



The Wages of Spin:

*Critical Writings on
Historic and Contemporary
Evangelicalism*



Carl R. Trueman

MENTOR





Carl R. Trueman is currently teaching Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, having previously been on faculty at the Universities of Nottingham and Aberdeen. He has published numerous books and articles on Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in addition to editing the theological journal, *Themelios*, for UCCF/IFES. He is married to Catriona, and has two sons, John and Peter.

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To

Reverend Iver Martin

Dr Ian R. Macdonald

And
'The Colonel'
Donald Matheson







INTRODUCTION

All of the essays and shorter pieces in this volume are drawn from the work I have done over the last five or six years for various evangelical groups in Great Britain and Europe, and they therefore represent something of an eclectic mix, dealing with issues from television to worship. If they have a unity it is perhaps that provided either by my concern to avoid selling out our evangelical birthright to every wind of cultural criticism or trendy new idea that comes our way – I am convinced that Christianity, as an historical religion, needs to listen very carefully to its history in order to build on past strengths and avoid repetition of past mistakes – or by my desire always to provoke readers not only into thinking for themselves but, above all, into having an opinion about things that matter. Too many today sit on the moral and theological fence; too few have any strong opinions about anything. That is why so often theological and ecclesiastical discussion in evangelical circles goes by default, with nobody having clear enough convictions about anything to engage in real discussion. This is not helped, of course, by the increasing tendency in evangelical circles to ape American linguini-spine culture and to regard disagreement with anyone on anything in our allegedly postmodern world as always inherently oppressive. Some evangelicals, indeed, seem to think that the whole point of having a debate is – well, just to have a debate, a conversation, and then to agree to differ as we all sit around having a mutually affirming, self-congratulatory love-fest. I say that such a view is total rubbish. As the late Frankie Howerd would have said, ‘Nay, nay, thrice nay!’ The point of a debate, as Paul so clearly demonstrates time and again in the Book of Acts, is to establish which position is best; and yes, I for one am still so hopelessly in thrall to modernism, as my relativist critics will no doubt allege, as to believe that some positions (e.g., sacrificing my children to Molech) are not as good as others (e.g., bringing



them up to love and fear the Lord), no matter where you may be in the world, and no matter to which culture you happen to belong. That is why I write the way I do – love what I say, hate what I say, either are acceptable responses; but please try not to be indifferent to what I say. Indifference, the plague of modern Western culture in general and evangelicalism in particular, is at best the result of intellectual laziness, at worst a sign of moral abdication.

Of course, my own thinking has changed over the years – only a fool never alters his mind on anything. I now, I think, have a much better grasp of the cross-cultural and class issues involved in the theological enterprise – emigration to the USA, and conversations with colleagues at Westminster Theological Seminary such as Manny Ortiz, Jeff Jue, Bill Edgar, Dick Gaffin, Stafford Carson, Susan Post and Scott Oliphint have all served to give me a better appreciation of both the Reformed tradition and its place in the modern world than I had when I wrote most of these pieces. Yet, for all of the lacunae I now see as I reread them, I still basically stand by what these pieces essentially say; and I still think a combination of plain speaking, occasional over-statement, and black humour is the best way to provoke people to think for themselves. It has always served me well in the classroom; I hope it does so here.

Many of these essays started life as talks for student groups or pieces for *Themelios*, the theological student journal I have edited for UCCF since 1998. I hope they are intellectually stimulating but I do not present any of them as polished pieces of scholarship; they are rather introductory salvos and journalistic jabs at some of the issues which are most pressing for the British evangelical scene at the moment. The depth of bibliography and footnoting varies; and those looking for more in-depth discussion of many of the issues raised, particularly in Part One, should chase up the references which I give for further discussion of the matters in hand but not assume that my notes give them an exhaustive scholarly apparatus. These are addresses for students wanting some stimulation and some guidance at the very start



of their lives as Christians and theologians, and that has shaped the way they are written.

Many Christians and friends have helped me think about these issues over the years – too many to mention here; but I should mention my wife Catriona and my two boys, John and Peter, none of whom may ever read a word of what I write, but whose patience with my not infrequent absences from home on theological business has made the whole possible; Martin Kennu, close friend and fine scholar, who graciously commented on an earlier draft; Simon Gathercole, Daniel Strange and the other Young Turks at *Themelios* with whom I have so enjoyed working over the years, and who know the importance of having fun and not taking oneself – or anyone else, for that matter – too seriously when it comes to theology; Bob Horn and Ranald MacAulay who have both been sources of encouragement and sound wisdom; and also – perhaps especially – Elizabeth Fraser, whose patience with all of us involved with RTSF is remarkable, whose diligent work for *Themelios* is so invaluable, and whose constant prayers for the whole team have been such a tremendous blessing.

Finally, the book is dedicated to Rev. Iver Martin, my former minister in Aberdeen, now minister of the Free Church of Scotland in Stornoway, Dr. Ian R. Macdonald, the Aberdeen session clerk, known to all affectionately as ‘Dr. Ian’, and Mr. Donald Matheson, ‘the Colonel,’ elder in the Free Church of Scotland and mentor to generations of Aberdeen Free Church students. These are men whose humility, learning, friendship and robust Christian testimony has meant more both to me and to my wife, Catriona, over the years than I can express. This book is offered as a small token of my esteem, affection, and gratitude.

Carl R. Trueman
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