

Christian Ethics

A Brief History of Fundamentalism in America

Matthew 16:3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Prior to World War I, there were 4
dominant branches of
Fundamentalist thought

- One branch pretty much condemned American culture
- These were Dispensational, Premillennial Fundamentalists, who found in “the signs of the times” the decay of American culture
- Social reform looked much like the lawlessness predicted by Paul, II Thessalonians 2.1-12
- The concern was that religious “liberalism would turn religion into morality”
- Daniel’s prediction of the advance of knowledge (Daniel 12.4) was coming true
- Proponents of this branch were Arno Gabelein, and Isaac Haldeman

- Another respected the tension American culture created, but didn't want to totally isolate from it
- It was dispensational and premillennial, but didn't attack American culture
- It was apolitical, emphasizing evangelism as the primary means of contact with American culture
- Advocates of this view were W.B. Riley, Moody Bible Institute

- A third branch sought to preserve “Christian civilization”
- It believed that “the ideals of Christian piety went together with the ideals of the progressing and democratic American nation”
- In other words, America’ ideals were Biblical ideals
- They were willing to work with those who differed in some areas, in order to preserve the Christian American culture
- William Jennings Bryan was a leading advocate of this view

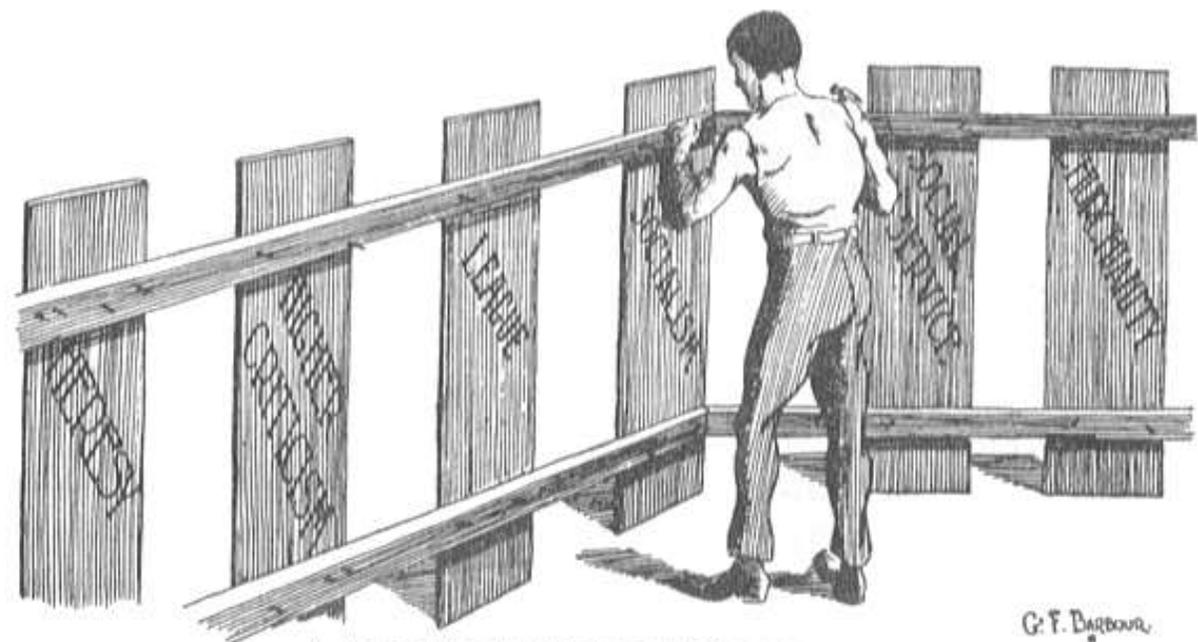
- The fourth branch viewed transformation of culture as part of the mission of the Church
- Although not all Presbyterians held this view, most who held it were Presbyterians.
- They saw the sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus (Revelation 19.21) as the Word transforming society
- Proponents were B.B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen

World War I changed the way people viewed many things, and it contributed to further divisions among Fundamentalists

- Prior to WW I, the conservatives and liberals belonged to the same groups and denominations
- The war created deep divisions in America: Christians became much more politically active
- Williams Jennings Bryan resigned as Secretary of State so as to avoid bringing America into the war
- Billy Sunday became a great patriot, telling listeners that “made in Germany” was stamped on the bottom of Hell

- The “basic goodness” of man, which was the hallmark of liberalism and social reform, was threatened by the war: “Christian culture” had to be rescued from it
- Patriotism became a two-edged sword: American culture must be preserved, but sacrifice in the war didn’t equate to Christianity

The immediate post-war years (the
Roaring Twenties) added a new enemy to
American culture: communism



G. F. BARBER

WILL THIS FENCE HOLD THEM BACK?

THE KING'S BUSINESS.
JULY 1918



*We can discern the face
of the sky, but can we not
discern the sign of the times.*

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

It was during this time that
Fundamentalist began to shift its
emphasis

- Fundamentalism had primarily been concerned with evangelism, prayer, and prophecy
- In 1919, W.B. Riley organized the World's Christian Fundamentals Association
- It's first conference addressed "the Great Apostasy spreading like a plague throughout Christendom"

- It's goal was simple: to address the crises of the denominations by teaching true and pure doctrine.
- But the overwhelming sense of social crisis will bring about a new type of fundamentalism