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Fundamentalism at the End of the Twentieth Century

David L. Burggraff

**Academic Dean, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary
Lansdale, Pennsylvania**

The list of those who came to make David king at Hebron includes one rather odd reference to the "men of Issachar." The chronicler identifies those tribes you might expect to hear about, such as: the men of Simeon, "men of valour for the war," others armed with weapons, brave warriors. Mention is even made of the men of Benjamin, Saul's kinsmen—3,000, most of whom had remained loyal to Saul's house until then (1 Chron 12:24-37). But among these thousands were 200 others, "men of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron 12:32).

Jewish and Christian interpreters alike have sometimes speculated that the tribe of Issachar consisted of astrologers, psychics, philosophers or scholars. But such hypotheses are not necessary. The text is straightforward—a few men of Issachar paid attention to the present and used their knowledge to plan for the future.

In considering the future of American fundamentalism at the end of the twentieth century, many questions arise. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we headed? Why do we think and act like we do? Why is this generation struggling over issues that seemed so clear a generation ago?

How do we plan for the future? Is there a future for fundamentalism?

The purpose of this study is to begin addressing these questions. By doing so, we will attempt to peer into the future of fundamentalism. It is thought that by "understanding the times" as did the men of Issachar, we will be more inclined to choose a wise course of action for the future.

Perhaps the most reliable way to anticipate the future is by understanding the past and the present. Therefore we will briefly reflect upon the past accomplishments of the evangelical tradition and will discuss the present trends in American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Following this, we will attempt to peer into its future. It is with this in mind that an attempt will be to chronicle the subtle changes of American fundamentalism through the course of the twentieth century.

Defining Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism

It is difficult to define fundamentalism because no single definition seems satisfactory to all fundamentalists or to those outside fundamentalism. George Marsden offers the following definition:

A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something. That seems simple and is fairly accurate. . . . A more precise statement of the same point is that an American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with "secular humanism." In either the long or the short definitions, fundamentalists are a subtype of evangelicals and militancy is crucial to their outlook. Fundamentalists are not

just religious conservatives, they are conservatives who are willing to take a stand and to fight.¹

This definition, though initially comical, does ultimately delineate the distinguishing marks of fundamentalism; that is, inerrancy and separation. Indeed, this definition would be fairly clear if we knew exactly what an evangelical is. However, our task is made more difficult because neither fundamentalism nor evangelicalism is a clearly defined religious organization with a membership list. Rather, both evangelicalism and fundamentalism are religious movements. Each of these movements, though only informally organized, is an identifiable set of groups and individuals with some common history and traits.

The Development of Fundamentalism

We must become more historically self-conscious as fundamentalists.² It is a sad commentary on our movement, but the fact is too few fundamentalists can explain accurately how fundamentalism developed. An awareness of four major periods, or "phases," helps us to understand fundamentalism: (1) an "irenic [i.e., peaceful] phase," which runs from approximately 1860-1919 and serves as a harbinger to fundamentalism "proper;" (2) a "militant phase," that runs from 1919-1940 and which encompasses the now famous "fundamentalist-modernist controversies;" (3) a "divisive phase" from 1941-1960, associated

¹George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 1.

²The last two decades have witnessed a growth in the historiography of fundamentalism. For an analysis of the vast amount of historical literature on American Protestant fundamentalism, see John Fea, "American Fundamentalism and Neo-Evangelicalism: A Bibliographical Survey," *Evangelical Journal* 11 (Spring 1993): 21-30.

with the fragmentation of fundamentalism into "evangelical/new-evangelical" and separatist factions; and (4) a "separatist phase" from 1960 to the present.³

Irenic Fundamentalism, 1860-1919

Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism. "Evangelical" (from the Greek for "gospel") eventually became the common British and American name for the revival movements that swept back and forth across the English-speaking world and elsewhere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Central to the evangelical gospel was the proclamation of Christ's saving work through his death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting Him for eternal salvation. In America, the way for the revivals had been prepared in part by the strong Puritan heritage of New England. Nevertheless, the revivalists' emphasis on simple biblical preaching in a fervent style that would elicit dramatic conversion experiences set the standard for much of American Protestantism. Since Protestantism was by far the dominant religion in the United States until the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicalism shaped the most characteristic style of American religion.

Being a style as well as a set of Protestant beliefs about the Bible and Christ's saving work, evangelicalism touched virtually all American denominations. Most major reform movements, such as antislavery or temperance, had a strong evangelical

³For the purpose of this study I have chosen to follow a "four-phase" history of fundamentalism as outlined by John Fea in his article "Understanding the Changing Facade of Twentieth-Century American Protestant Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Definition," *Trinity Journal 15NS* (Fall 1994): 181-199. Previously, I have advocated a three-fold history; however, this four-phase history seems to best explain the dynamics and developments that have taken place within fundamentalism in this century. I do, however, disagree with the dating of Fea's first phase. Whereas he begins his first phase in 1893, I begin in the 1860s and 1870s as does G. Marsden.

component. Evangelicals had a major voice in American schools and colleges, public as well as private, and had much to do with setting dominant American moral standards. Especially in its nineteenth-century heyday, 1860s-1870s evangelicalism was a very broad coalition, made up of many sub-groups. Though from differing denominations, these people were united with each other, and with persons from other nations in their zeal to win the world for Christ.

Crisis within evangelicalism. Most historians have described American evangelicalism at the turn of the century as a movement shocked by change.⁴ The vast cultural changes of the era from the 1860s to the 1920s created a major crisis within this evangelical coalition. Essentially it split in two as Protestants were forced to confront the rise of modernism. On the one hand were theological liberals who, in order to maintain better credibility in the modern age, were willing to modify some central evangelical doctrines, such as the reliability of the Bible or the necessity of salvation only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. On the other hand were conservatives who continued to believe the traditionally essential evangelical doctrines. What happened during this period to bring about American liberalism?

In the late nineteenth century, the influence of both Darwinism and German liberalism began to make major inroads in America. These influences brought about a denial of the supernatural, the existence of God, and any notion of an authoritative Bible. This attack came on several fronts:

⁴See W. R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford, 1980); E. R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); M. Szasz, *The Divided Mind of American Protestantism, 1880-1930* (Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1982).

theological, philosophical, scientific. Those influenced by liberalism veered from theological orthodoxy. Darwinism sprang up and redefined the origin of all living things. William Newton Clarke declared that the Bible was simply a book by men about God. Walter Rauchenbausch helped to usher in the age of the social gospel. The impact on evangelicalism was staggering; liberalism gained control over every major denomination. The greenhouses of liberal theology were the universities, many denominationally affiliated.⁵ America in the latter twenty years of the nineteenth century attempted to catch up with what had taken Europe two hundred years to develop.

The response to denominational liberalism was fivefold and eventually culminated in the emergence of 'fundamentalism.' First, Bible conferences were held to affirm orthodoxy. In 1876 at Swampscott, Massachusetts, men met for the first of the Bible conferences whose themes were the second coming. The first important conference (October 30 to November 1, 1878) met at the Church of the Holy Trinity in New York. Out of it came *Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference* edited by Nathaniel West. This conference awakened many to the dangers of liberalism. One of the most historically significant conferences was in Farwell Hall, Chicago on November 16-21, 1886. Clearer positions were stated, and like the 1878 conference resolutions were passed to define this position as well as its responsibilities. It was out of the Niagara Bible Conference in 1895, however, that the five fundamentals were

⁵"Modern religious liberalism with its denial of the supernatural and its rejection of historic Christian doctrine grew apace. It captured great citadels of learning, and began to permeate the denominational structures." Ernest Pickering, *The Fruit of Compromise* (Clark Summit, Pa.: Baptist Bible College, 1970), 5. Leading schools were: University of Chicago, Union Seminary in New York, Rochester Theological Seminary, Boston University, Duke Divinity School, Harvard Divinity School, Yale Divinity School, Garrett Biblical Institute, Crozier Theological Seminary, Hartford Theological Seminary, Oberlin College, Colgate University, Western Theological Seminary.

set forth as a basis for action in the battle against liberalism: (1) inerrancy of the Scriptures; (2) the deity of Christ; (3) His virgin birth; (4) His substitutionary atonement; (5) His physical resurrection and His bodily return to earth.⁶ Some of the figures behind these conferences included: A. J. Gordon, James H. Brookes, George C. Needham, L. W. Munhall, W. G. Moorehead, W. J. Erdman, A. T. Pierson, G. N. H. Peters, W. E. Blackstone and D. L. Moody, F. L. Godet, and F. Delitzsch who participated in the conference via letter.

Second, mass evangelism was used to reach thousands for Christ. From 1875-1900 four evangelists were reaching thousands for Christ: D. L. Moody, B. Fay Mills, Sam P. Jones, and Rodney "Gipsy" Smith. In addition to reaching souls for Christ, they preached biblical truths and repudiated liberalism. They were followed by Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, R. A. Torrey, and others. Liberals criticized these men, accusing them of being uninformed about social advances.

Third, the Bible institute movement became a means of preserving theological orthodoxy. With the defection of schools to liberalism, the following schools were started: Moody Bible Institute (1886), Boston Missionary Training School (Gordon Bible College, 1889), Northwestern Bible Schools (1902), Christian and Missionary Alliance Bible School (Nyack, New York, A. B. Simpson), Wheaton College (1860), Columbia Bible College (1923), Dallas Theological Seminary (1924), Bob Jones University (1927), Westminster Seminary (1929). Moreover, "nearly forty Bible schools were founded between 1930 and 1940."⁷

⁶See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, rev. and enlg. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 480-481, and George W. Dolla, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), 72.

⁷Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 481.

Fourth, liberalism came under the attack of conservative evangelicals in many of the nation's pulpits. Preaching was often aimed at the liberals. Since doctrinal error usually began in the schools, many fundamentalists, including those who had helped to establish schools, transmitted truth to the man in the pew to counter the liberal influence abroad. Sermons included refutations of higher criticism, the evolutionary approach and the naturalistic basis of liberalism.

Fifth, this conservative evangelicalism aggressively engaged in the production of literature.⁸ This effort helped to revive a sagging campaign against liberalism and initiated a new, more militant period in the history of fundamentalism.

This phase of fundamentalism has been identified as the irenic phase because by post-World War I standards, these conservatives were for the most part quite moderate in their attitude toward theological liberalism. Pre-World War I fundamentalism should be understood more in light of nineteenth-century conservative evangelicalism than twentieth-century fundamentalism.⁹ Despite the growing theological tension, most church leaders in this phase were committed to preserving denominational unity.¹⁰ It is thus anachronistic to give the label

⁸The *Scofield Reference Bible*, published in 1907, was the major literary work advocating orthodoxy and dispensationalism. It was edited by C. I. Scofield. In 1908 *Jesus Is Coming* by William E. Blackstone was published. It was an apologetic for premillennialism. In 1910, *The Fundamentals*, a collection of scholarly essays by leading conservatives, was published. It stressed the integrity of the Scriptures.

⁹See Fea, "Understanding the Changing Facade," 186-189; I agree with Fea that the concept of 'militancy,' which later become a hallmark of fundamentalism, was not overwhelmingly present in the first phase.

¹⁰An example of the irenic disposition of conservatives during this period were the ten volumes of *The Fundamentals*. Contributors came from a wide range of denominational affiliations. The selection and content of the articles display the moderate tone of the period; none were specific attacks on modernists' tendencies, neither did any focus on ecclesiastical separation. Most of the articles centered around the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

fundamentalist to World War I conservatives. Not only was there no such anti-modernist attitude yet dominant among them, but the term fundamentalist had not yet even been publicly coined. It is becoming more common to hear the label 'forerunners to fundamentalism' to describe this era. It should be noted that when new-evangelicals, and some modern-day fundamentalists, make the claim that they are the true proponents of 'historic fundamentalism,' it is to this period that they are referring.

Thus the first phase of American fundamentalism cannot actually be labeled fundamentalism as we now know it. It can be explained simply as the attempt of nineteenth-century evangelicals to formulate a plan for addressing the rising tide of theological modernism that was influencing their denominations. Ecclesiastical separation was not as important to a 1919 'fundamentalist' as it will be for a 1990s fundamentalist. Nevertheless, it must be noted that while conservatives had not yet fully engaged the battle against the liberalism rising within their respective denominations, neither were they unaware of the ever-growing presence of the enemy.¹¹

Militant Fundamentalism, 1919-1940

Between 1919-1925 fundamentalism took shape as a movement. 1919 marks the beginning of this phase with the organization in Philadelphia of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association. Some fundamentalist leaders, sensing the need for a more concerted stand against the strong liberalism of the day decided to found a new organization. W. B. Riley of Minneapolis was its first president. The organization was an

¹¹Fca, "Understanding the Changing Facade," 186.

important milestone in the development of the fundamentalist movement.¹²

By the 1920s a militant wing of conservatives emerged and took the name fundamentalist. Fundamentalists were ready to fight liberal theology in the churches as well as resist the changes in the dominant values and beliefs of the culture. By the middle of that decade, they had gained wide national prominence.

Fundamentalism took definite form especially in the conflicts within the Northern Baptist and Northern Presbyterian (Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.) denominations. These became centers of the anti-modernist movement because in each of these denominations advanced and aggressive modernism was faced by a conservative counter-force of comparable strength. . . . Curtis Lee Laws captured the essence of the common attitude and motive that gave the diverse groups cohesiveness as a distinct movement. Fundamentalism was a loose interdenominational coalition of "aggressive conservatives—conservatives who feel that it is their duty to contend for the faith." This definition embraced the main concerns of the fundamentalist premillennialists, conservative Baptists, Presbyterian traditionalists, and the scattered militants in other denominations, who were beginning to develop a sense of common identity.¹³

This temper of militancy and aggressive anti-modernism began to distinguish fundamentalists. Marsden makes the observation that the enemy in the war had been Germany, the mecca of theological liberalism and higher criticism. Consequently, many began to associate the destructive character

¹² See Ernest D. Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of the New Evangelicalism* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 4-5.

¹³ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 165, 169.

of the German war machine with the destructive nature of liberal theology upon traditional orthodoxy. The result was a mentality and vocabulary that having sprung from the previous war and the military campaigns of Europe would now be associated with the ecclesiastical confrontations of the 1920s. America was now in a war of its own, and the attitude and vocabulary associated with war were transferred to the churches.¹⁴ This may be seen, for instance, in the account of Laws which relates his coining of the term 'fundamentalist.' While returning home from a Baptist anti-modernist rally held in Buffalo in July of 1920, Laws announced:

We here and now move that a new word be adopted to describe the men among us who insist that the landmarks shall not be removed. "Conservatives" is too closely allied with reactionary forces in all walks of life. "Premillennialists" is too closely allied with a single doctrine and not sufficiently inclusive. "Landmarks" has a historical disadvantage and connotes a particular group of radical conservatives. We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the great fundamentals shall be called "Fundamentalists." By that name the editor of the *Watchman-Examiner* is willing to be called. It will be understood therefore when he uses the word it will be in compliment and not in disparagement.¹⁵

A fundamentalist was one who not only adhered to an evangelical body of doctrine but, as Laws put it, did "battle royal" for this body of doctrine. The distinguishing characteristic that made fundamentalism distinct within

¹⁴Ibid., 141-153.

¹⁵Curtis Lee Laws, "Convention Side Lights," *Watchman-Examiner* 8 (1 July 1920): 834.

evangelicalism in the 1920s was not doctrine but the attitude toward the defense of such doctrine.¹⁶

Fundamentalism had consequently developed into a formidable fighting force. The theological and ideological battle raged in universities and denominations as scholarly fundamentalists matched wits with liberals. The "big bang" occurred in 1925, marking the decline of fundamentalism and ultimately orthodoxy in many religious institutions. In Dayton, Tennessee, a much publicized trial pitted these two poles against each other.

The Scopes Monkey trial, as it came to be remembered, was over the issue of evolution. John T. Scopes, a high school biology teacher, attempted to teach evolution, though Tennessee had banned the teaching of Darwinism in any public school. Scopes was brought to trial because of his teaching. He was defended by the brilliant Clarence Darrow who, personified the twentieth-century urban man. Darrow destroyed his opponent, folksy William Jennings Bryan, at the trial. The media's portrayal of modern, intellectual man's domination of the backwoods, half-educated, obscurantist fundamentalist sent shockwaves throughout the nation and world. Even though most fundamentalists were not this way, from this point on their influence was minimal.¹⁷ As a result, many pulled out of the

¹⁶Several denominations were evangelical in doctrine (Methodists, Southern Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans) but did not possess the militancy associated with fundamentalism. Thus, militancy distinguished fundamentalists as a subset of a broader evangelical coalition. See Fea, "Understanding the Changing Facade," 187.

¹⁷Marsden writes, "It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of the 'Monkey Trial' at Dayton, Tennessee, in transforming fundamentalism. . . .

The central theme was, inescapably, the clash of two worlds, the rural and the urban. In the popular imagination, there were on the one side the small town, the backwoods, half-educated yokels, obscurantism, crackpot hawkers of religion, fundamentalism, the South, and the personification of the agrarian myth himself, William Jennings Bryan. Opposed to these were the

denominations and educational institutions in which they had been fighting. The liberals had won the day.

The consequences of this event were significant. After the ridicule, fundamentalism retreated from higher educational institutions. Liberals got the furniture and fundamentalism developed a deep-seated distrust of higher education. Emphasis of fundamentalists became centered on action (i.e., ministry) rather than education. Mark Noll remarks,

The modern university was a place of danger. Not only its promotion of naturalism, but also its methods of scholarship were suspect.

. . . For these Christians, the appeal of scholarship was a faint whisper in comparison to the imperative for action. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a remarkable outpouring of conservative activity, whether organizing to defend the fundamentals in "mainline" denominations, or establishing separate agencies outside the denominations. The university world may have fallen to enemies, but vast arenas for service still remained in mission work, evangelism, popular publication, the new medium of radio, Christian colleges and Bible schools, and so on. The effects of this activism could be seen everywhere.

. . . When J. Gresham Machen died on January 1, 1937, an era seemed to be over. An evangelical scholarship which

city, the clique of New York-Chicago lawyers, intellectuals, journalists, wits, sophisticates, modernists, and the cynical agnostic Clarence Darrow. . . .

. . . fundamentalism was a focal point for the real hostility of rural America toward much of modern culture and the intellect.

Another consequence . . . that held sway after 1925, was the obscurantist label that would ever after stick to fundamentalism. . . .

These bizarre developments in fundamentalist activities meant that in the years after 1925 it became increasingly difficult to take fundamentalism seriously" (Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 184, 185, 188, 191).

was supported by formidable institutions, which enlisted scholars of ability, which advocated thorough academic preparation, which was skeptical of exclusively popular interpretations, and which took an interest in the results of professional scholarship seemed to have come to an end.¹⁸

Marsden adds,

The period from about 1920 to 1950 became a sort of academic dark age.

. . . In place of the network of colleges dominated by evangelicals in the nineteenth century, fundamentalists during the first half of the twentieth century were building a network of Bible Institutes, practical training centers in which the curricula centered on the Bible alone. . . . Fundamentalists still talked about being scientific; but in fact they had become almost thoroughly isolated and alienated from the dominant American scientific culture. Warfare was now indeed the appropriate metaphor for understanding their relationship to the scientific culture.¹⁹

Modernism had now gained control of many denominations and theological seminaries. Throughout the 1920s, the battles were fought *within* the mainline denominations and fundamentalism lost. Conservatism was stripped of most of the ecclesiastical influence it once had. This became a turning point in American religious history for it was during this time that ecclesiastical separation (i.e., the belief that the only approach to modernism is to separate from it) was to become a defining characteristic of fundamentalism.

¹⁸Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row), 1986), 60-61.

¹⁹Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 148-149.

Moreover, after losing its national prominence, the term 'fundamentalism' began to take on a more limited meaning. Many fundamentalists were leaving the mainline Protestant denominations, essentially those associated with the ecumenical Federal (later National) Council of Churches. Having made this move themselves, fundamentalists began to make separation from such denominations a test of true faith. The change in terminology was gradual; but by the end of this period 'fundamentalist' usually meant 'separatist' and no longer included the many conservatives in mainline denominations. Such fundamentalists also stayed separate from two related revivalist movements, the holiness movement and pentecostalism. By the end of this period nearly all fundamentalists were Baptists and most were dispensationalists.

Division Within Fundamentalism: The Rise of New Evangelicalism, 1941-1960

In the 1940s a new mood began to prevail among some fundamentalists. The new practice of making separation a test of faith did not sit well with them. A contemporary writer observes,

Evangelicals don't like the label "fundamentalist." For them, as for most people, the term suggests narrowness, bigotry and intolerance.

. . . new evangelicalism was not a repudiation of fundamentalism, only a new and improved version of it. . . new evangelicals had also learned a few lessons since the Scopes trial. They saw that the fundamentalist polemics of the '20s had been ineffective and had taken away precious energy from the more important task of evangelism.

. . . The new evangelicals challenged fundamentalists to look beyond their religious world to the social and cultural concerns of the nation. Their subsequent public

involvement, academic accomplishments and willingness to cooperate with—or at least tolerate—the Protestant establishment were the first signs of a chastened or reformed fundamentalism.²⁰

Marsden adds,

A new generation of fundamentalist intellectuals began to emerge by the early 1940s. . . . These scholarly fundamentalists, or "new evangelicals," as they came to be called, emphasized the need to meet the intellectual challenges of the age if the movement was to have a lasting impact. . . . The evangelicals who were breaking away from strict fundamentalism were somewhat more affluent and, like many Americans after World War II, more interested in college education.²¹

Although this new spirit developed over years, the defining day for new evangelicalism was 8 December 1957. On that day, Harold John Ockenga laid down the principles of the new movement. This movement may be defined as having adopted the following characteristics:

1. A disdain for 'old fundamentalism.'
2. A softness toward non-conservative views of the Bible, evidenced by a serious deterioration in their view of biblical inspiration.
3. A friendliness toward contemporary scientific views.
4. A willingness to accept charismatic views and practices.
5. A tolerance toward various eschatological positions.
6. A reaction to dispensationalism.

²⁰ D. G. Hart, "The Mid-Life Crisis of American Evangelicalism," *Christian Century* 109 (11 November 1992): 1028-1030.

²¹Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 149-150.

7. A willingness to cooperate and dialogue with religious liberals, including ecumenical evangelism.
8. Stressing the need for the church to be socially concerned.
9. An optimistic attitude toward reaching the non-conservative.
10. Stress on scholarship and apologetics.

The 1950s were characterized by a widening of the gulf between fundamentalism and new evangelicalism. The more new evangelicalism "upgraded" its theology and ecclesiology, the deeper the division became between these new evangelicals and those who sought to maintain a traditional fundamentalist agenda of anti-modernism. In 1955, Carl Henry defined new evangelicalism in strictly doctrinal terms, calling a neo-evangelical anyone who was committed to biblical authority, the holiness of God, man as created in God's image, the sinfulness of man, the love of God, the death of Christ, the new birth, social action, and the return of Christ.²² While well-known separatists of the day such as Carl McIntire, Bob Jones, Sr. and Jr., and John R. Rice would agree with all these assertions (with the exception of social action, which they feared to be linked with the 'social gospel'), they added a belief in ecclesiastical separation and an aggressive (i.e., militant) anti-modernism.

Thus, by the middle of the 1950s, the heirs of anti-modernist 'third phase' fundamentalism were divided. On the one hand, separatists understood themselves as continuing in the historic line of militant, anti-modernist fundamentalism with a new emphasis on ecclesiastical separation. These fundamentalists would refuse to associate in ecclesiastical affairs not only with modernists but also with any group that associated with modernists. Hence, the term 'second-degree separation.' On the

²²Carl Henry, "What Is this Fundamentalism?" *United Evangelical Action* 14 (15 July 1955): 3-6; cf. Fea, "Understanding the Changing Facade," 192-193.

other hand, the neo-evangelicals, who themselves had emerged from second-phase fundamentalism, sought to return to the era associated with the nineteenth-century evangelical scholarship typified in *The Fundamentals*.²³

On the verge of the tumultuous sixties, the fundamentalist movement had become deeply divided. Those who affiliated with the agenda of the non-separatist faction took the name 'neo-evangelical' (eventually evolving to simply evangelical) and the separatists militantly clung to the term 'fundamentalist,' each often repudiating the other.

Evangelicalism and Separatist Fundamentalism, 1960-Present

Evangelicalism. Since the early sixties fundamentalism has become a rather specific self-designation. Though outsiders to the movement sometimes use the term broadly to designate any militant conservative, those who call themselves fundamentalists are predominantly separatist, Baptist dispensationalists.

While fundamentalism has become a fairly precise designation for a particular type of Protestant militant, it should be apparent that evangelicalism describes a much more diverse coalition. Roughly speaking, evangelicalism today includes any Christians traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old nineteenth-century evangelical consensus.

Evangelicalism, however, does not refer simply to a broad grouping of Christians who happen to believe some of the same doctrines; it can also mean a self-conscious interdenominational movement, with leaders, publications, and institutions with which people from many subgroups identify. Evangelicalism in this

²³For an example of the neo-evangelicals' desire to return to the irenic spirit of the first phase, see C. F. Henry, "Dare We Renew the Controversy: The Fundamentalist Reduction," *Christianity Today* 1 (24 June 1957): 23-26.

sense refers to what may be called "card-carrying" evangelicals. The test of being a "card-carrying" evangelical is having a fairly strong transdenominational identity, whatever one's denominational affiliation.

Today controversies rage within evangelicalism, especially over inerrancy. The position of affirming that Scripture is inerrant or infallible in its teaching on matters of faith and conduct but not necessarily in all its assertions concerning history and the cosmos, is gradually becoming ascendent among the most highly respected evangelical theologians. It is becoming fashionable to distinguish between inerrancy (which many do not believe) and infallibility (which many profess to believe). Evangelicalism is now beginning to divide over the issue. Fundamentalists perceive this as history repeating itself.²⁴

Fundamentalism. Because of the problems evangelicals have encountered in their pursuit of scholarly recognition, fundamentalists continue to mistrust graduate-level education. Many advocate that the local church or at most the college level provides a sufficient education. Dorothy Bass remarked,

As important as colleges and seminaries were in educating lay and clerical leadership for Protestant establishment churches, another school [i.e., the Sunday school] was closer to the hearts and more influential on the minds of their millions of members. . . . As public schools and higher education changed around the turn of the century, . . . the Sunday School did not. . . .

. . . Resistance to educational professionalism in the life of the local congregation not only indicated a widespread lay refusal to yield to the wisdom of high-level church educations; it also marked resistance to major developments

²⁴For a brief but helpful discussion, see Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise*, 96-103.

in twentieth-century American education. Local communities of Protestants, grounded in the habits of persistent traditionalism, intended to go on reading the Bible for themselves.²⁵

Early 'fourth-phase' fundamentalists clearly manifested an anti-evangelical attitude when the term evangelical was used in the narrow sense of describing former fundamentalists who in the 1940s and 1950s took a "kinder and gentler" approach toward modernism. This was because fundamentalism had become a world apart. In the years after the Scopes trial of 1925, fundamentalists were convinced that American culture had turned against them, so they withdrew from institutions they believed had become controlled by liberal ideas and established their own institutions as alternatives.²⁶

²⁵Dorothy C. Bass, "Ministry on the Margin: Protestants and Education," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 61, 67.

²⁶Because the modernists generally prevailed in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies that convulsed American Protestantism—that is, liberals managed to retain control of denominational machinery and assets—fundamentalists had to start anew, constructing their alternative organizations from the ground up. Bible institutes and colleges, which originally built upon the revival successes of Dwight L. Moody and others late in the nineteenth century, appealed to fundamentalists for several reasons. First, they provided refuge from the critical scholarship that called into question traditional notions of biblical authorship and cast doubts on the reliability of the Scriptures. Second, they offered an alternative environment for the education of their youth apart from the corrupting influences of secular colleges and universities. Third, the fundamentalist subculture made possible a wholesale retreat from the larger culture. A fundamentalist could socialize almost entirely among friends at his church, send contributions to trustworthy fundamental agencies and missions, purchase reading materials from a Christian bookstore, attend fundamentalist summer camps and colleges, etc. This sense of envelopment within the cocoon of the fundamental subculture held strong appeal for fundamentalists who believed that the larger culture was inherently both

The fundamentalist remnant found further seclusion from the world through ecclesiastical separation. But along with ecclesiastical separation came a delineated personal separation. Separation for early 'fourth-phase' separatist fundamentalism went hand in hand with the movement's interpretation of personal holiness. Holiness implies a complete separation from evil, which was taken to include all worldly amusements such as card-playing, dancing, attendance at the cinema, and drinking.

In recent years, however, suspicion of the 'world' has dissipated considerably. In the last several decades, and especially since the mid-1970s, fundamentalists emerged, albeit tentatively, from their self-imposed exile. The antipathy toward the broader culture so characteristic of fundamentalists in the forties through the early seventies has given way to ambivalence and the down-play of separation. Fundamentalists and their institutions have moved dramatically into the mainstream of American society. They enjoy more prosperity, education, and cultural sophistication; and they command greater attention from the media. By and large, the fundamentalist community has become comfortable with suburban mores and consumer culture. Even as many fundamentalists retain the old rhetoric of opposition to the world, they are eager to appropriate many of that world's standards of success. This situation has caused fundamentalists to begin to question themselves. James Singleton observed this when he wrote,

Many contend that there is nothing wrong with the movement except a 'softening' on the part of some elements in fundamentalism who believe that the battle is over. Thus, both foundation and superstructure are sound. Others affirm that the foundation is solid, but that the superstructure needs repairing. Still others would argue that fundamentalism is

flawed from the foundation up and needs a complete overhaul.

There are dangers in all three of these positions: The first position, which refuses to examine the movement for possible weaknesses, forgets that even healthy bodies become contaminated and need cleansing, and a failure to do so permits disease to run rampant with a resulting death. . . .

The second position, which speaks of sound foundations and faulty superstructures, does not take into account . . . connection between a foundation and a superstructure. . . .

The third position, which calls for a complete overhaul of fundamentalism from stem to stern, can easily produce a new generation of new evangelicals.²⁷

The Future of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism

Issues Facing Evangelicalism

American evangelicalism is in a state of transition. We are now witnessing, as it were, a changing of the guard in the leadership of the evangelical movement. The founding fathers of modern American evangelicalism have either gone home to be with Christ or are now in the closing years of their earthly ministries. The torch of leadership is being passed to a new generation.

It is hard to know where evangelicalism is headed, because—despite attempts at clarification—it is not always entirely clear just what evangelicalism actually is. Nevertheless, it seems fair to suppose that present trends will continue.

These problems of self-definition will likely increase rather than lessen. Though evangelicalism may be characterized by several identifiable features, it has failed to reach adequate

²⁷ James E. Singleton, *Fundamentalism: Past, Present, Future* (n.p.: Fundamental Baptist Press, 1993), 20-21.

confessional unity. Inerrancy has become the principal confessional standard, but history has taught that, by itself, inerrancy fails as a confessional standard.

Evangelicalism, both in mainline churches and in the smaller denominations and independent churches, will continue to grow in numbers, partly by natural increase, partly by the steady influx of new converts. At the same time, following some of their intellectual leaders, many evangelicals will tend to align themselves with mainline Protestantism and ecumenism and to play down the theological convictions and controversies that gave them their distinctiveness.

Since the 1960s, several things have happened to evangelicalism. Its largest seminary, Fuller, has actively sought to serve mainline Protestantism, without overemphasizing evangelical distinctives. The Watergate affair, followed by the campaign and election of a 'born-again' Baptist, Jimmy Carter, to the Presidency, brought evangelicalism into the limelight while at the same time blurring its profile, due in part to the theological fuzziness combined with the simple and undeniable sincerity of Carter's personal testimony. The Graham organization accepted overtures for various contacts with the W.C.C. and began an ambitious relationship with Moscow, which it had previously abhorred as the citadel of godlessness. Carl Henry left *Christianity Today*. His theologically clear-cut if somewhat rough-hewn successor, Harold Lindsell, retired shortly after the magazine moved to Wheaton. Lindsell has been followed by theologically more sophisticated and noticeably more irenic successors.

The familiar warhorses of intellectual evangelicalism now seldom publish in the magazine, having been relieved by a succession of younger, more inclusivistic, irenic writers, many with closer ties to Graham than was the case with the earlier generation of editors and writers. Francis Schaeffer, whose clear distinctions furnished for many evangelicals a complement to Graham's inclusivism, died in the spring of 1984. The

"organization men" of evangelicalism, rather than its Machens, Warfields, Henrys, and Schaeffers, are coming to the fore.

Will evangelicalism disintegrate as a movement? James Davidson Hunter makes the claim that evangelicalism is losing its "symbolic boundaries."²⁸ Appeals to confessional standards are often despised by evangelical 'progressives' as anti-intellectual, arrogant, and narrow-minded. James Hunter writes,

Not surprisingly, Evangelicals have an opinion about their own future. When seminarians were asked to state their views about "the Evangelical movement in America in the next few decades," the response was mixed but very interesting. In terms of its theology and its approach to social issues, some, of course, felt that there would be little change at all over the next several decades. Some believed it would become more conservative and some felt that it would become more liberal. *But the majority held that Evangelicals will be increasingly divided over theological and social issues to the point that this division "may ultimately bring about a major split in the Evangelical movement."* The faculty at Evangelical colleges were asked the same question and an even greater majority concurred [italics mine].²⁹

David Wells concurs with Hunter's pessimism when he writes:

Today, we too are benefiting from the results of mass evangelism, have produced a massive number of associations and parachurch movements, and, in the changing climate brought on by modernity, are reducing historical Protestant faith to a mass of diverse, conflicting "models." *I cannot see it all surviving. That a sundering of the movement is*

²⁸James Davidson Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 184.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 207.

*coming seems utterly certain to me; the only question is when, how, and with what consequences [italics mine].*³⁰

In both doctrine and ethics, the erosion of evangelicalism seems inevitable.

Issues Facing Fundamentalism

It is hard to know where fundamentalism is headed exactly. Nevertheless, it seems fair to suppose that present trends will continue. So what might the future hold? What are the issues facing the next generation of fundamentalists?

Cooperation or Competition? In the coming years, centrifugal forces will accelerate, but such is the orientation of our fragmented culture. Consequently, the core of American evangelical/fundamentalist history will remain entrepreneurial, decentralized, and thus be given to splitting, forming, and reforming.

Fundamentalism, as a movement, has been charged with being an individualistic, divisive, vitriolic movement. It is somewhat true that fundamentalism lacks unity as a religious movement. This is in large part due to its own intrinsic dynamics. Fundamentalist forms of discourse and organization have always been intuitive rather than formal, spontaneous rather than deliberative, pragmatic rather than regulative.

Fundamentalism appears to thrive best when promoted by individuals who are charismatic, seem to be just plain folks and can either speak the popular vernacular or use popular media effectively. Historically, the real locus of power in American fundamentalism has been the individual orator, not the assembly.

³⁰David Wells, "Assaulted by Modernity," *Christianity Today* 34 (19 February 1990): 16.

Ultimately, it seems, fundamentalism is a movement made up of a number of fiefdoms all competing for a larger market share within a specific target audience. Revivalists and preachers compete for the same audience while professing allegiance to the same Lord.

The market-driven character of fundamentalism has nurtured spiritual individualism and a plurality of leaders and ministers with little cohesion. This state of affairs in turn has prevented fundamentalists from giving adequate attention to the structures and institutions (churches, colleges, and seminaries) that sustain belief from one generation to the next, as well as failing to leave a legacy in print for coming generations. In a movement where the atmosphere is charged with rhetoric that regularly uses terms such as 'militant' and 'separatist,' terms such as 'cooperation,' 'understanding,' 'toleration,' smack of compromise. Such does not have to be the case. If fundamentalism as a movement is to have a significant and lasting impact, we will have to learn to cooperate, at least tolerate each other, rather than exhaust our energies and resources by competing with each other over intramural matters and secretly harboring suspicion over each other's ministries. If fundamentalism is determined that it wants to retain militancy, then it is time to begin discussing the matters over which we should be militant. We would agree that it is to be "sound doctrine," but does that mean the few fundamentals of the faith as set forth at the turn of the century (i.e., historic fundamentalism)? I think not, for new issues have come on the scene that earlier fundamentalists never imagined.

Should we militate over versions, music, times of worship, styles of worship, our particular alma mater, etc.? It appears that we have turned our weaponry on each other over these issues at the end of the twentieth-century, leaving fellow-fundamentalists wounded, bleeding, retreating, defecting. Younger soldiers are reluctant to enter a battle where they fear they may be mistaken for the enemy and shot by one of their

own. It is time we talk to each other; we may find that we are not each other's worst enemy. It is time we commend these younger warriors for Christ who are fighting battles today that are more theologically intense and complex than many of the battles a century ago.

The Life-of-the-Mind or Anti-Intellectualism? While fundamentalists decry the dangers of 'secular humanism,' they have rarely been in a position to do anything about it. Fundamentalists have not been heard by twentieth-century intellectuals for at least three reasons.

First, as pragmatic activists, fundamentalists have never revered the life of the mind. In fact, they are often suspicious of the methodical poking around of the scholar. The most common fundamentalist depiction of the history of American higher education is that institutions like Yale and Princeton sold their spiritual birthright in the pursuit of academic excellence.

All too often the new evangelicals succumbed to "the pride of intellect" and capitulated to a liberal position for the purpose of appearing scholarly and intellectual. Reacting to this, however, some fundamentalists have responded to the intellectual and scientific problems of the Bible with "the pride of ignorance."³¹

To call for academic progress in fundamental circles raises the threat of the slippery slope.

Second, the decentralized structure of the fundamentalist world also inhibits the expensive and painstakingly slow task of Christian thinking. Amidst the dozens of fundamentalist colleges and seminaries, none can provide faculty with the time for thought and writing provided at research universities.

³¹Singleton, *Fundamentalism: Past, Present, Future*, 28.

Third, the very success of each fundamentalist institution works to make fundamentalists more intellectually insular. Instead of addressing the issues of the world, fundamentalists spend most of their intellectual energies in intramural discussion.

It is possible to imagine a brighter intellectual and spiritual day arising from an alliance of deep Christian conviction, self-critical but loyal attachment to biblical traditions, and discriminating use of contemporary resources. I find myself to be an optimistic fundamentalist as I see the progress of many of our fundamentalist educational institutions. We cannot stagnate in anti-intellectualism, nor can we avoid discussing the issues surrounding the life-of-the-mind if we hope to educate the coming generation.

Relevant Fundamentalism or Isolationism? All too often, fundamentalism has retreated from culture in its attempt to protect the faith. Because of their high regard for Scripture, fundamentalists should have the most correct view of God, man, and the world. Rather than retreat from society, what is needed is a relevant fundamentalism that is biblically based, retains its evangelistic fervor, is true to its fundamentalist heritage, and works out its theology for a comprehensive world-life view.

Fundamentalists will fail in their responsibilities to society if they simply apply their theology to matters such as women wearing pants, smoking, movies, etc., and neglect a fundamentalist theological approach to the great social problems of the day, such as war and peace, the nuclear arena, overpopulation, discrimination and racism, liberation and justice for the oppressed masses of the world, and a host of other problems that need to be addressed from the viewpoint of a fundamentalist apologetic. To quote Christ,

"These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).³²

Conclusion

It is hoped that this article will aid our understanding of fundamentalism in two areas. First, while fundamentalists sometimes seem to be adverse to new ideas, innovation, or change, it is clear that a certain amount of change and doctrinal development has taken place in the fundamentalist movement through the course of this century. American fundamentalism is neither static nor monolithic. While a certain amount of continuity exists between phases, the movement is actually characterized by gradual, but constant change.³³

Second, fundamentalism makes up an important part of the American evangelical tradition. Most of fundamentalism's religious convictions stem from historical evangelical concerns such as personal holiness, revivalism, and the authority of Scripture. Fundamentalism has found itself ridiculed and disparaged, often because it has been misunderstood, sometimes because it has been misrepresented, occasionally because one of its own has created cause for reproach by his personal behavior. But history shows that fundamentalism deserves better. In his discussion of fundamentalism's future, David Beale writes:

Fundamentalism is a tremendous power for good. It is a God-honored and Christ-honoring movement that could not be replaced if set aside.

Virtually all spiritual movements have ultimately diminished in vigor and strength of conviction. . . . Hardly a movement has entirely escaped the deterioration that comes with the passing of time. New leadership emerges that paid

³²Singleton, *Fundamentalism: Past, Present, Future*, 32-33.

³³Fea, "Understanding the Changing Facade," 199.

no price of suffering. To them the battles have ended. New generations take for granted the truths for which the fathers had to fight. . . .

Fundamentalist creeds must grip Fundamentalist hearts if the world is to take note of the fact that Fundamentalism has something to offer. . . . It is not modernism but apathy that stands in the way of revival among Fundamentalist churches. . . . This pursuit of purity is the holy ideal and guiding light of Fundamentalism.³⁴

At the end of the twentieth century fundamentalism is faced with a challenge. In building the walls high so as to safeguard the fortress of Christian faith from external attack, fundamentalists all too frequently wall themselves off from the needy world they hope to reach. In their isolation they separate themselves from the centers of our culture—such as the universities—and retreat personally and spiritually to a fundamentalist "ghetto" in an effort to preserve Christian faith from worldly attack. As a result, the isolationists within fundamentalism tend to develop a vast inferiority complex, religiously and culturally speaking, that renders them incapable of carrying the gospel effectively to an unbelieving world outside the "ghetto." Such cultural isolation and anti-intellectualism are irresponsible. Not only does it lead inevitably to loss of faith, but there is something anti-biblical and anti-Christian about such a stance; and it is inconsistent with the commands of the Lord to go into all the world preaching and teaching.

At the other end of the pendulum's swing, evangelicalism is dissipating its evangelical heritage. Its motivation is praiseworthy—it wishes to preserve the spiritual comforts and good feelings of the traditional faith, and an even more noble desire to penetrate the world in ways that will be effective—but

³⁴David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1986), 356-359.

it is not willing to pay the doctrinal and ethical price of an obedient church. The solid substance of biblical orthodoxy (i.e., "sound doctrine") is compromised.

Fundamentalism must move back into the mainstream of our culture (Matt 5:13-16 "salt of the earth, light in the world," penetrating and remaining insulated, but not isolated from the world). In doing so, however, it must not find itself placed in a position of choosing between obedient faith and effective outreach. It is my belief that we can remain firmly committed to our conservative fundamental convictions and still address contemporary issues honestly, biblically, with courage, compassion and balance, while at the same time avoid becoming new, "new evangelicals."