

The Response of Fundamentalism

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The response of fundamentalism to liberalism and its effects upon evangelicalism
2. aim – To cause us to understand the nature of fundamentalism and its impact upon the church

b. outline

1. The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism
2. The Beginnings of Fundamentalism
3. The Effects of Fundamentalism

c. overview

1. the rise of **Liberalism** – the movement springing out of the modern age, around the Industrial Revolution, as an advancement of certain philosophical studies, both historical and critical, into the nature of God, the Scriptures, and the center of the gospel
 - a. having its roots in the 19th C. and continuing into the 20th; a clear “offshoot” of the *Age of Reason* of the 17th and 18th C. in which men believed they could “think” out the idea of God
 - b. led by men such as Schleiermacher, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Baur, etc.
 - c. developing the *Social Gospel*, a “renewed” view of the gospel whereby the task of the Christian is to seek to aid the poor and promote greater justice in society – a movement in which the *central* message of Christianity is to address the needs of the oppressed and downtrodden, with Jesus as a “model” of excellence in advancing this goal
 1. **i.e.** a movement away from sin, death, and judgment at the heart of the faith, to a message of God’s love for those most afflicted in the world, *demonstrated* in the death of Jesus
 2. **i.e.** a *horizontal* view of Christianity as opposed to a *vertical* one – the nature of human-to-human relationships as the way to “create” a human-to-God relationship

I. The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism

Content

a. the definition of Fundamentalism

1. **obviously:** the advancement of the liberal schools of theology (and their affect upon Protestantism) led to a *reaction* within many parts of the church
 - a. two of the *key* elements of this reaction were *Darwinism* (or the Theory of Evolution) and the rise of historical criticism, particularly as these two ideas began affecting the thinking of the church
 - b. **i.e.** Darwinism undermining the belief in the God of the Scriptures (**i.e.** the supernatural) and historical criticism undermining the historicity of the Scriptures themselves
2. **Fundamentalism** = the late 19th and early 20th C. movement to “combat” the teachings of liberalism by reenforcing the “fundamentals” of the faith amongst a number of Protestant and Evangelical denominations, a movement that would *continue* and *change* throughout the 20th C.
 - a. **note:** the title Fundamentalism (often) refers to the *movement* within early 20th C. Christianity, whereas the noun fundamentalism (lower-case *f*) is a reference to the *general idea* of strict adherence to the basic principles of *any* subject (**e.g.** Islamic idea of strict adherence to the Quran)
 - b. **note:** a great swath of evangelicalism was affected by this movement, and many of its “assumptions” still persist in the “typical” Baptist church of the 21st C.
 - c. **note:** although Fundamentalism is *heavily* associated (today) with Baptists, it was *not* a monolithic movement – advocates of Fundamentalism were found in *every* Protestant denomination at the beginning, although many of them would “withdraw” from it over time (**e.g.** the PCUSA)
 - d. **note:** while there are *many* fundamentals that the movement *insisted* were essential, the *crux* of them can be “boiled down” to five (5) specific ones considered *most important*

b. the fundamentals of Fundamentalism

1. the virgin birth of Jesus (and his deity) – that Jesus was *not* just a man, but was the union of God and man, and that his *virginal conception* was essential to this understanding
 - a. defying the liberal denial of the deity of Jesus and his elevation as just a “great man”
2. the inerrancy of Scripture (and its inspiration) – the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, which implies that it is inerrant in all its says about the faith *and is to be taken literally*
 - a. defying the liberal historical “criticism” of the Bible and the rejection of the supernatural

3. the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and his *bodily* resurrection – that the death of Jesus was to address the issue of sin in the human race, and he literally arose from the grave
 - a. defying the liberal idea of Jesus simply acting as an “example” of good social involvement
4. the literal creation account – that human life did not simply “evolve” from lower life forms, but that a Creator formed human beings as a unique creature and as the highest form of life
 - a. defying the liberal embrace of *Darwinism* and the place of humans as simply another “species”
5. the imminent return of Christ – that Jesus will return to the earth and that Christians are to be actively seeking the salvation of the lost in anticipation of his return
 - a. defying the liberal version of history without a proximate cause or purpose

II. The Beginnings of Fundamentalism

Content

a. the beginnings of Fundamentalism (as a movement)

1. the term “Fundamentalism” was first used at meetings of the **Niagara Bible Conference**
 - a. the conference was originally called in 1876, led by the Presbyterian pastor James Hall Brookes and the Baptist preacher A.J. Gordon – it continued to meet until 1897
 - b. the Conference was convened as a *direct* response to the movement of liberalism, and many of the “founding fathers” of fundamentalism were in attendance: W.E. Blackstone, Charles Erdman, William Moorehead, C.I. Scofield, and J. Hudson Taylor (*i.e.* of the China Inland Mission)
 - c. the Conference focused heavily on several “fundamentals” of the faith (**see above**)
 - d. but, the Conference was *particularly* focused on *prophecy*:
 1. Protestant eschatology in the 19th C. was (primarily) *postmillennial* in its outlook, looking for the advancement of the kingdom of God upon the earth *through the church* with Jesus returning to consummate that kingdom after it has been (mostly) ushered in
 2. however, the rise of “modernism” (with its attendant social and economic problems) gave rise to the “newer” view of *premillennialism*: that Christ would return to establish his kingdom upon the earth; that the millennium would *only* come by Jesus *himself* establishing it
 - a. **note**: the *dispensational* view of *premillennialism* (popularized by C.I. Scofield; **see above**) would heavily influence Fundamentalism into the 20th C.
 3. the Conference (then) focused heavily on *prophecy*, and (more specifically) *literal prophecy*, looking through the lens of biblical *literalism* to see future events unfold (**see below**)
 - a. **e.g.** Fundamentalists *even to today* focus “inordinately” upon prophecy in their churches
2. Fundamentalism was also “started” through a fundamentalist campaign that began in 1902, with **William Bell Riley**, a Northern Baptist in Minneapolis
 - a. at a large conference in Philadelphia in 1919, Riley founded the *World Christian Fundamentals Association* (WCFA), which became the chief *interdenominational* fundamentalist organization in the 1920s
 - b. Riley also founded *Northwestern College* and *Northwestern Evangelical Seminary* in Minneapolis (my *alma mater*, *Bethel University* [then Bethel College & Seminary], started in 1871 as *Baptist Union Theological Seminary*, under the *Baptist General Conference* [now *Converge*])
 - c. the *Association* continued until ~1929, but faded in importance after his death (**see IFCA below**)
 - d. it was Riley who took the initiative in the 1925 *Scopes Monkey Trial* to bring in William Jennings Bryan to argue for the prosecution, an indictment against John T. Scopes of *purposely* teaching evolution against the *Tennessee Butler Act*, which made it unlawful (Clarence Darrow served as *plaintiff’s attorney*) – Scopes was found guilty, but the verdict was overturned on a technicality
 1. **i.e.** it was a *show trial* designed to “face down” the tide of *Darwinism* by Fundamentalists
3. however, the movement *itself* is typically traced to the publishing of ***The Fundamentals*** in 1910
 - a. conceived in 1909 by Lyman Stewart, the founder of Union Oil, and a devout Presbyterian
 - b. it was designed to be a “new statement of the fundamentals of Christianity”, although its *emphasis* would be a disputation against the rising tide of liberalism in the Protestant church
 1. 64 different authors wrote, representing most major Protestant denominations
 2. it contained a series of 12 volumes (91 essays) addressing a wide range of topics, but focused *primarily* on responding to liberalism in the churches (**see below**)
 3. it was mailed free to ministers, missionaries, SS superintendents, theology professors, etc.
 4. more than 3,000,000 volumes were sent out between 1910 and 1915, with a second printing in 1917 as a 4-volume set

b. the organizations of Fundamentalism

1. although not a *monolithic* movement, a number of organizations developed from the churches (and denominations) that embraced it:
 - a. the *Independent Fundamental Churches of America* (IFCA) – an association of independent Protestant congregations and church bodies started in 1930 in Cicero, IL, with ~1000 churches, 5 member colleges, 11 home mission agencies, 8 foreign mission entities, and 12 church planters
 1. **e.g.** J. Oliver Buswell (Wheaton College), John Walvoord, J. Vernon McGee, Charles Ryrie, John MacArthur (Masters Seminary)
 - b. the *Independent Fundamental Baptist* (IFB) movement – a “group” of Baptist churches that specifically *seceded* from larger Baptist denominations to become “independent” (although that term is *redundant* in Baptist ecclesiology) – a loose “coalition” of churches, *not* a denomination
 1. **e.g.** PCC, Jack Hyles, J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice (*Sword of the Lord*), Lester Roloff,
 - c. the *Dallas Theological Seminary* – an evangelical seminary known for popularizing free grace theology and dispensationalism – founded in 1924 by Lewis Sperry Chafer, and led by John Walvoord and Chuck Swindoll, including the professorship of Charles Ryrie
 - d. the *General Association of Regular Baptist Churches* – begun in 1923 as the *Baptist Bible Union* in reaction against the Northern Baptist Convention (today ABC USA) – **e.g.** Calvary Baptist of Phillipsburg began in 1947 as a GARBC church, withdrawing from First Baptist

III. The Effects of Fundamentalism

Content

a. the perceptions of Fundamentalism

1. Timothy Weber: “a rather distinctive modern reaction to religious, social, and intellectual changes of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, a reaction that eventually took on a life of its own and changed significantly over time” (*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, 1990, emphasis mine)
2. in the 1930’s (including H. Richard Niebuhr), Fundamentalism was seen (mostly) as a *geographical* reaction: a social conflict between the cities and country life, with Fundamentalists reacting against the “progressivism” of the cities
 - a. and, although the movement began *in the N*, it became largely associated with the S, particularly amongst the SBC (**e.g.** by 1980, 65% were in the SE)
3. by the 1950’s, Fundamentalism was seen (largely) as an *anti-intellectual* movement: “retreating” into “conclaves” of belief, resisting the “newer” ideas of modernism
 - a. with the attendant accusation of **legalism** – the *unfortunate* tendency of Fundamentalists to “add” to their list of “fundamentals” and to impose those additions upon the beliefs *and practices* of members of their churches
 - b. **e.g.** the *ubiquitous* embrace by Fundamentalism of the *temperance movement* of the early 20th C., being *inculcated* into the “standard” Baptist church covenant as a prohibition against alcohol
4. but, by the 1980’s, Fundamentalism became (primarily) associated with the rise of the “Christian Right”, a surge of *political* interest by Fundamentalists to influence *social* and *political* outcomes:
 - a. **e.g.** the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 being viewed as an important step of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy (**i.e.** under the adoption of *dispensationalism* as the chief form of eschatology, *especially* after WWI and WWII and their “repudiation” of postmillennialism)
 - b. **e.g.** the *Moral Majority* under Jerry Falwell, the *Family Research Council* under James Dobson, and the *Christian Coalition* under Pat Robertson, all designed to fill public offices with professing Christians
 - c. **e.g.** Supreme Court decisions that rallied political activism: *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) prohibiting state-sanctioned prayer in schools, *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963) prohibiting mandatory Bible reading in schools, *Roe v. Wade* (1973) striking down state-specific abortion laws, etc.

b. the place of fundamentalism (as a *philosophy*)

1. many Reformed Baptists (and others in the Reformed world) would consider themselves to be *fundamentalists*, not in the “movement” sense, but in the *philosophical* sense
 - a. **i.e.** that there *are* certain fundamentals to the faith *essential for it to remain the Christian faith*
 - b. **e.g.** as Reformed Baptists, we would argue that the *sovereignty of God* is a *fundamental* to the revealed message of Scripture – that God is **sovereign** to will and to act in accordance with his good pleasure to his own glory in the affairs of individual men and in history as a whole