day in the evangelical world.¹⁹

Ockenga was not a perfect expositor—he preached topically a good bit, and not so much verse-by-verse—but he represents a return to the old ways. He worked hard to offer his people a rich meal of biblical truth. In this sense, he is a “pastor-theologian.” This term must be read with care. It does not mean a high-flown preacher holding a secular doctorate. Nor does it signify a pastor who closes himself off to the people and avoids counseling and visitation like an outbreak of pinkeye. Further, it cannot and must not refer to a homiletician whose sermons soar over the heads of his people. A pastor-theologian simply stands for this: God’s appointed shepherd who

17. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 57.

18. No one has chronicled these shifts better than E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

19. For more on Sunday and early twentieth-century revivalism, see Lyle Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). For an incisive look at the shape of American evangelicalism in this period, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (1980; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006). Sunday’s influence on American preaching and the shape of the local church’s activity deserves more consideration at the scholarly level.

believes that he ascends the sacred desk each week in order to deliver sound biblical doctrine discovered in a particular scriptural passage to God's called-out flock.²⁰

The Sad State of the American Pulpit in Our Time

If someone observes that this last definition sounds much like the biblical conception of a pastor—no hyphen and additional descriptor necessary—this is true. But we use the two-word term for two reasons: to highlight the biblical priority on doctrinal exposition, and to differentiate the model from dominant paradigms of the current day. The American pulpit resembles nothing so much as a war-zone in our time; it is as if the preaching office has been bombed by one hostile critic after another, leaving many shepherds to effectively dig themselves out of the rubble in order to assume a genuinely textual and theological ministry.²¹

Theology is seen today as the high-level privilege of an arrogant few; bring theology into the church, and it divides people. If you preach it, the congregation might actually wake up, and people could even—hold your breath and clutch your pearls—*leave*. Our big-box, numbers-saturated, soft-word-flowing age fears little else more than people leaving, for such an outcome means smaller numbers, and smaller numbers means we frankly do not matter as much.

I do not mean to suggest here that churches should intentionally seek to shrink. That's clearly not what is taking place in the Book of Acts, after all. But let us not miss what is indeed taking place in the Book of Acts. The apostles of the crucified and risen Christ go into one knife-drawn environment after another and declare an exclusive gospel that demands on-the-spot faith and repentance in the name of the Son of God. Two things, to condense affairs that follow, occur. First, the apostles and early disciples experience trials, persecution, and suffering. Second, the gospel advances, unsuspecting sinners—both Jew and Gentile—are miraculously though straightforwardly converted, and the church grows. Suffering and joy, intertwined in the life and ministry of the Christian, and all of it provoked by the plain statement of the gospel, the truth, the Word.²²

Theology—by which I mean biblical teaching, nothing more, nothing fancy—causes a ruckus wherever it goes in the Bible. It makes monotheistic worshippers out of pagan epicureans. It creates glad-hearted Christians out of hate-gripped Jews.

20. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Douglas A. Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Gerald Hiestand and Walter T. Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

21. See David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); also Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

22. This statement comes very close to Luther's "theology of the cross," and with good cause. See Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, Second Edition (Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

It forms a people united by nothing other than the blood of Jesus out of a thousand disparate people-groups, many of whom simmer with disaffection for one another prior to conversion. Theology unites, but theology also presents the hard heart of the unbeliever—or even the immature believer—with a choice. Then and now, many elect to snub the truth, ignore it, turn away from it, and leave those who cling to it as a drowning man clings to the only rock he has.

For the pastor-theologian, numbers are not the goal. A fellowship humming with programmatic activity is not the goal.²³ Community impact is not the goal. God is the goal. God is the focus of the church. God is the only actual good in the universe. God is the ground of being, and the hope of our hearts, and the reason why all things exist and live rather than dying and going dormant. God has made a cosmos that hums with life and cannot help but be purposive and all points back to his radiant excellency, his undeniable glory, his unstoppable authority. God has desired to be known, and so he has spoken his Word, and shepherds have the unspeakable privilege of studying, learning, and teaching it to a gathered, called-out people. This is why there's a church; this is why there's a pastor.

The pastor-theologian knows that his chief duty is not to serve unbelievers. He wishes to evangelize them all he can, but unbelievers are not funding his very existence and paying, by extension, his bills. It is the people of God who are his responsibility. He has a flesh-and-blood charge, a living body, to lead and bless and train to know God. Praise God for developments in political philosophy and the doing of politics; praise God for the eclipse of the state church in so much of the West, with all its attendant confusion over what makes a Christian and what constitutes a church.²⁴ Nowhere in the Bible is a pastor called to be the spiritual leader of the ungodly; the New Testament knows only the elder—part of a team, a team that answers to the whole congregation—who exercises watchcare over the assembly of a localized body of Christians. The pastor-theologian thus labors to strengthen the faith and practice of Christ-loving men and women.

The pastor-theologian accomplishes this weighty—even impossible, in human terms—end by giving the people endless portions of the Word of God. He feeds them, spiritually speaking, God. So it was that Christ put it—his disciples were to *eat his flesh* and *drink his blood* (John 6). God is not the man behind the curtain, as many evangelical congregations have it; he is not hovering in the background, shy and unwilling to be named, like a crowd-shy philanthropist underwriting a meaningful charity. God is the reason the church exists, and the purpose of weekly gathering, and the figure the pastor-theologian lives and breathes to make known.

23. See Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

24. An instructive book on this topic is Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule*, Studies in Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016).

Led by the preacher, the church thus labors to center the worship-service in God. Musicians care more about the divine than about their own performance; God's Word is read, and not merely for a hurried verse or two, as if the reading of Scripture is a detour from the intended program; prayer to God is serious and consequential, not a tossed-off, formulaic invocation before jump-starting the collection of tithes and offerings; the Bible is expounded, as the pastor-theologian emulates Nehemiah and "gives the sense" of the text, a "sense" that will only make sense with Christ and his hermeneutical fulfillment in view (Nehemiah 8:8). God is the point; God is the focus; God is reason why the church exists.

In too many churches today, the preceding words do not fit the actual behaviors and intentions of the staff and the assembly. In such a context, Ockenga offers the rising generation of ministers a model. He himself had this effect on at least one formative expositor: John Piper. Struck down by illness, Piper heard Ockenga piped-in when the Boston preacher gave chapel messages at Wheaton. He had never heard preaching quite like that which Ockenga offered.²⁵ Piper, the consummate pastor-theologian of our time, has gone on to summon—as if in a personal, by-the-collar calling-out—countless men to the pastorate. There is thus a golden chain running through history, from Machen to Ockenga to Piper to many young men who now work in God's fields. No doubt many of these men have no idea that they are in ministry in human terms because of a forgotten Boston pastor—but they are.

Onward Ockenga: Five Considerations for the Next Generation of Pastor-Theologians

But this little factoid raises a further question: if a young man (or an older one, no matter) aspires to this model of the ministry, what principles should frame his thinking from this point forward? In light of Ockenga's example, and the testimony of theological history, let me suggest five matters for further consideration on the part of future pastor-theologians.

First, we need smart and godly men to aspire to a theological pastorate.

As mentioned above, Ockenga yearned to be a pastor. He undertook high-level training at two seminaries and a university in order to prepare himself theologically and intellectually for the sacred task. One does not need a certain set of degrees to undertake a theological pastorate, but whatever one's course of training, we need young men to hunger to feed the flock of Christ sound doctrine.²⁶

25. See Strachan, *Awakening*, 166.

26. Few texts will do more to ignite a holy interest in preaching than Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010 [1875]) and J. C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015 [1865]).

I say this in contradistinction from an overly academic approach to the ministry. It is not a sign of health for a seminary campus, for example, to be awash in students who have no interest in pastoring an actual church.²⁷ It is great—and thrilling—for some students to prepare for academic ministry, but the healthiest seminaries see their primary role as sending out a veritable flood of ministers. These institutions, after all, came into being because local churches at some point recognized the strategic nature of pooling resources for the nurture and training of pastors. Seminaries continue to serve this necessary function, and do so with special effectiveness when partnered with local churches to not merely produce graduates, but form workers in Christ's vineyards.²⁸

All this means that we want young men of the Ockengan type—bright, godly, ambitious for the kingdom of heaven—to aspire, more often than not, to the pastorate. We find ourselves, as so often happens in church history, in the midst of a theology famine.²⁹ The only sure cure for this awful phenomenon is the preparation of future shepherds who will lead churches and strengthen them through biblical feeding. There is no higher work given to humanity than this; there is no nobler call one can hear, and heed, than God's, summoning the rising generation like Samuel in the night.

Second, we need colleges, universities, and especially seminaries to intentionally form pastor-theologians.

Here I wish to bring in the example of Ockenga's partner-in-crime Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, undoubtedly the brightest intellectual light of postwar Western Christianity. Henry almost seems a fictional figure, he's so impressive: two PhDs, one best-selling book that continues to influence the church (*The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* of 1947), several dozen more books, thousands of articles and reviews and reports, tireless activism to promote truth and oppose the darkness,

27. Theologian John Frame has offered provocative thoughts in his stimulating book *The Academic Captivity of Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2013).

28. As one example, consider the Academy in Geneva. Consult Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

29. This phenomenon is happening in America, strangely enough, for we are awash in good theological resources; it is also surely happening in much greater terms across the world. According to one missions voice, the number one request of non-Western ministry leaders is for pastoral training, a key component of which is doctrinal instruction. See Nick Moore, "Theological Famine in the Majority World," B&H Academic Blog, July 28, 2016, accessible at <http://www.bhacademicblog.com/theological-famine-majority-world>. Surely the two problems are connected—theology famine in the majority world, and theology famine in the areas the church evangelizes. In sum, the rising generation of ministers and scholars should know that any fighting of this tide matters, and matters greatly, wherever one labors.

and much, much more.³⁰ Henry gave a good portion of his time to instruction of seminarians, first at Fuller Theological Seminary, later at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and beyond these schools the theologian lectured at nearly every evangelical institution under the sun.

Henry was peripatetic, but he believed in the formation of pastors. His *magnum opus*, the six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority*, shot far over the head of the average Christian reader, but works marvelously well as an interaction with the predominant non-evangelical hermeneutics of its time.³¹ I assign whole volumes of GRA to my own seminarians, and part of the benefit of doing so is not merely the fine-tuned content, but the model. Here is a brilliant thinker who loved Christ above all else, paid little attention to cultivating the attention of the theological elites of his day, but who did not shirk from the task of full-bore doctrinal encounter with Neo-Orthodoxy, Protestant Liberalism, Catholic natural law teaching, and Western thought more broadly. It is this kind of scholar one wants to have in classrooms teaching students, and then after class sequestered in his office to write the books that will train pastor-theologians to engage their culture and context.

In other words, we need institutions to partner with the church to form pastor-theologians. This should begin at the undergraduate level, and it should come to flower in the seminary environment. Ideally this takes place through residential education. Though it is difficult to pull up stakes, move away from home and perhaps even a ministry position, and undertake the long work of the MDiv, this investment in one's vocation is worth all the cost.³² Pastor-theologians, after all, are not brains in vats; they are flesh-and-blood people, and they are being trained to spiritually strengthen flesh-and-blood people. If a seminary is not fulfilling this mission, it should go out of business. If, on the other hand, it is calibrated like an arrow to build into future pastors, then it deserves the fullest possible support on the part of God's churches.

You do not *absolutely* need scholars—or even seminaries—to make pastors. But if scholars have a genuine love for the mission of God and the people of God, they are

30. Ben Peays has done valuable work in showing how Henry pulled the “Uneasy Conscience” material together. See Peays, “The Modern Mind and the Uneasy Conscience” in Hall and Strachan, *Essential Evangelicalism*, 149–73.

31. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco, TX: Word, 1976–1983), hereafter *GRA*. The six volumes in order of publication: Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume One: God Who Speaks and Shows, Preliminary Considerations* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1976]); idem, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Two: God Who Speaks and Shows—Fifteen Theses, Part One* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1976]); idem, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Three: God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Two* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1979]); idem, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Four: God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Three* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1979]); idem, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Five: God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1982]); idem, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Six: God Who Stands and Stays, Part Two* (Crossway, 1999 [Word, 1983]).

32. As Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary president Jason K. Allen has said, “The call to ministry is a call to prepare.” Allen, *Discerning Your Call to Ministry: How to Know For Sure and What to Do About It* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 134–37.

in a marvelous position to influence future pastors. What a priceless opportunity this is. What a calling. What a job. If anyone doubts the potency of such environments, we should direct them to the Christian tradition. The Genevan academy was no modern academic outfit, but it shaped an entire generation of church planters and ministers. Princeton Seminary in its 19th-century iteration trained hordes of young men in the rugged “Princeton Theology”; men like Charles Hodge truly served as watchmen on the wall.³³ They brought multitudes in to the school, they imparted all they could, and then they stood on the ramparts and watched as God sent his shepherds to battle Satan and feed the sheep.

The same is true with Machen, Cornelius Van Til, John Murray, and others at Westminster; Henry, E. J. Carnell, and Ladd at Fuller; more recently, David Wells, Meredith Kline, and Roger Nicole at Gordon-Conwell; D. A. Carson, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Woodbridge, and Douglas Sweeney at Trinity; Al Mohler, Tom Schreiner, Bruce Ware, Michael Haykin, and Don Whitney at Southern.³⁴ The list could go on. You do not have to build seminaries to launch massive offensive operations against the kingdom of darkness, but in historical retrospective, they have surely played a unique role in doing great damage to Satan’s anti-monarchy.

So, though we need a far smaller group of scholars—we could call them theologian-pastors—we need them nonetheless. They are nothing other than what the Bible calls “teachers,” after all. We especially need the type who work and speak and write and teach and mentor for the church. This in no way means they sidestep, say, writing high-level exegetical commentaries, biblical theologies, systematic texts, historical volumes, or ethical and philosophical treatises. It does mean that they labor from the standpoint that the greatest delight of any on earth is not to earn the praise of the secular academy, but to search out the will and ways of almighty God. Nothing exceeds this. Nothing compares to it.³⁵

Let us produce outstanding thinkers, leaders, and communicators, but let us do so while learning at least one lesson from the neo-evangelicals, and break in our heart with the temptation common to academicians, namely, the desire to put Scripture aside as our ultimate authority and win the praise of the guild. Scripture

33. As substantiated in Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

34. Truly, fresh attention needs to be given to the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century theological reloading among evangelicals and, in particular, Baptists. The return of many Baptists to the general doctrinal orientation of the early years of the Southern Baptist Convention is both a theological miracle and a remarkable historical development. For a helpful introduction on this point, Gregory A. Wills, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); also L. Russ Bush and Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 1999 [1980]).

35. We think here of David Wells’s compelling argument that historically, pastors were “scholar-saints” who were “as comfortable with books and learning as with the aches of the soul.” Wells, *Courage to Be Protestant*, 40. See also the testimony of John Piper in Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar, the Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 21–70.

is not a prison for the mind; Scripture is a springboard for the intellect. You can study the doctrine of creation, the attributes of God, cross-covenantal symbolism and fulfillment, and never exhaust it.³⁶ Let us have done with evangelical academics, evangelical theologians, who chase some effervescent and never-realized dream of elite approval. Let us recover and repristinate *Sola Scriptura*, and think hard about what it truly means for all intellectual inquiry.

Third, we need pastors to declare biblical truth—which is to say sound doctrine—from the pulpit.

Harold Ockenga purposefully rejected a story-driven ministry. Sunday worship was not storytelling hour for evangelicals; it was feeding season for the spiritually hungry. Kenneth Kantzer, a doctoral student in Boston during the 1940s, shared the following about Ockenga's sermonizing: "One of the secrets of Ockenga's success as a pastor and church leader was his thorough preparation for everything he did. He prepared his sermons from the Greek text and has continued to study his Greek Testament throughout his ministry."³⁷ From this foundation, Ockenga preached four times a week for much of his ministerial career.

If a pastor is not committed to sound doctrine, he not only a God problem, for he will answer to the Lord of heaven and earth for his trifling messages. He also has a content problem, for there simply are not enough testimonies, sociological insights, and sports anecdotes by which to sustain a forty-year pastorate (at least not a compelling one). By contrast, the historic model of the pastor-theologian eschews innovation and topical spelunking for the systematic exposition of the Bible. From my own vantage point, it has been fascinating to watch who endures in the ministry and who does not. There are many factors in play, but it is noteworthy to see John MacArthur, for example, last for over fifty years in the pulpit, while so many neophytes have come and gone in that time.³⁸ Indeed, one of the best strategies for countering soft words and false teaching seems to be simply this: waiting the wolves out. Over the years, a heart straying from biblical wisdom—or never truly interested in it—tends to stray not merely from the text, but from the faith itself. By contrast, those who treasure the loving-kindness of the Lord, and count it better than life, have a Spirit-powered habit of endurance.

The pastor-theologian makes a conscious decision to do just this: endure. His ministry is not grounded in coolness; in relevance; in authenticity, as commonly

36. The recent explosion of biblical-theological scholarship bears this out in spades. As just one of many examples, consult the arresting perspective put forth by numerous authors in Steven J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016).

37. Strachan, *Awakening*, 74.

38. Pastors-in-training will benefit from the biography of MacArthur by Iain Murray. See Murray, *John MacArthur: Servant of the Word and Flock* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2011).

defined; in rhetorical firepower; in personal winsomeness; in cultural fluency; in popularity; in normality, even. The pastor-theologian is more like the grasshopper-chewing John the Baptist, in other words, than like a CEO, a cutting-edge activist, a wildly-gifted “maker,” a society-defying musician, a comedian, or any other performer or public figure. The pastor-theologian’s ministry is grounded in God and his Word. He wants above all else to know the Lord, and thus to kill his sin, and grow in maturity by the power of Christ in him. He knows that conversion ushers the redeemed into a lifelong process of sanctification, and that he is responsible for pursuing the fruits of the Spirit. More than anything else, his people need him to be mature, to be holy, to be zealous for the divine, and thus to be a kind of Bible-saturated mystic.³⁹

The pastor-theologian does not believe he deserves extra credit for preaching biblical truth. He humbly confesses, whatever his gifting, whatever his intellectual interests, that he has nothing else to preach.⁴⁰ God has graciously given him the Word, all of it, to be searched out and applied. There is nothing better to preach—not warmed-over psychotherapy, not historical lessons, not activism, not Chicken Soup for the Vaguely Evangelical Soul. This exposition of the text handed down to us by God’s Spirit is no exercise in virtuous but boring spirituality, either. The biblical text is fascinating. Alongside the full inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, we should freely and gladly confess the full beauty of the Word of God.⁴¹ Nothing comes close to it in terms of depth and breadth and mystery and power and complexity. Yes, a child can understand the basic message of the Bible—praise God for that. But a skilled scholar can spend a lifetime in the Word and never come close to discovering its fathomless deeps.

Fourth, the pastor-theologian delights to go toe-to-toe with an age that is both reductionist and intellectually arrogant.

As we have been at pains to say: how much do we need strong, intellectually-gripping, soul-shaking preaching in our age. We live in an era that is simultaneously dumbed-down but academically-beholden. In other words, while many of us flirt with laziness due in part to our devices (which do the heavy-lifting for us), our culture puts

39. As Gavin Peacock has said, we need “divines, not dudes.” See Peacock, “What Is Biblical Manhood?” in Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock, *The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them* (Christian Focus, 2016), 58; also Aaron Cline Hanbury, “Gavin Peacock’s Moment,” Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, July 21, 2014, accessible at <https://cbmw.org/topics/ministry-men/gavin-peacocks-moment>.

40. I make this argument in Strachan, “The Pastor as Theologian” in *Portraits of a Pastor*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 71–90.

41. One could argue that this is the entailment of a text that is uniquely divine. To read the Scripture, in fact, is to come into full contact with its heavenly form and identity. The Scripture is so glorious, in fact, that it authenticates itself as the very testimony of God. See J. I. Packer, “Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority,” *Themelios* 1.1 (Autumn 1975): 3–12; also John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

more stock than ever before in elite education and expert consensus. Such a context leaves sheep who are ripe for plucking, especially if they are interested in debates, discussions, and genuine intellectual inquiry.

I sense this is particularly true for young people, many of whom go to secular schools and find themselves intellectually interested, perhaps, for the first time in their lives.⁴² Their youth group did little to give them a taste for the exhilaration of biblical learning; their church body was geared more to salving feelings than equipping the mind; their parents, members of this kind of ecclesial experiment, did little to train them up in apologetic terms. In fact, despite real evidence of serious study and real learning on the part of children and youth—we think here, and even perhaps shudder as we do, of chemistry, geometry, algebra, complex football playbooks, and so on—the church has often treated its younger constituency as if the mere mention of theology, like a computer virus, shuts the brain down on the spot. With a background like this, is it any shock that our youth would be sorely tempted to walk away from the faith, when the faith when they have witnessed in their background seemed to strain against deep discussion and heartfelt engagement of the deepest realities of the universe?

More than perhaps ever before—save for the era of the Enlightenment—the church not only needs but *must have* pastors who are equipped to handle objections, challenges, and genuine questions from both skeptics and saints. In terms of discipleship, it is not enough to give people John 3:16, a financial planning program, and a watered-down, fill-in-the-blank brand of instruction. The sheep need *doctrine*. The sheep, whatever their age or station in life, need *truth*.⁴³ The people of God require—from their shepherds—a rich meal of biblical food. Too often today, they receive only a thimble-full of theology. We do not mean here that the pastor is required to personally vindicate the faith in the face of every query and overthrow every disputant.⁴⁴ Faith, we remember, is a miracle. No one is saved by reason or mere intellection, but by the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9). But with this noted, pastors

42. There is a great hunger among our youth for the truth. As one example, consider the testimony of Jaquelle Crowe, *This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

43. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. speaks well to the truth-driven nature of the pastorate: “There is no more theological calling than this—guard the flock of God for the sake of God’s truth.” Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 107.

44. Vanhoozer has very helpfully framed the pastor as an intellectual “generalist.” Discussing ministers, Vanhoozer writes: “Pastors are called not to practice academic theology but to minister theological understanding, helping people to interpret the Scriptures, their cultures, and their own lives in relation to God’s great work of redemption summed up *in Christ*.” Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 15, 112. In terms of helping, say, college students work through secular presentations in their coursework, the pastor does not need to master quantum physics to aid them, but he should help them understand how to integrate science and faith, and should try to identify what the working metaphysical and philosophical assumptions of a discipline are, and then compare them to biblical commitments in the same areas. Vanhoozer’s contributions in *Pastor as Public Theologian* give further guidance on these important but hard-to-handle matters.

can surely work very hard in our simultaneously anti-intellectual and arrogantly intellectual age to show the beauty and power and cohesion of the Word of God.

This kind of ministry is truly the cure of souls, as the Puritans used to say. The pastor is in the business of presenting people whole in Christ to God. Alongside the theologian, he is the only person on the earth who traffics in eternity for a living. All this ministry, all this activity, all this glory-giving work, depends upon sound doctrine. Biblical truth is the *obsession* of the pastor. He is like a lion deprived of meat when taken out of his pulpit; he is consumed with getting back to divine business, as Edwards called it.⁴⁵ He lives to preach the Word of God, he sees it as a calling he could never deserve and has no right to assume, and he works very, very hard to preach and teach faithfully each week.

He does so while happily, cheerfully, and unstintingly proclaiming the whole counsel of God. This is where the pastor approaches a great line, drawn deep in the sand, and must choose whether he will cross over or hold back. Will he preach, in the context of book-by-book exposition, the truth about homosexuality? Will he tell his people what everlasting torment in hell means? Will he defend substitutionary atonement against the rising chorus of its detractors? Will he build out a meaningful, robust understanding of submission as it relates *both* to the nature of the Christian life *and* to biblical womanhood, or will he dodge the bullet with a few jokes and limp qualifications? Will he show his people that we not only affirm Christ as the judge of all the earth, but *need* him to fill this role in order for evil to be routed and destroyed?

Too often, pastors confront the kind of questions I have just posed only in terms of faithfulness. This is surely a crucial component of the conscious and ministry-shaping decision to declare the whole counsel, no matter the cost. But I would also suggest that pastors should consider these questions in terms of *need*—the need of the people for answers to an unbelieving culture's challenges. The church, for example, largely decided to go light on matters of sexuality and gender so as to not offend or divide, or drive away potential seekers. We cannot miss that this decision left the church's apologetic ministry with a gaping hole in its defenses; the people of God had no theology of sexuality, no deeper understanding of marriage, no comprehensive and beautiful vision of manhood and womanhood.⁴⁶ Is it any wonder that our youth report in polls that they support a non-Christian ethic on homosexuality, then?

Pastor-theologians build their ministry off of sound doctrine, we conclude here, not only because the Bible commands they do so (Titus 2:1), but because this is precisely what the flock of Christ must have to endure, survive, and thrive in our

45. See Jonathan Edwards, "Pastor and People Must Look to God," in *The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of Ministry and the Gospel*, ed. Richard Bailey and Wills (Carol Stream: Crossway, 2002), 142. This entire sermon by Edwards will fan into flame an interest in the model of pastoral ministry covered in this article.

46. This despite the outstanding contribution of John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006 [1991]).

smoldering, faith-targeting world. Failure to preach and teach doctrinally leaves the church a collection of unwitting prey and unready witnesses.

Fifth, we need pastor-theologians because, under Christ, the church depends on them.

Give us men who fit this paradigm, and the church truly has what it needs to survive and even thrive in the wild. Much is being said in our time of the need to equip the whole body for ministry; Baptists like me, as with all true saints, cherish the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Yet it must also be said that the church has just two offices, elders and deacons, and that God has invested a great deal in the former.

The elders of the church, led in many cases by those who give special attention to preaching and teaching the Word, have the God-given responsibility to protect, nourish, and correct the flock.⁴⁷ They are always accountable to the church body itself; they cannot act as CEOs or spiritual dictators. But they and they alone are called to oversee the body of Christ in its local expression. When Christ launched his ministry and thereby began the formation of his spiritual body, he began by gathering the twelve to himself. He taught them, trained them, admonished them, and readied them for the work he was soon to hand over to them.⁴⁸

So it was that the apostle Paul traveled the Greco-Roman world, appointing elders wherever he went. So much—so very much—rests upon the elders of a local church. This means, correspondingly, that so much depends upon identifying and training the next generation of elders. This means, in turn, that in human terms, the church's health rests with the church's ability to strengthen and summon young men to leadership.

The church is Christ's. It cannot live or move or have its being but through Christ, who at every moment upholds both the created order and the people washed in his blood. But Christ has so ordered his church that it must have men to lead it. Nowhere is male leadership associated with the necessary subjugation of women. Rather, God has structured his church for maximal glory, and his church's pattern of leadership follows the creational design of the man and the woman (see Genesis 2). In this way, men serving as elders is not arbitrary, but grounded in creational norms.

There are many ways for men and women alike to bless and build up the body outside of the position of elder. All this service is valuable; all of it is drenched in meaning. But we cannot miss the missional necessity of raising up pastor-theologians, men who are equipped to be leaders of men, who will be able to guide an elder-board

47. I commend here the work of Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2014).

48. This raises the matter of discipleship, the lack of which is a formative part of all that ails the modern church. For help here, consult Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). All discipling begins, it must be said, with a healthy and vigorous pulpit ministry. Preaching *is* discipling, and is the cornerstone of all discipleship efforts.

in answering falsehood, standing down wolves who slip into the flock, promoting true doctrine, and caring for the souls of the people. To the extent that we succeed in this great endeavor, our churches will be positioned for health; to the extent that we fail to call out and raise up the next generation of pastors, our churches will wilt and fail to give God the glory he deserves.

In sum, we need more men like Ockenga, men who sought training and preparation for ministry, who worked very hard to preach faithfully and well, and who exuded a spirit of holy ambition and gospel boldness in a world that sought to quiet and snuff out such boisterous faith.⁴⁹ But these kind of men will accrue naturally in churches that love doctrine and love the mission of Christ, for no matter the direness of the cultural situation, true men of God will always thrill to a big challenge and an impossible task.⁵⁰

Conclusion

We began with a big claim: the neo-evangelical heyday deserves consideration—and even scholarly representation—as the Third Great Awakening of American history. That claim is audacious enough in itself, but here’s more for the scholarly scales: we may well find ourselves in a new season of revival. We have not yet seen the conversion growth that would merit this age being labeled a Fourth Great Awakening, but it is clear to many of us that God has done something new in our time.

Looking back at Ockenga’s career, and movement, gives us fresh insight and perspective for our own day. The neo-evangelical enterprise ultimately faltered, as disagreement over doctrines like Scripture, manhood and womanhood, and the nature of the church caused a splintering of the once-unified association. This reality prompts us to wonder afresh today: will we hold fast to the trustworthy word? Will evangelicals pursue unity, but not a unity of warm feelings and shared cultural interests, a unity grounded in love for the truth? Will a still-secularizing environment lead the church to trim its theological wings, and bid its pastors to soften their tone, for fear of being heard as controversial?

We cannot know, but we can pray for this: that God will raise up more with the spirit and pastoral commitment of Ockenga, and more with the willingness to venture all over the world, and like the early church declare the exclusivistic gospel of Christic grace, the gospel that may yield suffering in the present, but bequeaths the eternal weight of glory to all who are faithful in Christ, and to Christ.

49. We would do well to recover such a bold spirit. For a popular take on this issue, consider John Piper, *Risk Is Right: Better to Lose Your Life Than Waste it* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); David Platt, *Radical: Taking Your Faith Back from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010); Owen Strachan, *Risky Gospel: Abandon Fear and Build Something Awesome* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

50. See Mark Chanski, *Manly Dominion: In a Passive-Purple-Four-Ball World* (Merrick, New York: Calvary Press, 2014).