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What Scandal? Whose Conscience?

Some reflections on Ronald Sider's Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience.

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Ronald Sider's sermon to American evangelicals, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, is entirely "seasonable," as all good jeremiads are. The Church is always entangled in worldliness of one form or another, and prophetic voices wisely rouse us to recognize our peril and our dereliction of duty. Yet Sider's book is also encumbered by confusion that blurs the sharp point he wants to make. And this confusion shows up constantly in evangelical publishing and preaching, so it is worthwhile attending to what keeps us from sounding clear, sustained, and accurate notes on our prophetic trumpets.

Sider's central thesis is clear enough: American evangelicals fail so badly to live according to the gospel that we are, in many respects, indistinguishable from the world around us. But his apparently shocking statistics of evangelical worldliness, culled from George Barna, George Gallup, and a variety of others, do not all stand up to closer scrutiny. Furthermore, Sider's contention about evangelical declension founders on a variety of other shoals: basic matters of terminology, sociology, history, theology, and pastoral practice.

The first, and arguably most damaging, difficulty appears right away—indeed, in the title itself. What does Sider mean by "evangelical"? He doesn't actually say. And yet he says too many things. He implicitly provides two sorts of definitions. The first, with which he opens the book, is a brief historical sketch of the movement. This is a perfectly good way to define evangelicalism. Indeed, some of the best definitions ever formulated have emerged from historical studies—notably those of David Bebbington in Britain and George Marsden in the United States.¹ But Sider doesn't avail himself of their method: careful delineation of the various stages of the emergence of trans-Atlantic evangelicalism in the 18th century and its subsequent metamorphoses—resulting, in part, in contemporary American evangelicalism. Instead, his account of the unnamed "renewal movement" in view is so vague that one wonders if he means, indeed, the Protestant Reformation, or 18th-century revivalism, or early 20th-century fundamentalism, or mid-20th-century American evangelicalism. His narrative sketch concludes with an elliptical reference to American evangelicals dealing with President Bush on faith-based initiatives and the controversy over the redefinition of marriage to include homosexuals.

So does Sider mean the evangelical Religious Right? Or does he mean all American evangelicals—say, those who identify with the NAE or *Christianity Today* magazine or Billy Graham—many of whom, like Sider's own Anabaptist kin, would not recognize themselves in his contemporary sketch of American evangelical political power brokers? It's not clear. And it never gets clearer.

Sider might have availed himself of the other fruit of all of those historical studies, namely, clear definitions of evangelicalism that literally have stood the test of time, both in the sense that they emerge out of the study of the history of the movement and also in the sense that they have been used profitably—and therefore tested—by many other historians in a number of other countries as well (such as Canada and Australia). These definitions amount to something like the following:

Evangelicals maintain Protestant orthodoxy: they believe what their various denominations have historically taught about Christian doctrine, with special emphasis on Christology and soteriology;

Evangelicals experience conversion: they might enjoy a particular dramatic moment, or they might undergo a long process punctuated by one or more crises, but they all personally commit themselves to Christ and then seek to be fully converted in the process of sanctification;

Evangelicals believe the Bible: they not only maintain classic Christian beliefs about it, but their piety is structured around it: in individual, family, group, and congregation study, in the centrality of preaching in public worship, and in the Bible's epistemological supremacy in all areas of life;

Evangelicals engage in mission: they view themselves as called by God to perform his will in every activity of life, and particularly in sharing the message of salvation with others and caring for their needs; and

Evangelicals recognize each other across denominational lines as kin: thus evangelicals cooperate in a wide range of organizations and activities to further the work of God beyond the reach of their respective congregation and denomination.

Nowhere does Sider lay out such a definition. And if he had done so, as we shall see, he would have saved himself and his readers considerable trouble. What he does instead, after his vague historical sketch, is plunge immediately into a series of poll data of American evangelicals, showing how worldly evangelicals are. And the terminological confusion appears right away.

"This," Sider says in his introduction, "alas, is roughly the situation of Western or at least American evangelicalism today." Well, it certainly isn't the situation of evangelicals in Canada or Britain, who have not, in fact, had nearly the access to their chief executives that Americans have had to theirs. No, this is about America—and all the subsequent data are American. Then Sider says, "Scandalous behavior is rapidly destroying American Christianity. By their daily activity, most 'Christians' regularly commit treason. With their mouths they claim that Jesus is Lord, but with their actions they demonstrate allegiance to money, sex, and self-fulfillment."

But wait a second. The advertised subject is evangelicalism, not Christianity. And I pick on this terminological imperialism, which suggests that evangelicalism and Christianity are synonymous, because it is rampant in evangelicalism. Whenever I hear an evangelical academician discuss "Christian colleges" in the United States, I always ask, "You mean, such as Notre Dame and Catholic University of America?" Um, no. Whenever I hear an evangelical missionary talk about how few "Christians" there are in a given country (such as Poland or Ireland—yes, I have heard both used as examples, despite the fact that their church attendance figures are higher than America's), I know that once again we are encountering this syndrome.

Now, to be sure, a lot of people in Poland and Ireland are merely nominal Christians, and by evangelical standards, that's not authentic Christianity. So one can see the half-truth in the missionary claims. But that brings us smack-dab into the fundamental problem affecting Sider and so many (not all) of his sources: they, too, fail consistently to define evangelicalism *as it in fact has usually been defined by evangelical leaders through the centuries*. Thus their "evangelicals" include large numbers of merely nominal evangelicals, which seems on the grounds of the definition outlined above to be a contradiction in terms.

So who *are* the worldly, compromising Americans who are scandalizing Ron Sider, and apparently many others, in the name of "evangelicalism"? Is the problem truly in the "evangelical conscience," or is the problem in the surveyors who are looking at the wrong people to examine that conscience?

Sider leans heavily on George Barna, as do many other evangelical writers and speakers. And Barna has found some terrible data indeed. For instance, "the percentage of born-again Christians who had experienced divorce was slightly higher ... than that of non-Christians Barna also found in one study that 90 percent of all divorced born-again folk divorced after they accepted Christ." Barna found that less than 10 per cent of "born-again" or "evangelical" Christians tithed. The rate of cohabitation is "only a little lower among born-again adults than the general public." And so on.

Other sources are adduced to expand this gloomy picture. George Gallup is invoked to show that "Baptists and evangelicals" (it isn't clear what the difference is) were "among the most likely to object to black neighbors." John and Sylvia Ronsvalle's respected *The State of Christian Giving* report claims that, in Sider's summary, "the richer we become, the less we give in proportion to our incomes." And political scientist John C. Green has found that at least a quarter of "traditional evangelicals" do not think that premarital sex is wrong—and over ten per cent believe that adultery is acceptable. Finally, several different sources confirm that the rate of domestic violence among evangelicals is troublingly high, although Sider's several sources seem to be measuring different

things (e.g., rate of abuse among "traditional" or "husband-dominant" marriages versus rate of abuse among men who attended conservative churches or held conservative theological views).

Are these, then, not grounds for genuine alarm? Isn't Sider right to say that "there is a crisis of disobedience in the evangelical world today?" I'm suggesting that the answer to that question depends largely on what one means by "the evangelical world." If one asks whether authentic Christian faith makes a demonstrable difference in the world, there seems to be abundant evidence that it does. Polls from various sources have shown, for instance, that people of traditional Christian faith live longer and healthier, they report longer and happier marriages, and they participate much more readily in volunteer work (including work outside ecclesiastical institutions).² At the "most macro" scale, sociologist Rodney Stark, furthermore, has reminded us at length of many positive differences Christianity has made in the world, from the origins of science to the abolition of slavery.³

If one asks whether evangelical Christianity makes a demonstrable difference, the answer is also clear. Yes, to take the American case, evangelicalism clearly shaped American society from the Great Awakening, through the Second Great Awakening, to the present. The contours are evident in American institutions—such as a huge range of benevolent societies, schools, and hospitals—and attitudes—such as sabbatarianism, temperance, the Protestant work ethic, and the sense that Providence has peculiarly blessed and called America.

The evangelicalism that has done so, however, is an evangelicalism that has had various careers, not just a happy one of deep cultural redemption. It generally has burned hot, briefly, here and there, and then cooled: whether into a sustained form of piety, or into an ossified orthodoxy, or even into a burned-over desert in some places. Recall that Jonathan Edwards himself was fired by the very congregation that experienced the "surprising work of God" under his leadership. Or, for a transatlantic parallel, consider that the Welsh revival early in the 20th century (to which Sider himself points as an example of the evangelical social influence he desires) has, a century later, almost entirely evanesced—as David Bebbington's recent article in this journal attests ("The News from Rhosllanerchrugog," May 2005).

More to the immediate point, Sider himself allows that "when pollsters make more careful distinctions between nominal Christians and devout believers, there is evidence that deeply committed Christians do live differently." In a very brief conclusion, he notes that Gallup, Barna, and others have found that people they call "super-saints" or those "with a biblical worldview," respectively, score very highly in volunteerism, avoidance of pornography and tobacco, Bible reading, attendance at church and small groups, and belief in and practice of personal evangelism.

Now here's the kicker. The definitions of these extraordinary Christians line up pretty well with the basic definition of evangelicalism with which I began—that is, as just what evangelicals are supposed to be and do by definition, and not as some special group of "super-saints." Gallup and Timothy Jones are quoted as using a 12-question survey to identify "heroic and faithful individual" Christians. These questions include belief in the full authority of the Bible and the practice of personal evangelism. Others identify what Sider calls "costly behavior," such as "I do things I don't want to do because I believe it is the will of God" and "I put my religious beliefs into practice in my relations with all people regardless of their backgrounds." If you're waiting for the attribution of miracles to these "saints," don't bother. Gallup and Jones apparently labeled "saints" all those who agreed with every one of the 12 questions. And "super-saints" agreed strongly with every question.

Such a set of criteria ought to speed things up for the beatification of John Paul II. And the criteria used by Barna for "those with a biblical worldview" or "evangelical" (not the same things, apparently, but pretty close in his lexicon) are hardly more demanding: belief in the Bible as "the moral standard" that contains "absolute moral truths," plus belief in all six of the following: "God is the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator who still rules the universe; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; Satan is a real, living entity; salvation is a free gift, not something we can earn; every Christian has a personal responsibility to evangelize; and the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches."

Now these two sets of criteria are problematic in that they demand both too little and too much. Any good Roman Catholic or, for that matter, any other orthodox Christian of integrity, can meet these criteria. Therefore, in order to find evangelicals, pollsters have got to ask questions that discriminate among various kinds of pious Christians—such as a question about the authority of the Bible that also rules out church tradition as a co-equal authority. This distinction is routinely made in both Catholic and Protestant statements of

doctrine from the 16th century forward, but pollsters almost never observe it and thus their nets are too wide. And one wonders if the common evangelical equation of "evangelical" with "[faithful] Christian" isn't at least partly to blame.

Furthermore, these criteria do not, in fact, measure some sort of "heroic" piety. Indeed, would not our forebears either grin or grimace at such a description of what they would have called the "normal Christian life"? I mean, really: Can we take anyone seriously who calls himself or herself a Christian who would deny that "I do things I don't want to do because I believe it is the will of God"?

At the same time, these sorts of questions end up with too narrow a group—ironically enough, particularly the questions on the nature of the Bible. Frequently, in my experience, we find pollsters using an extreme and theologically problematic understanding of the Bible as a measure for evangelicalism, as if all proper evangelicals should believe that "the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches." Good gracious: many evangelical seminary professors wouldn't say that (for instance, they would say that the Bible does not purport to offer "totally accurate" statistics). Even Charles Hodge, the great nineteenth-century exemplar of evangelical orthodoxy, didn't believe in that. Now, we must allow that pollsters cannot use standard theological terms because they can be too technical for many people. Instead, then, they should drop these extreme statements of inerrancy in favor of something more generically evangelical, such as "The Bible is true in what it teaches, and God uses it as our supreme guide for faith."⁴

Once the pollsters get their questions in line with what evangelicalism has been saying about itself for a couple of hundred years, therefore, we should find that genuine evangelical conviction results in genuine holiness. (Just as, one wants to add, any genuine Christian conviction results in genuine holiness.) And—behold!—the poll data show that we do: Barna's data, Gallup's data—pretty much everyone's data.

What is it, then, that Sider and his sources have actually found? I think they have found that American evangelicalism is a victim of its own success. Evangelicalism spread far and wide across the American landscape in the 19th century. And this spread has meant a twofold problem for any Siderian comparison of "evangelicals" and "society."

First, American society has been largely shaped by evangelical, or at least by broadly Christian values, from the time of the Puritans. So we should expect at least a rough similarity in values between even token believers and the most observant—which scale takes in the vast majority of Americans. It is not as if we were comparing evangelicals in a society with, say, nominal communists (as in China) or quasi-Shintoist, quasi-Buddhist secularists (as in Japan), or so-called animists (as in much of Africa).

Second, because evangelicalism is, in fact, the "mainline" in the South and is common in many other parts of the country, we should expect quite a range of degrees of adherence. That is, we're not living in a binary situation: "in" or "out," "us versus them," first-generation evangelicals boldly striking out in a new religious direction versus a religiously hollow society, but in a multigenerational sedimentation such that evangelicalism is the inherited "default" religion of many millions. The mere fact that someone tells a pollster that she is an "evangelical," or answers correctly a few questions of generic evangelical confession, doesn't say much about how authentically evangelical is her piety—in intensity, clarity, or extent.

Indeed, Barna himself now distinguishes between "evangelicals" and "non-evangelical born-again" Americans—with only 7 to 9 per cent of the population in the first category and well over 20 per cent in the second.⁵ And many social scientists properly distinguish between "observant" and "nonobservant" members of religious groups because their behavior—from marriage to voting—usually differs in lots of ways. Yet Sider's book frequently treats "born again" as a synonym for "evangelical."

We should pause to note that these are some of the real numbers beneath the oft-cited "25 or 30 or 35 percent" of America being "evangelical"—that is, erroneously equating "born again" with "evangelical." Another way pollsters have come up with that proportion is to add up all of the members of all of the denominations they call "evangelical"—whether those members actually believe or practice evangelical faith to any degree at all. This method, incidentally, leaves out members of "mainline" denominations, such as the United Methodist Church or the Presbyterian Church—USA, who would call themselves evangelicals. And Gallup includes Mormons among "evangelicals." Let's agree, then, that these big numbers—mentioned so frequently with an air of scientific precision—are decidedly "soft."

So what exactly is Sider's concern? That many Americans call themselves "evangelicals," or answer a few questions about doctrine and conviction affirmatively, but then do not in fact practice a full-fledged obedience? One must agree that those are, indeed, valid grounds for concern. But they sound like the same grounds for concern of every pastor in every church in every situation throughout church history. It is typically the problem of the "second generation," of inherited identity, of "cultural Christianity." It isn't exactly a new problem. It isn't even new in American evangelicalism: Fully three centuries ago, Jonathan Edwards's grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, was among those supporting a "Half-Way Covenant" that allowed nonpracticing New Englanders to get their children baptized. And it isn't an evangelical problem: It's the same problem that faced pastors in medieval Europe or that faces them in Latin America today: so much nominal Christianity, so little educated and observant Christianity.

Furthermore, it's not clear that the problem is, in fact, more acute than ever, although Sider proclaims it is. Let's examine the "leading moral indicators" he offers, and do so in terms of what I will call realism, in two respects: (1) how bad is it, really? and (2) what would you expect?

Money. When it comes to money, I especially want to listen hard to Ron Sider, as I have since I first encountered *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. But I do wonder whether Sider forgets that with an increase in salary comes an increase in the tax rate so that such people are, in fact, giving a greater proportion of their incomes to the poor through their taxes. (Perhaps Canadians such as I are especially sensitive to this reality!) Barna's data, for instance, discuss tithing as a percentage of "gross" or "pre-tax" income, thus ignoring the giving to social services—including charity to the poor both here and abroad—that we all do through taxes.

Sider also hurts his case by occasional rhetorical overkill (mercifully sparse in his book) such as the following: "evangelicals are piling up ever-greater treasures in their huge houses, growing vacation homes, and expanding investments." Hmm. Ron Sider must run with a fast crowd! I daresay that demographically few evangelicals have this kind of income, especially since evangelicalism continues to recruit disproportionately from the lower and lower-middle classes.

So should we give more? Undoubtedly. Yet is it as bad as Sider says? I'm pretty sure it isn't, and we need a clearer picture to know just what God really is requiring of us.

Race. It is indeed disturbing to find evangelicals less willing to have black neighbors than other Americans are. But one wants to ask one sociological question and then one historical question of this finding. First, since evangelicals are overrepresented in the South and underrepresented in, say, New England and the Pacific Northwest, would we not expect there to be more race troubles among evangelicals, taken as a national whole? I'm reminded of an exchange on *The West Wing* between the governor of Oklahoma and the president over incidents of racial violence. The president chides the governor, saying, "This kind of thing doesn't happen in my home state of New Hampshire."

To which the governor shoots back, "Got a lot of black and Latino Americans in New Hampshire, do you?" So a proper comparison would be sensitive to regional differences, and Sider doesn't provide one.

Second, in historical perspective I just have to ask Ron Sider, *Do you really think that American evangelicals are more racist now than they were fifty years ago?* As bad as things might still be, is the country at large, and evangelicals as a group, not moving in the right direction? And if that is true, isn't that cause to rejoice, rather than mourn?

Domestic Abuse. The same question can be asked here, too: Does anyone think that domestic abuse among evangelicals is actually worse today than it was a generation ago? Given the increased status of women in our society and the willingness of the courts and the increase of social agencies formed to help battered women, surely again we can thank God for what is, in these respects, a *more* Christian America, even as we long and work for a still better one. In fact, University of Virginia sociologist Bradford Wilcox has reported that conservative evangelical family men "have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any major religious group in the United States," and in general (not in every respect, but in general) are better husbands and fathers than their peers.⁶

Sexuality, Marriage, and Divorce. I expect that the greater incidence of divorce in our time is, in too many cases, reflective of women who are escaping abusive husbands. Divorce in these cases is a relatively (I say that carefully) good thing. Furthermore, since evangelicalism does recruit from those sectors of the population statistically more likely to divorce anyhow (younger, less wealthy, less

educated, and so on), then, again, we need to compare apples with apples. And those who have done so have found that authentic evangelical commitment does, in fact, result in better marital records: greater commitment to marriage and resistance to divorce.

We can also look at other "cultural indicators" to gauge whether America, and American evangelicals, are moving in the right or wrong direction. Consider the status of women in our culture; the accommodation for the handicapped in our cities; the rise of Christian adoption agencies and other social service organizations—are these not all reasons to give thanks, even as we realize we are nowhere close to the New Jerusalem? All I am asking is that when we bemoan what is wrong—once we get into focus just what is wrong—we also do not fail to keep in focus all that is right, or at least partially so.

I recognize that a prophet naturally resists finely balanced judgments and fears that his message may "die the death of a thousand qualifications." But Ron Sider is a scholar as well as a prophet, and as such he must recognize that some of us, at least, will be moved to action much better if the case is made without all of these distracting and confusing obstacles.

Yet as encumbered as he is, Sider also has firm grasp of the "one thing needful," the "better part" that no reviewer dare try to take away from him. However questionable his grasp on this or that matter of history or sociology, he undoubtedly has a tight hold on the gospel. And the central exhortation of the book to holiness—between the bookend chapters I have spent this article analyzing—is, as always, right on target. We are more worldly than we should be—as every generation of the church has been. We do need to call ourselves, each other, and our churches to repentance and amendment of life.

What, then, shall we do? Let's conclude with Ron Sider's prudent suggestions, and then add a few more in the light of this discussion of social realities in American evangelicalism.

Sider affirms small groups and church discipline as key solutions. He doesn't say much about the latter, except that it is a good idea in danger of eclipse. I wish he had dealt with how toxic church discipline still is in many churches, including among his own Anabaptist tribe, and offered advice as to how it can be put into better practice today.

Oddly, he connects this congregational idea of discipline with a defense of denominational organization, claiming that "the notion—and practice—of an independent congregation with no structures of accountability to the larger body of Christ is simply heretical." But particularly when confronted with how to connect parachurch organizations with some accountability structure, he confesses that he doesn't know how to "solve" this "problem," and even glances wistfully at Rome. I respectfully suggest that he think about this question some more before damning as heretics all of those who disagree with him on a fundamental dispute in evangelical ecclesiology.

He is much more articulate about small groups, and especially small groups that demand commitment from participants. In particular, these groups manifest both transparency (resembling John Wesley's class meetings and their inquiries into each member's spiritual and moral record that week) and tenacity (no quitting when the conversation gets uncomfortably personal). What Sider does not do, however, is make clear just how his small groups will incite greater involvement than those already out there. If American evangelicals now are too willing to abandon small groups, why would they be more likely to stick it out in these much less comfortable ones?

Well, perhaps Sider thinks that greater demands make for greater attractiveness, along the lines of the general interpretation of Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*—which Sider cites approvingly in this regard. (It's not clear that this is quite what Kelley was saying, but that's what he is often understood to be saying.) Or perhaps Sider doesn't care if many drop out, as long as the sincere believers get to participate in healthy small groups. Either way, the "mean of evangelical piety," so to speak, goes up. But it does so at the loss, perhaps, of many who would otherwise adhere, at least somewhat, to the church.

And that is a major question lurking nearby: Is Sider making a covert defense of the believers' church, and a fairly radical version at that? Is this what evangelicalism really ought to be, in his view, and evangelicals would be better off without the compromises of "seeker-sensitive" models, whether those of Saddleback and Willow Creek or, yes, those older ones of Geneva, Wittenberg, Canterbury, and Rome?

Even if this is so (and I'm not sure that it is), Sider's newer, better evangelicalism will soon have to face the "second generation" problem. So let's face it now. The best way for evangelicalism to help young people avoid improper sex, drugs, and other moral quagmires is to parent them well, and provide excellent Sunday School and youth groups—alternative peer groups and instructional centers to teach and model something other than they experience at school and on MTV. Evangelicals will not enjoy holy, healthy, and happy communities until we focus proper attention on our children. For all of their dubious aspects, the "focus on the family" of many evangelicals and the rise of the evangelical youth culture have demonstrably contributed to the strength of evangelicalism in America.

We also need to educate adults, particularly in biblical standards of holiness and how to both apply and attain them. Adult Christian education is a travesty in too many churches: either restricted to home Bible studies or to informational lectures with too little "take-home" wisdom. Adult Christian education is simply crucial to helping adults cope well with the temptations of our times. Indeed, the status of "Sunday School Superintendent," "Youth Pastor," and "Pastor of Christian Education" must be elevated in our churches to a level commensurate with the crucial importance of their ministries.

Finally, pastors need to follow Sider's lead and preach discipleship and holiness. We need high ideals held up before us—evangelical ideals of genuine conversion issuing in holy living, not the "cheap grace" of popular evangelical heresy. Let's not let people claim to be "evangelicals" or "Christians" so easily in our culture. Let's give those words the rich meanings they have had, so that when the next pollster calls, people will know much better what and who they are and are not—and, much more importantly, will live in the light of that increased self-awareness.

At the same time as I endorse Sider's call to holiness, however, I don't think we need to worry quite so much about what finally amounts to this: the various degrees of adherence among evangelicals. People are taking various paths at various paces, and before their own Master they stand or fall. Jesus himself had a range of disciples, and we see various shades of adherence in the New Testament churches as people make their way along the path of faith—as we have ever since. Pastorally, we can and should be both idealistic and realistic.

So by all means let us, with Brother Sider, "Lift High the Cross." And let us invite everyone to come, drawing them closer as best we can.

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1. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 1-19; George Marsden, "Introduction," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Eerdmans, 1984).
2. On religion and marital happiness, see the data and reports of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, based on its General Social Survey; on volunteerism, see Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).
3. Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2001); and *idem*, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2003).
4. An unusually well-informed and carefully-nuanced discussion of these terminological and methodological issues is Robert D. Woodberry and Christian S. Smith, "Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24 (1998), pp. 25-56.
5. Barna makes clear in virtually every press release and publication on this subject that he does not ask people to identify themselves as "born again," but instead applies the label to everyone who answers this question affirmatively: "Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?" and then, to a question on life after death, affirms this response of seven options offered: "When I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior." With these two tests, he turns up Roman Catholics, those who never go to church, and those who rarely pray—all of whom he calls "born again" and sometimes, alas, "believers." One wonders why he persists with this easily misunderstood and wildly variegated category at all.

6. W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 206-7.

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