

INERRANCY IS NOT ENOUGH: A PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Denny R. Burk, Jr.
Criswell College, Dallas, TX
Ray Van Neste
Union University, Jackson, TN

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, Ray Van Neste argued that in the wardrobe of doctrinal statements the Evangelical Theological Society's (ETS) doctrinal basis is a bikini.¹ In spite of protests to the contrary, it simply does not cover everything that needs to be covered, and it leaves the ETS embarrassingly exposed. We are convinced that the concerns that motivated that original essay are still with us today six years hence. We also believe that now, perhaps more than ever, these issues need to be addressed in a formal way. That is why the authors of this article are co-sponsoring a proposal to amend the doctrinal basis of the ETS. After much discussion with and feedback from fellow members of the ETS, we sent the proposed amendment to the Executive Committee of the ETS in August of 2007 so that the amendment can be formally introduced at the 2007 annual meeting of the ETS in San Diego, California. According to the ETS Constitution, the Society will have an opportunity to vote on the amendment the following year at the 2008 meeting in Providence, Rhode Island.² Even though the following discussion relates most directly to

¹The original version of Ray Van Neste's essay was presented in 2001 at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Available on-line, <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/papers/ets/2001/VanNeste/VanNeste.html>). It was subsequently published as "The Glaring Inadequacy of the ETS Doctrinal Statement," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2004): 74–81.

²ETS Constitution, Article VII, sections 1 and 2: "Proposed amendments to this constitution must be submitted in writing to the secretary-treasurer,

voting members of the ETS, the issues we raise here are relevant to anyone who is concerned about the shape of contemporary American evangelicalism. In the pages that follow, we intend to introduce the amendment, elaborate our rationale for it, and answer objections to it that we have received from conscientious fellow members.

II. THE AMENDMENT

Before introducing the amendment, a little background is in order. In 2001 at the 53rd annual meeting of the ETS, Ray Van Neste presented a paper in which he suggested numerous ways in which the current doctrinal basis falls short (we will revisit some of those reasons below). Presently, the ETS doctrinal basis has two parts: (1) a statement on inerrancy, and (2) a statement on the Trinity. It reads as follows: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.” In order to improve this short statement, Van Neste proposed that the ETS adopt the doctrinal basis of the U.K.’s Tyndale Fellowship. The Tyndale Fellowship unites biblical scholars from diverse denominational and theological perspectives (Calvinists, Wesleyans, Baptists, Anglicans, etc.) around evangelical truths. The members of the Tyndale Fellowship agree to the statement of belief used by the U.K.’s Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF). Since this statement has a proven track record of providing a unifying evangelical core for a varied group of scholars, it seemed a good resource for the ETS.

The UCCF statement includes not only an evangelical view of Scripture and the Trinity, but also addresses the following crucial areas of evangelical faith that are not included in the current ETS doctrinal basis:

The sovereignty of God (UCCF pt. 2),

The plight of humanity- the fall, universal guilt, and God’s wrath (UCCF pt. 4),

The incarnation, virgin birth, humanity, crucifixion, bodily resurrection, and current reign of Jesus Christ (UCCF pt. 5),

Salvation only in Christ’s sacrificial and substitutionary

considered by the executive committee and read at the next annual meeting. A two-thirds vote at the succeeding annual meeting shall be necessary for adoption. . . . Amendments to Articles II and III and Section 2 of Article VII, however, shall require a four-fifths vote.” As adopted Dec. 28, 1949, and amended in 1950, 1951, 1959, 1976, 1985, and 1990.

atonement (UCCF pt. 6),

Salvation by grace through faith, not works; the imputation of Christ's righteousness (UCCF pt. 7),

The work of the Spirit in conversion and sanctification (UCCF pt. 8&9),

The church (UCCF pt. 10), and

The personal return of Christ with final judgment and reward (UCCF pt. 11).

Van Neste's original idea was that the ETS should adopt the UCCF statement along with the simple addition to a statement on inerrancy. What we are proposing in our amendment is slightly different. Since the ETS has already approved a statement on inerrancy and another on the Trinity, we propose that the ETS adopt the UCCF wording with the current doctrinal basis of the ETS incorporated into it.³ One other addition defines the "written word of God" as the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. So we propose to amend the current doctrinal basis as follows (italicized words indicate where the current doctrinal basis has been incorporated into the UCCF statement):

ARTICLE III. DOCTRINAL BASIS

1. *The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.* This written word of God consists of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments and is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and behavior.

2. *God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.*

3. God is sovereign in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment.

4. Since the fall, the whole of humankind is sinful and guilty, so that everyone is subject to God's wrath and condemnation.

5. The Lord Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, is fully God; he was born of a virgin; his humanity is real and sinless; he died on the cross, was raised bodily from death and is now reigning over heaven and earth.

6. Sinful human beings are redeemed from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death once and for all

³ We have corresponded with leadership of the UCCF and have obtained permission to use the wording of their statement while incorporating changes.

time of their representative and substitute, Jesus Christ, the only mediator between them and God.

7. Those who believe in Christ are pardoned of all their sins and accepted in God's sight only because of the righteousness of Christ credited to them; this justification is God's act of undeserved mercy, received solely by trust in him and not by their own efforts.

8. The Holy Spirit alone makes the work of Christ effective to individual sinners, enabling them to turn to God from their sin and to trust in Jesus Christ.

9. The Holy Spirit lives in all those he has regenerated. He makes them increasingly Christ-like in character and behavior and gives them power for their witness in the world.

10. The one holy universal church is the Body of Christ, to which all true believers belong.

11. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in person, to judge everyone, to execute God's just condemnation on those who have not repented and to receive the redeemed to eternal glory.

As already noted, the UCCF statement unites a broad constituency of evangelicals in the U.K. We think there is great potential for it to be a unifying doctrinal basis for the various evangelical constituencies represented in the ETS as well.

III. RATIONALE FOR THE AMENDMENT

D. A. Carson has warned in various settings that what is assumed in one generation is often lost in the next.⁴ We fear that far too much must simply be assumed in the current ETS doctrinal basis. Sure, the statement has worked for a generation, but what of the generations to come? Are we really content to assume that people will affirm the humanity of Christ, the fallenness of humanity, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide* just to name a few? Some will say that inerrancy requires such affirmations. However, this casts us too much into hermeneutical discussions. The purpose of a doctrinal basis is to make explicit how we interpret the Bible.

Therefore, we contend that the current ETS doctrinal basis is simply inadequate because it fails to include significant doctrines commonly held to be essential to evangelicals. This inadequacy creates the potential for some people who would not fit any historically responsible definition of "evangelical" to sign the statement in good conscience. In Van Neste's 2001 paper he cited correspondence with Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and a self-confessed Pelagian who all affirmed the current ETS doctrinal basis. Some have dismissed this as a problem that will never really materialize. However, the recent return of Francis Beckwith to

⁴ One place in print where Carson makes this point is *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 26–27.

Rome should have shown us that many things can happen that we have never expected. It should also remind us of the inadequacy of assuming agreement on key doctrinal matters. We cannot foresee what the next challenge will be. That is why Christian groups have historically put into writing what they viewed as the non-negotiable points of agreement.

We are not unaware of the debate among historians over whether there has ever been a confessional center to evangelical faith.⁵ For instance, David Wells notes “the interesting question of whether there ever was a theological structure that evangelicals commonly held and that held them together in a common world of belief.”⁶ Yet we believe that even within the diverse ecclesiological traditions of evangelicalism, there have been some consistent emphases throughout. There is much wisdom in the observation of former ETS president Darrell Bock that the *solas* of the Reformation represent a coherent “evangelical core” when added to the “Trinitarian-Christological core” of the Great Tradition.⁷ However, the current ETS doctrinal basis fails to affirm explicitly any of the five *solas*, has no real Christological core, and is seriously deficient of the Great Tradition in general.⁸ Though we would not presume to identify a comprehensive statement of evangelical belief, we nevertheless think an evangelical doctrinal basis would include more than what the ETS currently has.⁹

⁵Nor are we unaware of the historical question of who are the real forebears of modern evangelicalism. See for instance Michael Horton’s discussion of Donald Dayton’s thesis in “The Battles over the Label ‘Evangelical,’” *Modern Reformation* 10 (March/April 2001): 15–21.

⁶David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 133.

⁷Darrell Bock, “The Purpose-Driven ETS: Where Should We Go? A Look at Jesus Studies and Other Example Cases,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 7. We should point out that Bock appears to be a little more sanguine about the viability of the current ETS doctrinal basis: “Does an affirmation of a commitment to inerrancy alone keep us within appropriate boundaries? I would contend it can *within our community at large*, provided we also keep a focus on what emerges from Scripture, a vibrant Trinitarian doctrine as that has been defined in the earliest church” (*ibid.*, 15).

⁸It is often asserted that the ETS doctrinal basis affirms *sola scriptura*. This will be dealt with later in this paper.

⁹When we talk about evangelical identity we always include much more than inerrancy and the Trinity. Plenary papers at the 2001 national ETS meeting which focused on the issue of boundaries and evangelical definition commonly cited as evangelical distinctives issues like the five *solas* and the importance of gospel proclamation. It was interesting to hear the discussions of boundary markers while noting that very few of these supposed markers are mentioned in our doctrinal basis. Plenary sessions from that meeting included Darrell Bock, “The Purpose-Driven ETS: Where Should We Go? A Look at Jesus Studies and Other Example Cases”; William Travis, “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries Historically”; John Sanders and Bruce Ware, “Is Open Theism Evangelical?”;

IV. RESPONSES TO OBJECTIONS

We have used the internet to get the word out about the proposed amendment. Through our website (AmendETS.com) and through direct e-mail contacts we have enlisted the support of fellow members of the Society. Our correspondence has included past presidents and officers of the ETS, members of the Executive Committee, a charter member, and one living founder. As a result of this process, many members have signed on to support the amendment, including one former president of the ETS.¹⁰ During this process we have also received some helpful, critical feedback. Most of the objections to our proposal have been thoughtful and are worthy of a careful response. So we have gathered together the critical feedback that we have received and have put it in the form of a series of questions. What follows are the questions and our answers.

Is this amendment seeking to replace the ETS's doctrinal "basis" with a doctrinal "statement"?

The authors of this amendment are not putting forth this amendment as a doctrinal *statement* but as an expansion of the current doctrinal *basis*. This point is critical for members to understand since some members may be tempted to construe this proposal as a doctrinal statement or a confession of faith. The eleven points enumerated above are not being set forth as a doctrinal statement or a confession of faith.

Of course this begs the question as to what exactly the difference is between a doctrinal *statement* and a doctrinal *basis*. The difference is between how each *functions* as a constitutive basis for a volunteer society. Typically, a doctrinal statement functions as a summary of essential beliefs for fellowship within a church or a denomination. Since the ETS is not a church or a denomination, it is entirely appropriate that it does not have a doctrinal statement in the sense of a summary of essential beliefs. From the beginning, members of the ETS have represented a wide variety of ecclesial and theological traditions: Presbyterian, Baptist,

David Dockery, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Biblically"; Douglas Groothuis, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Culturally"; James Sweeney, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries in Ministry" ("Reports Relating to the Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the Society," *JETS* 45 [2002]: 183–84).

¹⁰George W. Knight, III is a past president of the ETS and has joined the list of supporters. This list can be found on the "Supporters" page of our website, www.AmendETS.com. In our correspondence with Dr. Knight, he affirmed the underlying logic of using an already existing doctrinal basis: "I think that the usage of this formula in a respected group in England is quite adequate support for considering its being used by the ETS, and the ETS, as past amendments have indicated, needs a more adequate statement" (e-mail dated August 27, 2007).

Independent, Methodist, Dispensational, Reformed, and more.¹¹ Members of the Society have always construed differently what is essential for fellowship, and so the ETS doctrinal basis was not designed as an expression of essential beliefs for fellowship or mission.¹²

Within the ETS, the doctrinal basis has functioned (and we hope it will continue to function) as a summary of essential principles for doing scholarship in the various theological disciplines. In other words, the doctrinal basis functions as a matrix from which a certain kind of scholarship can proceed. In this case, the kind of scholarship that our Society aims to nurture is *evangelical* scholarship. We are asking the Society to adopt this proposal so that we can be more clearly constituted toward that end.¹³

Will these additions turn the ETS's "Doctrinal Basis" into a de facto doctrinal statement?

An expanded statement will not erase the distinction the ETS has historically made between having a doctrinal basis and having a doctrinal statement. As stated above, this amendment is not being put forth as a comprehensive statement of essential doctrine (as in a doctrinal *statement*). It is merely a more clearly defined matrix from which evangelical scholarship might proceed (as in a doctrinal *basis*). As is the case with our current doctrinal basis, it is likely that individual members

¹¹In his keynote address at the founding meeting of the ETS, Dr. Clarence Bouma described the variety of theological positions that were represented at the meeting: "Are we not too diverse? Baptists, Presbyterians, and Reformed; Calvinists and Arminians; Premillennialists and Amillennialists; Dispensationalists and those who hold to the essential unity and continuity of the Old and New Testament dispensations" (Clarence Bouma, "The Importance of the Society for American Evangelical Scholarship," keynote address at the founding meeting of the ETS, December 27–28, 1949, Cincinnati, OH; subsequently published as "Orthodox Theological Scholarship: An Editorial," *The Calvin Forum* 15.7 [1950]: 131–34).

¹²According to Robert Culver's account of the founding of the Society, it was for precisely this reason that Gordon Clark insisted that the ETS must be constituted in distinction from other "religious organizations" which require comprehensive statements of belief: "Gordon Clark advocated (strongly) a minimal statement of doctrine. He insisted that if he was to join, it must not be a religious organization, for if it were religious, for him it would have to be a complete statement of Reformed theology" (Robert Culver, "Defining ETS Doctrinal Boundaries in the Midwest Section Forty-Two Years Ago," paper presented at the 53rd annual meeting of the ETS [November 2001], 7).

¹³We should note that members and officers of the ETS have not always recognized the difference we are highlighting here. For instance, in 1976 the Society endorsed a resolution passed by the Executive Committee that refers to the "Doctrinal Basis" as both a "creedal statement" and a "doctrinal statement" ("Reports Relating to the 28th Annual Meeting of the Society," *JETS* 20 [1977]: 91–92).

would affirm as essential more than what is covered in the short expansion that we have proposed.

The ETS was originally constituted with one doctrinal basis, an affirmation of inerrancy. Later, a statement on the Trinity was added to its doctrinal basis in order to ensure that the Society would be constituted as orthodox.¹⁴ In light of the ETS's Trinitarian statement, there is no reason to preclude the possibility that the doctrinal basis might be expanded even further in order to ensure that the Society is constituted as evangelical. If any and all expansions of the statement were to destroy the distinction between a doctrinal basis and a doctrinal statement, then there never would have been room for the later addition of the Trinitarian clause. We believe there is also room for a statement to clarify the evangelical identity of our Society. We think the UCCF statement would do just that.

Is this statement a knee-jerk reaction to Dr. Francis Beckwith's return to the Roman Catholic Church?

The original form of this proposal dates back to 2001, and Dr. Beckwith's return to the Roman Catholic Church only occurred in the spring of 2007.¹⁵ Thus the original form of this proposal pre-dates Dr. Beckwith's return to the Roman Catholic Church by six years. Though Dr. Beckwith's resignation does raise important theological questions for the Society to consider, it is not by itself the reason that the ETS needs a more clearly articulated doctrinal basis. It is merely the latest event to draw attention to the inadequacy of our current statement.

The long-standing problem of the current statement is that its minimalism arguably allows for many non-evangelicals (e.g. Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox) and some who are outside Christian orthodoxy (e.g. Docetists, Pelagians) to affirm it in good conscience. We would argue that since the ETS constitution clearly intends for our Society to be "Evangelical" (see "Article 1: Name"), it is important for each member of our Society to affirm a clearly evangelical doctrinal basis. Apart from such affirmation, the Society cannot long retain its evangelical identity. Granted, there are many different opinions within our Society about how evangelical theology should be conceived, but we believe this amendment is sufficiently broad to accommodate all of those

¹⁴In 1989, President James Borland introduced and proposed the addition of the Trinitarian expansion of the ETS's doctrinal basis ("Reports Relating to the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the Society," *JETS* 33 [1990]: 141). In 1990, the Society adopted the expansion by motion ("Reports Relating to the Forty-Second Annual Meeting of the Society," *JETS* 34 [1990]: 141).

¹⁵Once again see Ray Van Neste's 2001 paper published as "The Glaring Inadequacy of the ETS Doctrinal Statement," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8.4 (2004): 74–81. See also, Francis Beckwith, "My Resignation from the Evangelical Theological Society" Right Reason: The Weblog for Conservative Philosophers (May 7, 2007); accessed on-line, http://rightreason.ektopos.com/archives/2007/05/my_resignation.html.

voices (as it has in the U.K.).

Doesn't the current doctrinal basis already affirm sola scriptura?

The current doctrinal basis simply states, “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.” *Scriptura* and *sola* both appear here but not in the right relation to affirm what is traditionally meant by *sola Scriptura*. The statement affirms that Scripture is the only written word of God. The essential point of *sola scriptura* that is missing is “authority.” When the Reformers articulated *sola scriptura* the key point was that Scripture held an authority supreme over all else including tradition.¹⁶ So Luther in his reply to Henry VIII wrote, “God’s word for me is above everything.” The current ETS doctrinal basis says nothing about the relative authority of Scripture in comparison to tradition, the Magisterium, or experience for that matter.¹⁷ The proposed amendment would rectify this by including the affirmation that Scripture is “the supreme authority in all matters of belief and behavior.”

Will this statement be used to foreclose conversation on controversial theological topics, such as Evangelical-Catholic relations?

A proposal to expand the doctrinal basis will not foreclose discussion about controversial topics. Nor will it cut off voices from outside the ETS. We believe an expanded statement will invite a more earnest participation by all members and invited guests to engage one another in charitable dialogue. To this end, Darrell Bock’s metaphor of the “village green” can be helpful,¹⁸ but we think the metaphor needs to be extended just a little bit. We should welcome people from other villages to gather at our green and enter our dialogue, but we should not lose site of the constitution of the evangelical village. It is important for the ETS village to be able to distinguish its members from those who are coming from other villages. An expanded doctrinal basis would help greatly in that regard. Socially, clear identity tends to foster better dialogue with others rather than stifling such dialogue. Uncertainty about one’s identity

¹⁶ Cf. for example J. I. Packer, “‘Sola Scriptura’ in History and Today,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973) 43–62.

¹⁷ In 2001 correspondence with Ray Van Neste answering the question of whether he could affirm the current ETS doctrinal basis, Catholic scholar Dr. Thomas Howard stated, “Certainly—any orthodox Catholic would gladly affirm every word of that statement re the Bible. So long as it speaks of ‘the Word of God written’, that’s fine. As you say, it does not even touch on the infallibility of the Magisterium, etc.” (cited with permission).

¹⁸ Darrell Bock, *Purpose-Directed Theology: Getting Our Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002) 55–58. Bock derives the “village green” metaphor from Michael Horton, “The Battles over the Label ‘Evangelical,’” *Modern Reformation* 10 (March/April 2001): 20.

creates uneasiness and fear which typically leads to withdrawal.

Does this statement represent a regression into a narrow, separatistic fundamentalism?

The UCCF doctrinal statement could in no way be labeled as “narrow, separatistic fundamentalism.” No one can reasonably describe the Tyndale Fellowship in Britain as “narrow,” “separatistic” or “fundamentalist.” This is in fact an effort to provide ETS with a doctrinal basis that is more engaged with our broad tradition and which looks less like a fundamentalist, secluded statement.¹⁹

It is our view that a more sharply defined doctrinal basis would encourage the ETS to engage more vigorously with those outside the evangelical tradition. We believe the ETS would do well to invite to its forum not only non-inerrantist evangelicals (e.g. N. T. Wright, Richard Hays), but also scholars who would not fit anyone’s definition of evangelical (e.g. Schlusser-Fiorenza, Ehrman, etc.). A clear identity would allow us to enlarge the forum for discussion (by way of invitation to outside guests) while maintaining a membership that is constituted as broadly evangelical. A clear evangelical constitution is the only way to ensure in the long run that the Society’s forum will keep evangelical issues on the agenda—issues that are not always on the agenda at AAR/SBL. A clear doctrinal basis will strengthen ETS’s forum for engagement with the most critical, biblical and theological questions of our time.

In recent years, the Society has been through two membership challenges. Are you attempting to lay the groundwork for more membership challenges with this amendment?

No. The co-sponsors of the amendment are not trying to lay the groundwork for more membership challenges. Nor are we trying to establish a basis upon which to exclude masses of current members. We sent invitations to support the amendment to Calvinists, Arminians, Complementarians, Egalitarians, Baptists, Methodists, and others. The statement’s use in the U.K. has demonstrated that this proposal can serve as a consensus statement for the various theological constituencies represented in the ETS as well. What we have in view is not increased policing of current members but the securing of our borders. More explicit statement of evangelical belief may decrease the sensed need of some members to push certain issues as entailed in inerrancy.

¹⁹See Timothy George’s assessment in “Evangelicals and the Great Tradition,” *First Things* 175(August/September 2007): 20. George seems to identify himself with those who say the ETS doctrinal basis “suffers . . . from reductionism, like the fundamentalism from which the evangelical movement itself emerged.”

If some members sign the current ETS doctrinal basis in bad faith, what's to keep them from signing a longer doctrinal basis in bad faith?

The problem with the current doctrinal basis is not that some members might be signing it in bad faith. The problem is with those who subscribe to inerrancy in good faith but who nevertheless would not fit any historically responsible definition of “Evangelical.” This is precisely why the Society had to add the Trinitarian clause in 1991. Inerrancy is essential, but an evangelical doctrinal basis should be about much more than that. Therein lies our concern.

Is the reference to the Holy Spirit's enabling work slanted towards Calvinism?

We believe the statement on the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration can accommodate the Calvinist view as well as Wesleyan/Arminian notions of prevenient grace. Because the statement already unites Calvinist, Wesleyan, and Arminian evangelicals in England, we think that we have good reason not to interpret it as slanted towards either Calvinism or Arminianism. We have corresponded with at least one non-Calvinist long time member of the Tyndale Fellowship who has said he has never had a problem with this description of the Holy Spirit's work.

Wouldn't it be better to risk some "non-evangelicals" being in the ETS than to risk starting down a path of constriction that may work counter to the original design of the ETS?

The problems that would result from allowing some non-evangelicals into the ETS would not emerge this year, next year, or maybe even in the next 10 years. But eventually, without more evangelical definition, the Society may be constituted of a majority of members whose evangelical identity consists only in their association with institutions and publishing houses that are (or were) known as “evangelical.”

Whenever it happens (in 10 years, 15 years, 20 years?), then there really won't be any point in having an ETS. The value of ETS is that it promotes evangelical scholarship and it preserves a scholarly forum in which evangelical concerns are on the agenda (concerns that are not necessarily on the agenda at AAR/SBL). When the Society ceases to be evangelical, it will cease to have any purpose and will likely go the way of the dinosaur.²⁰

²⁰ETS founder Clarence Bouma wrote in 1949 of the limitations of non-evangelical theological societies: “The great cleft between Modernism and Orthodoxy is of so far-reaching importance that such theologizing together always remains unsatisfactory, and—what is more important—that certain aspects of that theologizing even on the basis of purely scholarly discussion cannot thus come to their own” (Clarence Bouma, “Orthodox Theological Scholarship: An Editorial,” *The Calvin Forum* 15.7 [1950]: 132). Bouma goes on to write of an “absolute value and need of such membership in a Bible-believing, orthodox theological society.” He writes, “Only an evangelical theological society can furnish that

Younger evangelical scholars will be less and less interested in an “evangelical” society that is not evangelical.²¹ What would be the point? AAR and SBL are bigger and more prestigious scholarly forums. In 20 years, why would a young evangelical scholar want to participate in a smaller, less prestigious society? If ETS becomes evangelical in name only, younger scholars will not join and eventually ETS will die out. We suspect another society that is evangelical will emerge to take its place. We are acting now because we have our sights on preserving the forum for the next generation of evangelical scholars.

V. CONCLUSION

So, we would like to put forward this amendment as an affirmation of the commitments of the Great Tradition and of historic, evangelical faith.²² We commend this expansion as a unity statement that accommodates the wide variety of evangelical traditions represented in the ETS. The proposal has already drawn support from members representing diverse theological traditions: Presbyterian, Baptist, covenantal, dispensational, Calvinist, non-Calvinist, and more. Our hope and prayer is that the cause of evangelical faith might be served by a mutual effort to conserve the evangelical tradition of our Society. This is not something that the authors can do alone. So we invite our readers to consider prayerfully this proposed amendment. We also invite readers to visit the AmendETS.com website to participate in the conversation and debate about the proposal and to join the list of supporters if you affirm this amendment.

spiritual atmosphere, that morale, that mutual encouragement in the face of the enemy, which we so sorely need to fulfill our modern theological task” (ibid.).

²¹In some of the feedback we have received we have been told of younger scholars who have not bothered to join the Society because the Society did not seem to them to be serious about its evangelical identity.

²²The UCCF’s website says that “UCCF’s Doctrinal Basis belongs to that long tradition” of “definitive statements of essential Christian belief, such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, that are still considered benchmarks of orthodoxy.” See “Why do we have a Declaration of Belief?” available online at <http://www.uccf.org.uk/about-us/declaration-of-belief/why-do-we-have-a-declaration-of-belief.htm>.