2290 Epiphany '89 **ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS**

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One way religion "helps mess us the world" (to use a Fosdick phrase) is by provid-Noncommercial reproduction permitted ing perfectionists with pious reasons for being proud of rather than penitent about their psychopathology. The reason I'm addressing in this Thinksheet is this: some religions claim to be in possession of a perfect book--errorless because God-dictatated (eg, the Qoran & the Book of Mormon) or God-inspired-&-protected-against-error (eg, Protestant fundamentalism). In religions, those intellectuals are rewarded who are bright & clever enough to make plausible the belief in the sacred text's freedom from error, from falsehood, from distortion & any other imperfections that might disturb the credulity of the faithful, who want nothing to do with (Peter Bertocci) "the religion of creative insecurity." The personal price these intellectuals pay for their performance is the intellectual corruption Socrates accused the sophists of, viz, "making the worse appear the better part," ie, glossing over the sacred text's flaws, straining for lucidity against factuality. Almost never is this dishonorable behavior Elmer-Gantry deliberate. In almost all cases the performer is self-deceived over a long period of time, beginning with small betrayals of truth, tiny turnings away from facts in front of their noses. Occasionally such a performer comes to coercive institutional power in private or public life-instance, for the latter, Khomeini, whose seminary lectures (which I've read) defend the inerrancy of the Qoran with an awesome subtlety of corrupt & corrupting reasoning, completely free of self-criticism or any critical an awesome subtrety of corrupting reasoning, compretely free of self-criticism of any critical principle (leading straight to his unprincipled, demonic tyranny over Iran)....This Thinksheet combines reflections (1) on my experience of this phenomenon & (2) on Carl F.H. Henry's CONFESSIONS OF A THEOLOGIAN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY (Word Books/86). Beginning $\frac{1}{2}$ century ago, he and I studied together (Winona Lake School of Theology), taught on the same faculty (Northern Baptist Theolgical Seminary), & bumped into each other at many conferences (eg, 1957 WCC Faith & Order, Oberlin; & 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin). All I here say of him is within the sphere of Phil.13: "I thank God every time I think of you," for great gifts greatly offered to the great God....Page reff. not otherwise noted are to his autobiography.

- The architectonic (system-building) personality type (Carl's) is more easily seduced, captured, held by inerrancy than is the intuitive personality type (mine). My type believes that love is the only everlasting satisfaction. But Carl loves to quotes this from his first philosophy teacher, Gordon H. Clark, under whom he majored at Wheaton (IL) College (67): "A satisfactory religion must satisfy. But satisfy what & why? The Greek mysteries satisfied the emotions; brute force can satisfy the will; but Christianity satisfies the intellect because it is true, and truth is the only everlasting satisfaction." How natural for strength to recognize strength & think all else weakness! When you are looking in one direction, you see what you're looking at, you only somewhat see what's in your peripheral vision, & you're blind to all beyond your peripheral vision—or, if you're afflicted with tunnel vision, you're blind to all you're not looking at. Scribes (ie, those who take their sacred text more seriously than both [Papias] "the living word" & the world) favor inerrancy because it heightens the authority of their text & gives it wow; & they hold their noses so close to the text as to afflict themselves with the bookworm's version of tunnel vision. Carl curiously combines the philosopher's wide-ranging & deep-going sight & insight with the scribe's narrow, inerrantist, tunnel vision. I love & applaud him for the first but since 1942 I've been criticizing him face-to-face & in writing & print for the second.
- Scribes come in two types, the architectonic & the catenic. The latter build "chains" (yes, the Latin for my adj.) of proof-texts (eg, the Thompson CHAIN-Reference Bible). The former have a craw in which they grind up biblical matter & extrude it as building materials. So clever are these (let's call them) arch.-scribes that if you were to give them random lines of poetry, on the spot they could hand you back a plausible exegesis & an illuminating exposition. Of this I have absolute e seen it. I've seen Carl do it, using fourteen random lines from The performance was pure, blind: he didn't know he was doing it. l've seen it. One (to me) memorable evening in 1942, Carl & I, in a confrontation the NATS students set up, interpreted each a text given by the other---the students intending fun & profit as they discussed who was the better interpreter. The text Carl gave me was integral, so the eisegetic element (Willis' foreign input into the text) could But as Carl was working with a bogus text, as random as if a monkey had picked up fourteen cards each with a Shakespeare line, his eisegetic element was maximal. But his exegesis was integral-architectonic, & his exposition was brilliant... From which we conclude what? When a master arch.-scribe produces something plausible & illuminating, it ain't necessarily biblical. And when that master produces a six-vol. masterwork of architectonic ("systematic") theology--as Carl's GOD, REVELATION AND AUTHORITY--that ain't necessarily so, either. brilliant (as eq Carl & Khomeini)! And of course also beware the tricky (as eq me)!

- 3. It takes one to know one, & my experience of inerrancy has not been only secondhand. I've been a foe of inerrancy only since 1940: for the previous five years I was a defender of it. 1940, the transitional year, at age 22, I was graduated from seminary & was ordained. Five years earlier I'd acquired, along with the health of conversion (Thinksheet #2288), the disease of inerrancy: the blessed authentic assurance of God's forgiving love for me, along with the blissful false confidence that the mediating Book was "entirely reliable each new day." (The quoted words are from Bonhoeffer, written shortly before his martyr death; but he's not talking about a book: "GOD is with us evening and morning, & ganz gewiss each new day.") Yet there never was a time I did not consider the Bible dependable as the best map & compass on life's way. I was never without it, still am not (I take it, the Bible itself [not versions or translations], to all meetings), & qualify for what Jn. Wesley called homo unius libri, "a one-book person." For $\frac{1}{2}$ century I've read it daily (yes, in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek--adding, these past thirty years, Latin [Vulgate] & a modern nonEnglish language). Deeds speak louder than words when it comes to honoring Scripture & worshipping God through it &, as I've tried to do, living it out into "the world."....You ask, how can it be dependable if it's not reliable? Our minds "know" downward, analytically, critically (&, when open, discover flaws in the great Book, as all things human are flawed): our hearts "understand" upward, synthetically, appreciatively (&, when open, are graced with love & truth dependably, through the only-mentally unreliable Book). (See sheet #2289 for my stance here, which I call "interrogative infallibility.") Let's free in the Bible, thoroughly familiar with it; free with the Bible, to use it in daily life, witnessing & serving; & free from the Bible where it's wrong, which is seldom, & where it's inadquate, which--given the vast burgeoning of human knowledge these past two millenia--is often. You can depend on it: As the Love that will not let us go will not let us down, so the Book we don't let go of but have as a vade mecum always with us will not let us down...."Authority" in the phrase "the authority of the Bible" is either a verb or a curse. The sanction of antiquity wedded to the claim of inerrancy is an unnecessary burden on evangelical Christianity and a curse. My word here is the word Carl uses (298) to defend himself against possible criticism for the frankness with which (though I think with as much fairness, kindness, and grace as facts would permit) he presents the shortcomings of the evangelical leaders closest to him: "'Pure religion can never be hurt by the truth.'"
- God & the devil are both at work in the "born-again" conversional experience--God to humble sinners through the process of contrition-confession-repentancerestitution, the devil to tempt the neonate saints into arrogant self-satisfaction with what has, as it were, fallen into their laps, including an errorless Book providing propositions that in debate give the believer a leg up against "the world," including all Christians whose preconditioning toward the faith has not been, in this style, conversional. Further, leaders who, though of broad sympathies (as Carl is & always has been, & as was J. Gresham Machen before him), carry the virus of inerrantism tend to be followed by less broad-beamed brains, more rigid minds, less tolerant hearts. The great Machen, leaving Princeton Seminary, founded Westminster Seminary, famous for spewing out fissiparous hyperCalvinistic partisans, of whom I must mention one: Francis A. Schaeffer, often mentioned as No.2 to Carl in evangelical-intellectual leadership. (His son Franky is even narrower, even more embarrassment to the cause of providing evangelicalism with intellectual respectability.) I've irritated Carl (& have gotten a burst from him in CHRISTIANITY TODAY, of which he was chief editor for its first dozen years); but I drove Fran crazy--in writing, but also face-to-face here & there, including his Switzerland fiefdom, L'Abri. In his home, I saw him ignore quests whose questions he chose not to respond to, so that all the discussion-time could be the spinning together of responses to questions amenable to that use; in short, a monolog under the false quise of a dialog. He had no tolerance for the intuitive & for mystery. (Of Flannery O'Connor, an author I love, Robt Coles (p.15, HARVARD DIARY: REFLECTIONS ON THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR [Crossroad/88]) says this: "For her, mystery is a gift of God; without it we have no choice but self-intoxication"--

of which Fran was a clear case.) Presenting me with a copy of his THE CHURCH BE-FORE THE WATCHING WORLD (I-VP/72), he wrote on cover-p.2: "To Dr. Willis Elliott, with the deep wish and prayer that you will find the truth and get your shit together." "The truth" meaning truth as he sees it, & getting my "shit together" meaning the same shit-architectonics as his. An appalling case of intellectual arrogance, with which he managed to wow millions not only of Mencken's booboisie not a few intellectually gifted youth who without his island of superconfidence would have continued swimming in a sea of hormones & uncertainty. Suggestion for some student desperate for a PhD subject: A comparative study of mind-manipulating leaders: The Rev. Jim Jones of the People's Temple, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Rev. Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer. Such leaders are master musicians on the three-bank organ of anxiety for clarity, purity, & security. All his writing is clear, as the products of architectonic minds tend to be. The book he inelegantly inscribed to me has, as its "focus" (p.8), "doctrinal purity." And while the faith he proclaims can lead to temporal & eternal security & thus to freedom, the way he proclaims it tilts toward the captivity of dependency. Warning against divisions, he narrows (as Carl refuses to do) the definition of "true Christians" down to those who subscribe to the "verbal [inerrant], propositional" approach to Scripture; & (again unlike Carl) he'll have nothing to do with ecumenism (global & national councils of churches). The virus of inerrantism energizes his absolutes, yet he preaching against absolutism as well as relativism (with nothing in between, such as E.S.Ames' "relative absolute"). "Beware of the habits you learn in controversy" (62) he preaches, but his practice (in this & all his books) is that of the controversialist who, without noticing it, prizes reason above truth & love. (Agreeing with Fran on inerrancy, Carl's visit to L'Abri, as he reported it in the 3 July 64 CT [CHRISTIANITY TODAY], was positive; there, I was not even permitted to announce a place where I might meet with young people interested in hearing about NYTS [New York Theological Seminary, my employer]. had that experience also at the World Congress on Evangelism, of which Carl was chair: the executive committee had me officially waited upon to request that I observe silence.)....Fran, like all true dogmatists, was intolerant of nuanced Carl says (333f) Fran "indirectly criticized me as lacking objective moral standards on the abortion issue, and before his more intemperate son Franky misrepresented me as being pro-abortion....[& then Carl waves a noble banner, & I salute] hammer-headed negation cannot hope in intelligent circles to carry its positions even when they happen to be right, which they sometimes but not always are."....More diametricality (365): Fran & Harold Lindsell (in his THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE [1976]) dismissed "as 'false evangelicals' all who do not affirm biblical inerrancy....Had Schaeffer and Lindsell spoken of 'inconsistent' rather than of 'false' evangelicals they might have served the cause more positively." censorious narrowness, Carl continues, ruled out such world-class evangelical scholars as F.F.Bruce & G.K.Berkouwer, who consider the Bible "reliable." This "overstatement" made "mediating schools, Fuller among them,...look better than they deserved" (Carl being at odds with Fuller for ceasing to insist that faculty be inerrantists).

5. Carl's autobio shows a true Christian gentleman struggling to be, vis-a-vis his colleagues through the years, as generous as truth will permit. To list the main ones in alphabetical order: Nelson Bell, Ed. Carnell, Frank Gaebelein, Billy Graham, Harold Lindsell, Harold Okenga, Howard Pew, Wilbur Smith. For all of these, his appreciative words far outweigh his critical. (Carl would heartily agree with my saying, "We are each of us a deficient & damaged child of God, & the noun outweighs the adjectives.")....I must now give some attention to Lindsell, whom I remember (we were fellow-teachers at NBTS) as smaller in both mind & heart than Carl but equally dedicated to the Lord. A champion debater, ever ready to take the other side of an argument, Harold was a college mate of Carl's & was best man at the wedding of Carl & Helga (Bender). Harold & Carl were on Fuller Seminary's original faculty, Harold teaching missions (as I remember his doing at NBTS). As Carl had put Harold's name in to teach at Fuller, Harold pushed for Carl to be the first (skip the titles debate!) of CHRISTIANITY TODAY (1956-). Carl wanted

to be featured in an early issue, "perhaps even our first Christmas issue" (158f, a fascinating story you can't locate in a subject index: the autobio's defective in having only a names index), but that didn't come off. In 1964, discouraged with Fuller's drift away from inerrancy (Dan, founder Chas. Fuller' son, "insisted" in the Jan. trustee meeting"that Scripture contains error" (C.'s words, 214), Carl went to CHRISTIANITY TODAY. In 1967, Harold left CT for Wheaton. When Harold was being considered to succeed Carl as overall editor of CT, Carl said to the board (294) that Harold had "made biblical inerrancy an issue in the faculty conflict at Fuller" (but perhaps he was "'too hurried a spirit'" for the editorship). (Later Carl was to see this debater's feistiness in defense of inerrancy not as a plus but a minus for the evangelical movement.) Harold was editor 1968-78, and Carl's name "was obliterated from the masthead. In those years the magazine moved more radically to the right and I was depicted to the Board members as being on the left," & CT "veered from its original stance as a professional thought journal to a largely lay-oriented publication" (299f). "Lindsell struck my name from the masthead completely" (340). In 1969, Harold wrote Carl anxiously (310): "The trends in the U.S. seem to point away from adherence to Christianity more & more," & this anxiety led him on to THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE (Zondervan/76), which H. described two years earlier to C. in C.'s home as (348, C.'s words) "a bombshell showing ecumenical seminaries' confusion" on biblical authority & "portending the same dilemma for mediating evangelical schools" then waffling on inerrancy. In 1977, much to Carl's distress, CT was moved from Wash., DC, to Carol Stream, a suburb of Wheaton; & of the editorial staff, only Harold agreed to the move (364; the other Harold, Board chair Okenga, told NEWSWEEK [C.'s wording] "that the moral pollution and deleterious influence of the District of Columbia ran counter to the magazine's concern for Christian ethics and lifestyle. Others, however, considered the move to this heartland of evangelical independency and political conservatism the 'evangelical Vatican'": NAE [National Ass'n. into Evangelicals], Tyndale House, Youth for Christ International, Scripture Press, CHRISTIAN LIFE, "and others," with Billy Graham Center soon to come. Carl to NEWSWEEK: "The decision to relocate seems to reverse the ideal of evangelical penetration of secular society that motivated the founders of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.") Harold soon left CT, but (363) "was not dislodged by cabal as I was."

- 6. It puzzles me how Carl could ever have thought that any formulation of inerrantism could ever "penetrate secular society." My experience & observation is that it can't even penetrate the Church: to use Schaeffer's inelegant phrase, it can't even get its shit together enough to do more than make raids on denominations (as now the Southern Baptist Convention). It's a crutch for the emotionally insecure & (with a very few notable exceptions, of whom Carl is king) intellectually weak. It's a disease spreading arrogance & confusion among Christians & our institutions local & larger. But in 1977 the Council for Biblical Inerrancy was formed (365), "one of its first burdens" being "to escape commitment to embarrassing excessive formulations," implying such as Harold's BATTLE. 365f: "Lindsell's BATTLE conceded that I supported inerrancy, but then added that I did not consider it important, contrary to my published stance. My GOD, REVELATION AND AUTHORITY incorporated an affirmation of inerrancy, but not as the very first thing to be said about the Bible."
- 7. The very year Harold's BATTLE appeared, NEWSWEEK ran a cover story titled "The Year of the Evangelical" (25 Oct 76). The evangelical resurgence had begun way back in 1942 with the forming of the National Association of Evangelicals, of whose creedal committee I was a member. We faced right off the question whether "Evangelicals" was to mean only Calvinistic ("Reformed") evangelicals. When in the committee I criticized the original draft's atonement statement as sectarian, specifically Calvinist, & proposed adding the Lutheran phrasing—on the Elizabethan settlement's inclusive principle for the first Church of England Prayerbook, 1549—Okenga tried to claim that the draft's wording was inclusive enough for Lutherans, though it plainly wasn't. His power prevailed there, as it did almost everywhere he involved himself—Boston's Park St. Church, Fuller Seminary, CHRISTIANITY

- TODAY. A man of preaching power & personal "presence," he loved to bully & cabal, & he left a trail of broken promises & breached contracts (as Carl's autobio amply documents). Concluding that NAE was actually a power-play by a few imperial egos, I lost interest & attended no more meetings. But NAE had more than symbolic significance; evangelicalism was shaking off its sleep and once again, after a generation, becoming media-visible. Then in 1947 came the founding of Fuller, & two years later the Hearst-pooped national launching of Billy Graham; & in 1956, CT. As for youth, the old Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship was soon joined by Youth for Christ, the Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, & Young Life. 1966 saw the World Congress on Evangelism (Berlin, Germany), followed by national parallels in several nations.
- 8. But all was not well in the evangelical ranks. Fissures & fractures weakened the evangelical witness. Eschatological differences (pre-, a-, post-millenialism; Darbyite dispensationalism with its Scofield Bible). Ecclesiological differences (independents v. denominationalists; come-outers v. stay-iners). Leadership (personality-The old individual/social-gospel difference, lived out in Chicago cult) differences. (birthplace of NAE) as the standoff between NBTS (where Carl took his ThD in '42 & I the next year) & UCDS (University of Chicago Divinity School, where I took the PhD). So wide was the split between the two schools that in both I was repeatedly asked, "How can you honestly take a doctorate in that place?" I agreed on the falsity of this splitting of the gospel, & he was soon to say so in a milepost book, THE UNEASY CONSCIENCE OF MODERN FUNDAMENTALISM (1947). As he puts it in his autobio (386), "The fundamentalist privatization of piety and withdrawal from public concerns had stirred my UNEASY CONSCIENCE." Finally(at least at the momemt I can't think of others), the ecumenical divide (almost all independents having nothing to do with the conciliar movement, the councils of churches, at any level--local, area, state, national, world; & many evangelicals within denominations being anti-ecumenical, but most of them going along with their denomination's ecumenical participation)....A number of these splits weakened the Key '73 national evangelistic effort (384): "ecumenically affiliated denominations were more interested in social protest than in personal evangelism," & "fundamentalist churches were reluctant to cooperate with evangelicals in ecumenically identified churches." So evangelicals missed this opportunity to penetrate more deeply into the culture. Other divides over biblical criticism & liberation theology.
- 9. Carl bewails many opportunities the evangelicals muffed & lost. Because he's an inerrantist, the part this issue played in evangelical fissiparousness & thus weakness is especially painful to him. The fight, of which Harold's BATTLE was the book-symbol &, in large part, the occasion, (389) weakened the evangelical witness by dividing evangelical forces and diverting evangelical attention: "exulting in their evident public gains, evangelicals indulged in the luxury of internal conflict and channeled theological energies into the controversy over biblical inerrancy." Then in 1988 we (for I count myself an evangelical) were struck a terrible blow by evangelical televangelists, whom you can see (in this Christmas Eve "Twelve Days").

of Christmas" Toles cartoon) laying eggs. In a dozen years we evangelicals had hurled ourselves down from being "a city set on a hill" to being a laughingstock. To try for some damage control, Carl agreed to be interviewed on PBS's "McLaughlin One on One."

10. Philosophy, theoretical science, & hermeneutics have had to abandon, as illusion, the notion of the objective observer. Every observer of anything is not only involved but "(self-)interested..." Two

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hermeneutic mentalities concern us here, the religious & the scribal (with no idea that scribes are necessarily irreligious or the religious necessarily unscholarly). Bob Dylan (as his conversion's described in the last chapter of his official biography) illustrates the religious reader of sacred text. When he was going through deep waters, a friend suggested that he try Jesus, so he did two things:

he explored Christian meetings, and he began regular reading of the Gospels. One day, alone in his room, he sensed a presence, & said he, "it couldn't have been anybody but Jesus." I think Jesus & he found each other, but you don't have to believe that to observe (with your hermeneutics of suspicion switched on) that we usu. find what we're looking for, & he was looking for (let's say, though its a weak word for it) food. The scribal reader is looking for fact (again, an inadequate term The latter looks at the text, the former through the text--a true though exaggerated observation. What gets your attention gets you: if (like Dylan) you're hungry for what's on the other side of the sacred text, God will get you; & if you rivet your attention on the text, beware that the text doesn't get you ("Beware of Two characteristics of the scribal mentality are (1) pride the scribes!"--M.1238)! in arcane learning & (2) the tendency to literalism & thus to inerrantism. Teaching in three scribal seminaries, I encountered opposition & finally dismissal because I irritated the scribes on both scores: as a teacher of the biblical languages, I was privy to their arcane learning; & being a vocal anti-inerrantist, I undermined their (After 3½ years at Eastern Baptist Theol. Sem., I was told that I might have stayed, the student body being solidly with me as well as most of the faculty, if I'd been an anti-inerrantist teaching anything other than the biblical languages! Carl went to teach there in 1969, twenty years after I left, & he berues there the victory of anti-inerrantism.) So to a third (3) characteristic of the scribal mentality, viz, suspiciousness, heresy-hunting. Here inerrantism serves as a shibboleth to sort out the goats from the sheep--not only the bleating goats (like me, a vocal anti-inerrantist) but also the quiet, crypto-goats. What's called "the evangelical movement in America" is so scribistic-suspicious as to ostracize vocal anti-inerrantists, so I've been an "out" evangelical these forty years. been largely "read out" of their history, old-Soviet style.

- 11. It's ironic how little actual difference the in/errantist debate makes in perspective, convictions, & agenda among culturally advantaged evangelicals such as Carl & I are. Look, eg, at what Carl, resisting moneybag Howard Pew's pressure to control the content of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, wrote the latter, listing "the five tenets of our position" on "Christianity and social action" from the beginning of CT (279f):
- 1. The Bible is critically relevant to the whole of modern life and culture—the socio-political area included.
- 2. The institutional church has no mandate, jurisdiction or competence to endorse political legislation or military tactics or economic specifics in the name of Christ.
- 3. The institutional church is divinely obliged to proclaim God's entire revelation, including the standards or commandments by which men and nations are to be finally judged, and by which they ought now to live and maintain social stability.
- 4. The political achievement of a better society is the task of all citizens, and individual Christians ought to be politically engaged to the limit of their competence and opportunity.
- 5. The Bible limits the proper activity of both government and church for divinely stipulated objectives—the former, the preservation of justice and order, and the latter, the moral-spiritual task of evangelizing the earth.
 - While #2 & #5 are too restrictive (eg, evangelicals' failure to give fullhearted support to the civil rights movement), I agree with the perspective & tone of this statement.
 - 12. My 1966 NCC Triennum speech confronting Billy Graham emphasized the downside of the scribal mentality. The downside of anti-inerrantism is the danger that the sacred text will be taken <u>under</u>seriously, & theology will sink into a morassof psychology & sociology, & social action will replace evangelism, liturgy, & spirituality. But we need not slide down either slipperyslope.

Enough already! My Thinksheets are a tough enough read without becoming intolerably long. Besides, I've found myself drifting toward wanting to address Carl directly, confessionally as much as accusatively, & in hope of continuing to learn from the most eminent representative of his Christian stance, as well as in hope of the warmth I feel from anticipating hearing from a good friend across the years. So it feels like an open-letter Thinksheet coming up. DSG (To God alone be the glory).

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